

2-1-1: Connecting people with critical community resources

2-1-1 is a national information and referral line that connects people locally to critical social services 24 hours a day, year round. It is a key tool in United Way's effort to advance the common good by linking citizens with vital health and human services when they don't know where to turn.

- Currently 2-1-1 is available to more than 80% of the U.S. population (including 93% of New Yorkers). Nationwide, more than 16 million calls were answered in 2009.
- 2.7 million callers were from New York State; an increase of nearly one million over the previous year. A closer look at the call types reveals: basic needs - up 40%, health care – up 41%, finding employment or temporary financial assistance -up 56% and mental health – up 71%.
- Locally, Finger Lakes Region 2-1-1 received 117,230 calls through the end of 2009. Twenty-three percent were by people seeking referrals for basic needs such as food, clothing or shelter.

Today more than ever, economic uncertainties are affecting New Yorkers who never expected to need assistance. 2-1-1, an easily remembered multi-lingual number, has become New York's first responder in getting people the help they need.

Over three years, \$13 million in combined funding from state and local government, United Way and private investments resulted in the launch of services across New York State. Despite documented increases in utilization, last year's executive budget contained no funding for 2-1-1. Without a renewed state investment, this statewide system cannot continue to serve those in need.

2-1-1 provides significant aid to local and state government and 911 in that, it simplifies access to emergency services, by eliminating the need for people to struggle with hundreds of government and nonprofit telephone numbers.

Our community will continue to work in partnership with NYS 2-1-1 to coordinate efficient statewide coverage.

We are asking New York State to

- Restore \$4.4 million in funding to ensure that every New York State resident has access to 2-1-1. This level of funding provides a portion of the dollars needed to support ongoing development and implementation across NYS, with the balance of funding raised locally.
- Review the cost of state-funded 1-800 numbers, consolidate existing call centers and encourage wider use of 2-1-1 facilitating consumer access to needed services.

We are asking the federal government to

- Support the Calling for 2-1-1 Act (S. 211/H.R. 211) which would authorize a \$700 million matching grant program, over six years, to help implement and sustain 2-1-1 nationwide.

As an interim approach, until the Calling for 2-1-1 Act is passed and fully funded, we continue to support the inclusion of 2-1-1 funding requests in federal appropriations bills.

New York State's commitment to this vital referral and information service will have unparalleled value to its citizens in the difficult economic times that lie ahead.