

## Interview series

### Fighting the opioid epidemic in Texas

**Maven Wave**, an Atos company, is a technology consulting firm working with leading companies to create agile, analytics-based solutions in the cloud.

**The Department of Psychiatry at UT Austin's Dell Medical School** works with a range of community partners to transform mental health care and mental illness prevention in central Texas and beyond, making a meaningful real-world impact.

The Google Cloud Healthcare and Life Sciences team spoke with Aaron Miri, Chief Information Officer for the Dell Medical School at the University of Texas at Austin, and Harrison Sonntag, Principal Consultant in Maven Wave's healthcare practice, about their collaborative efforts to combat the opioid epidemic in the state of Texas with Project Connect.

**The opioid epidemic is a major crisis in the United States. What specific challenges are you facing in Texas?**

**Harrison Sonntag:** Texas has an opioid problem, much like every other area of the country. In Texas, we don't have reliable data on this problem to inform either prevention or allocation of funds from the state for services.

**Aaron Miri:** There's so many different facets of this problem, from documentation that's inaccurate, to laws that forbid people from saying what's really going on with them, to people who are ashamed to admit they're struggling with opioid addiction.

**So alongside the data problems, there are some real human issues at play. How do these factor into Project Connect?**

**Aaron Miri:** I think everybody we know in our personal lives has either been directly touched or knows someone that's been directly touched by the opioid crisis. In my case, my wife's grandmother passed away recently because of addiction. She became addicted to opioids after back surgery. So for me, it's personal.

In terms of understanding the human issues contributing to the data gaps, it's been months of work, with great collaboration across all of UT Austin, bringing together the best from the School of Pharmacy, Dell Medical School, our research divisions, and our psychiatry divisions, all led by a fantastic researcher, Dr. Kasey Claborn. Now we're ready to rock and roll and make a difference in the community.

### Let's get solving.

UT Austin, Maven Wave, and Google Cloud are...

"...solving for combating the opioid epidemic in the State of Texas."

**Harrison Sonntag,**  
Principal Consultant,  
Maven Wave healthcare practice

"...looking for a way to achieve something that our community has needed to achieve for quite some time, and we're building a platform that will make this problem solvable nationally."

**Aaron Miri**  
Chief Information Officer, the Dell Medical School, University of Texas at Austin

How have you approached solving such a multifaceted problem?

**Harrison Sonntag:** We're starting by building a reliable opioid abuse reporting and tracking platform on Google Cloud to replace multiple disjointed systems currently used in Texas that have limited adoption.

**Aaron Miri:** Our first challenge was actually scoping the problem. You've got data entry issues where people are still using paper and scanning it in. You have different types of data sets within the hospital that don't really talk to each other. And then you have other data sets that you wouldn't think have anything to do with opioid addiction that actually do and need to be considered. So, how do you parse out what's relevant or not to make something actionable for the first responders and clinicians taking care of patients? We broke it up to say, "Okay, what's immediate, what's medium, what's long-term?"

**Harrison Sonntag:** In the first year, we're focusing largely on the initial applications for reporting overdoses and Narcan administration, plus the implementation of the platform to ingest this data and start reporting on it. In years two through five, we'll focus on building tailored applications for individuals in specific groups, such as law enforcement, health care professionals, first responders, and EMS, but very importantly also, actual opioid users and their friends and family.

We'll also work on the predictive analytics components and on moving beyond the two urban and three rural pilot sites in Texas to a full implementation throughout the state. This is an incredible opportunity to make Texas a model for other states and for our national government moving forward, which we take very seriously. We want to do it right from the beginning.



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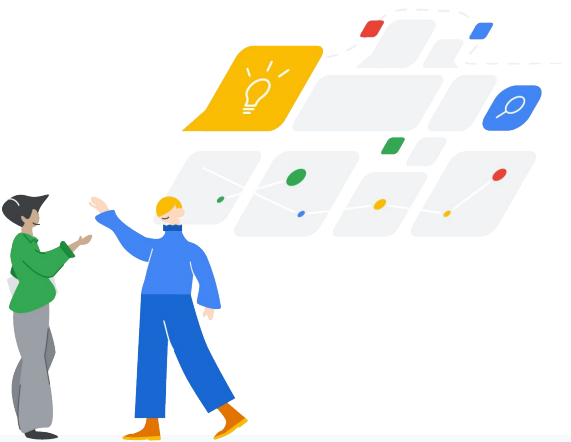


Aaron Miri, Chief  
Information Officer,  
the Dell Medical  
School, University  
of Texas at Austin

“We’re working to pinpoint the hotspots around Texas. This system will help us alert EMS workers that a call may involve substance abuse, so they’ll have the information and life-saving medications they need to help the patient, instead of just showing up and winging it. Even these early wins will have a huge impact.”

What are some of the benefits you expect to see from the platform in the first phases of the project?

**Aaron Miri:** We're working to pinpoint the hotspots around Texas. This system will help us alert EMS workers that a call may involve substance abuse, so they'll have the information and life-saving medications they need to help the patient, instead of just showing up and winging it. Even these early wins will have a huge impact.



Tell us about your partnership with Google Cloud. How has it supported what you're trying to achieve?

**Harrison Sonntag:** At Maven Wave, we have ten Google Cloud Partner Specializations, and we focus on building solutions utilizing Google technology as the backbone. Healthcare is a very personal thing. The reason we get up in the morning is to solve problems in order to make a difference, and I really think that Google has the same mindset in its healthcare practice. That's one of the reasons that we love partnering with them to build out solutions like this one that are making a real difference in the community.

**Aaron Miri:** For me, it's been very rewarding, from flying out to California to meet the Google team in person, to now seeing the house being constructed and the number of tools available to us that I don't think healthcare realizes you can take advantage of. In this case we're solving the opioid problem, but we'll want to solve other issues too. This project is a great example to say, "Look, here's the roadmap of how you get it done, and how you plan for it, and how you build a stable and secure house that carries forward."



To learn more about  
Google Cloud Healthcare and Life Sciences visit:

<https://cloud.google.com/solutions/healthcare-life-sciences>

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