

# Calling for 2-1-1

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## What is 2-1-1?

2-1-1 is an easy to remember telephone number that, where available, connects people with important community services and volunteer opportunities, and is being spearheaded by United Ways and comprehensive and specialized Information and Referral Agencies in states and local communities. United Way of America (UWA) and the Alliance for Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) strongly support federal funding so that every American has access to this essential service.

Every hour of every day, someone in the United States needs essential services - from finding an after-school program to securing adequate care for a child or an aging parent. Faced with a dramatic increase in the number of agencies and help-lines, people often don't know where to turn. In many cases, people end up going without these necessary services because they do not know where to start. 2-1-1 helps people find and give help.

The New York City 2-1-1 Task Force estimates that there are at least 250 information and referral providers in New York City alone, creating a confusing network for people to navigate. One phone number to assess individual and family needs and connect them with necessary resources would eliminate the confusion.

## What is the Current Status of 2-1-1?

In 2000, UWA with its partners successfully led the effort to get the Federal Communications Commission to assign 2-1-1 for health and human services information and referral. Today, 2-1-1 reaches approximately 102 million Americans—approximately 34 percent of the U.S. population. The goal of UWA is to ensure that 50 percent of the U.S. population has access to quality community information and referral services through 2-1-1 by 2005, and 100 percent soon thereafter. The 107th Congress recognized the importance of 2-1-1 by including it as an allowable use of funding in the bioterrorism preparedness legislation, signed into law in June 2002. UWA urges Congress and the Administration to provide an annual dedicated federal appropriation for the implementation and support of 2-1-1. The 108th Congress closed with 182 Members cosponsoring The Calling for 2-1-1 Act, which authorizes federal investment to implement and sustain 2-1-1 nationwide.

The Calling for 2-1-1 Act was reintroduced early in the 109th Congress. The Senate bill, lead by Senators Elizabeth Dole (R-NC), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), and Richard Burr (R-NC), is numbered S 211. The House bill is HR 896, cosponsored by Representatives Mike Bilirakis (R-FL-9) and Anna Eshoo (D-CA-14).

## How Will a National 2-1-1 System Impact Society?

2-1-1 will make some dramatic and much needed changes, including:

- Providing the infrastructure to connect individuals with precise information and social

## The Calling for 2-1-1 Act

A nationwide 2-1-1 system will not happen without the partnership of the federal government. The Calling for 2-1-1 Act (S 211 /HR 896), lead by Sens. Elizabeth Dole (R-NC), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), and Richard Burr (R-NC), and Reps. Michael Bilirakis (R-FL-9) and Anna Eshoo (D-CA-14), enjoys broad bi-partisan support and would authorize \$150 million to assist states with implementing and sustaining 2-1-1 statewide. States would have to provide a 50 percent match to the grant, which could come from current 2-1-1 funding in the community, such as United Way funding, funding through other non-profits, state and local government, foundations and businesses. Funding would be administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Act closed the 108th Congress with 182 bi-partisan congressional cosponsors.

services that address their individual needs.

- Employing personal interaction to analyze callers' needs and impact their lives.
- Empowering the nation to better respond to large-scale emergencies and homeland security needs.
- Providing relied-upon aggregated data from 2-1-1 Systems nationwide to better assess the needs of our communities.

In the Tri-State area following the attacks of September 11th, and in Florida following the 2004 hurricanes, areas served by 2-1-1 responded measurably faster and more efficiently than areas without 2-1-1. Both in preparation for and in response to major disasters and crises, a national 2-1-1 system would make an immediate and profound impact on community stability and recovery.

### **Who Will Benefit from 2-1-1?**

While services that are offered through 2-1-1 vary from community to community, 2-1-1 provides callers with information about and referrals to human services for every day needs and in times of crisis. For example, 2-1-1 can offer access to the following types of services:

- Support for children, youth and families: child care, after-school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, and protective services.
- Basic human-needs resources: food banks, clothing closets, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance.
- Physical and mental health resources: health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, Children's Health Insurance Program, medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, and drug or alcohol intervention and rehabilitation.
- Employment supports: financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, and education programs.
- Assistance for older Americans and persons with disabilities.
- Volunteer opportunities and donations.

### **What are the Cost/Benefits of a National 2-1-1 System?**

A national cost benefit analysis conducted by the University of Texas estimates a net value to society of a national 2-1-1 system approaching \$130 million in the first year alone and a conservative estimate of \$1.1 billion over ten years. Savings include time saved, tax assistance and recovery, volunteer recruitment, 24/7 service, a reduction in the number of 1-800 numbers and reduction in non-emergency calls to 9-1-1.

The research found that the viability of maintaining and expanding a standards-based, national 2-1-1 information and referral network is dependent on the infusion of additional funds.

The study also determined that the national 2-1-1 effort is ripe for enhanced public/private sector collaboration as the entities, which operate the 2-1-1 call centers, and the public agencies, which administer the vast majority of health and human services resources, recognize the complementary features of their service delivery systems.

Finally, 93% of the users surveyed by the University of Texas indicated they found the information they sought with ease, and 97% said they would call 2-1-1 again.

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