



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
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**Texas Department of State  
Health Services**

## **Public Health Region 2/3 and Tarleton State University Partner to Reduce Health Disparities in North Central Texas**

By Chris Currie

DSHS Public Health Region (PHR) 2/3 provides public health services covering nearly 40 counties in north central Texas. It has partnerships with select institutions rooted in our region and one example involves Tarleton State University (TSU). With its main campus in Stephenville (Erath County) and its own public health undergraduate curriculum, TSU is an anchor institution with wide outreach to the counties that surround it. Upon speaking to several PHR 2/3 personnel, we learned of the scope of services that partnerships with TSU have provided.

PHR 2/3 Project Manager Briana DeBose states that “public health improvement can’t be reached with any one group working alone.” This past year, professionals from PHR 2/3 have collaborated with faculty, staff and students from TSU in conducting a series of ongoing engagements in and around the TSU campus and Erath County.

Some of the activities have included:

- Providing health education with the intent of reducing health disparities in local rural communities, in addition to newsletters, fliers, posters and other outreach media.
- Involving local community health workers in outreach efforts such as focus groups, vaccine clinics, trainings, short presentations and listening sessions.
- Sexually Transmitted Infection testing and resources for follow-up care.

Local stakeholders are considered valued partners in these endeavors. It helps to reinforce the message to community residents that we are here to serve them and that we want their perspective on their needs uplifted. According to PHR 2/3 Manager Oscar Hernandez, a major goal is to

destigmatize public health concerns: "Let's talk about (these topics) in a normal sense (where) it doesn't have to be a negative."

PHR 2/3 team member William Cady states that the importance of institutional partnerships like the one with TSU show county residents in north central Texas that the regional branch of DSHS is committed to having a relationship with local communities. Cady noted that having a wide range of students participating in multiple activities highlights that engagement.

With TSU located in an underserved community, it can be a bridge to local outreach. PHR 2/3 Community Building Coordinator Laticcia Riggins sums up the appeal of partnering with an institution like TSU by saying "It also allows us to have access to those communities that we (would otherwise) struggle to enter." PHR 2/3 team members reaffirmed that partnerships like the one with TSU are a needed, advantageous means of reaching as many people as possible to fulfill our mission to Texans.