

Champions of Texas Injury Prevention

February 2026



Becky Devine

Director of Special Projects – Recovery Resource Council

How did you get started in your field?

I grew up in a family affected by substance use, which shaped my passion for this work. Early in my career, the executive director of what was then The Dallas Council recognized that passion and took a chance on me.

What do you like most about your work?

I love turning big ideas into real programs – navigating what hasn't been done, building support, and bringing people together around a shared vision. Creating innovative approaches that make meaningful change in how our communities respond to substance use.

Tell us about a recent success from your work.

After launching Overdose Response Teams in five counties over the last three years and seeing the impact of true cross-sector collaboration, we built upon that momentum by launching Texas's first Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) Committee. Through the case review and data analysis process, the OFR Committee uncovers systemic gaps and reveals opportunities for earlier intervention, shaping meaningful, community-driven recommendations that strengthen our responses, leverage resources, and help save future lives.

Tell us about any barriers or challenges in your field you've experienced and how you have overcome or addressed them.

With no OFR legislation in Texas, we had to figure out how to operate, get data, involve all necessary stakeholders, ensure we meet HIPAA requirements, etc., all without funding or dedicated staff. Everyone involved has been on a labor of love, which naturally slows progress. Persistence has truly been the key, driven by a shared passion and belief in the potential of this work. Each barrier becomes a puzzle to solve, and we keep moving because if we don't build it, who will?

What motivates you to continue in your work each day?

Every life saved changes a family's future. Substance use and mental health issues are often generational, but it only takes one person making a different choice to rewrite the story of future generations. Knowing our work can give someone another chance or prevent the next overdose keeps me motivated.

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Molly Johnson, PhD

Research Scientist, Dell Children's Trauma and Injury Research Center

How did you get started in your field?

With a PhD in Neuroscience & Behavior and background teaching swimming, it was a natural fit for me to shift to drowning research when Dell Children's launched the drowning prevention program in 2020.

What do you like most about your work?

I am grateful that I can guide my research directions. I can focus on what I think are the most important gaps in research. I can also join forces with people who identify gaps I may not have been aware of, such as a collaboration initiated by DSHS to develop an EMS case definition for drowning.

Tell us about a recent success from your work.

I am thrilled when conclusions from my published research are incorporated into injury prevention guidance. I am also grateful to be able to help grow the Texas Water Safety Coalition, which brings together stakeholders from across the state. As a coalition, we have developed a set of water safety recommendations that will be used to create the first Texas Water Safety Strategy.

Tell us about any barriers or challenges in your field you've experienced and how you have overcome or addressed them.

Inconsistencies in data collection can limit our ability to combine data from different regions. For instance, institutions may have different ways of categorizing the water setting of the drowning incident (e.g. pool vs. lake) or different criteria for identifying nonfatal drowning vs. a water rescue with no respiratory impact. I am working within my own hospital and with national colleagues to bring greater consistency to data collection and further our ability to compile regional and national data.

What motivates you to continue in your work each day?

I am able to work collaboratively with people across Texas and internationally in an amazing network of professionals focused on drowning prevention whose passion and drive make me hopeful that, together, we can improve water safety and save lives.

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Patricia Rivera

Program Manager in DSHS Public Health Region 2/3, Community Health Improvement

How did you get started in your field?

My state service started in 1995 with the Texas Department of Human Services (now HHSC). The following year, I transferred to the Texas Department of Health (now DSHS) to work at a TB Outpatient Clinic. I was a clerk, an administrative assistant, and then a contact investigator. After 10 years with TB, I transferred to the Community Health Improvement (CHI) program, where I began to learn all about injury prevention. I've been with CHI for the past 19 years.

What do you like most about your work?

Meeting and working with community partners on injury prevention initiatives that will make a difference in the lives of children in their communities is what I love the most. For example, helping families ensure that their children are safer in their car seats is very rewarding.

Tell us about a recent success from your work.

This year, our team reactivated six child fatality review teams in Public Health Region 2/3. These teams became dormant during the pandemic, but now review meetings are underway which will result in prevention ideas and activities, as well as recommendations to the State Child Fatality Review Team Committee.

Tell us about any barriers or challenges in your field you've experienced and how you have overcome or addressed them.

Reviewing child fatalities is very difficult. We've faced barriers, such as geography and team capacity. Our teams cover a large geographical area, which also includes rural communities. We are often pulled in many different directions and are stretched thin. However, we've managed to pull together dedicated folks who care and want to make a difference in communities.

What motivates you to continue in your injury prevention work each day?

I work with a group of dedicated individuals who share my passion for safe and healthy communities. We motivate each other to continue the great work.

Nominate a Champion of Texas Injury Prevention

Do you know someone who is a Champion of Texas Injury Prevention?

Submit a nomination through the [Champions of Injury Prevention form](#) or email the Injury Prevention team at injury.prevention@dshs.texas.gov.