

Training and Assistance for Criminal Justice Professionals on Driving while Intoxicated Treatment Interventions

Impaired driving is a significant contributor to traffic fatalities in Texas, with the number of alcohol/drug-related fatalities continuing to rise. The project team raised awareness about impaired driving and DWI recidivism—by training DWI professionals and the community on mental health and treatment options.

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Project Need and Approach

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the number of traffic fatalities across the nation has hit a 16-year high. An estimated 42,915 people died from a motor vehicle crash in 2021; this figure represents a 10.5 percent increase from the previous year. In 2021, Texas saw an even sharper 15.22 percent increase in traffic fatalities from 2020. Impaired driving remains a significant contributor to traffic fatalities in Texas, with alcohol-related crashes claiming a life every 8 hours and 31 minutes. Statewide, the Texas Department of Transportation recorded 15,558 crashes in which alcohol was listed as a contributing factor, while an additional 3,430 crashes listed a drug contribution factor. While the number of alcohol/drug-related fatalities are up, so are the number of arrests. In 2020, the Texas Department of Public Safety recorded 83,088 driving while intoxicated (DWI) charges compared to 89,457 in 2021 (an increase of 6,369).

Of concern is the number of drivers who had previously been arrested and then recidivated back into the criminal justice system with another DWI offense, in which the underlying issue often involves substance use or mental health disorders. Left untreated, substance use disorders and mental health problems can worsen over time and contribute to repeat DWI offenses on Texas roads. To combat this, a project team from the Texas A&M Transportation Institute's Center for Transportation Safety educated and assisted criminal justice stakeholders on the importance of mental health and holistic care approaches through DWI sentencing, monitoring, and referral practices.

The project team provided training and technical assistance to criminal justice professionals on how to reduce the risk of DWI recidivism by sharing intervention plan practices.



According to TxDOT, in Texas, one individual loses their life every 8 hours and 31 minutes due to an alcohol-related motor vehicle crash.



Project Activities

A variety of activities were conducted to educate and assist criminal justice professionals in addressing DWI recidivism. The project team developed an online self-paced course that allowed stakeholders to engage with project content at their convenience. Additionally, two live training sessions were held for judges, community corrections departments, jailers, and public defenders that described the latest evidence-based mental health intervention practices that can decrease recidivism among DWI drivers. The training engaged 45 participants through polling, open discussion, and resource sharing. The post-training survey indicated that high levels of satisfaction were reported by attendees, who found the content highly applicable and relevant to their work. The project team also provided three training opportunities and a resource guide to traffic safety stakeholders, educators, and the general community on DWI offenses and mental health in a condensed manner that applies to them.

The project team hosted two focus group discussions with probation department stakeholders to identify how probation officers enhance probationers' motivation. By analyzing the probation officers' responses, researchers gained a more comprehensive understanding of the tools utilized to help offenders make sustained behavior changes, thus decreasing their likelihood of recidivating due to additional DWI charges. These discussions informed the creation of educational materials that were distributed to over 3,000 newsletter subscribers. A comprehensive report was completed, summarizing the findings and feedback from participants.

Benefits to Texas Transportation Safety

This project benefited Texas transportation safety by addressing impaired driving—a critical issue impacting roadway fatalities. The project raised awareness among stakeholders and the community about the root causes of impaired driving, encouraging data-driven interventions. It supported collaboration across disciplines—among behavioral health, criminal justice, and transportation personnel—helping to develop comprehensive solutions to improve safety on Texas roadways.

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For More Information

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