

2-1-1 Report to the Federal Communications Commission

Summary

In July 2000 when United Way of America (UWA),¹ United Way of Connecticut, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (“AIRS”),² successfully petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC” or “Commission”) to assign 2-1-1 as the universal telephone number for information and referral services,³ 2-1-1 was seen largely as a means through which those in need would be able to more easily access a human-services system that is often disjointed and whose providers rarely share resources or information.

In the five years since the FCC formally assigned the number, it has become clear to creative citizens, community leaders, academics, and government officials that innovative communities can leverage the resources to address their specific needs. The public interest inherent in the 2-1-1 assignment is now more apparent than ever.

2-1-1 provides a single, easy-to-remember access point through which citizens can either receive or offer help. It has become the number to call for information on communities’ most pressing issues, ranging from housing to health care to financial literacy. It has facilitated civic engagement and is a tool for mobilizing volunteers. It has provided a social barometer, allowing communities to better gauge their needs and thereby allocate their resources to their most pressing needs.

While UWA and AIRS have assumed the national leadership role, 2-1-1 is locally designed by community stakeholders intimately aware of their local needs and resources. 2-1-1 is part of the community fabric, employing local citizens and serving the local community.

In this report to the FCC, UWA and AIRS provide a snapshot of the current 2-1-1 landscape and a sense of the momentum that is taking 2-1-1 nationwide, ensuring that all Americans are connected 24/7 to the services they need and to ways they can engage in helping their communities.

¹ United Way of America is a national membership organization of approximately 1,400 community-based United Ways.

² AIRS is a national membership organization of over 1,000 information and referral service providers.

³ The 211 code was designated for the purpose of community information and referral on July 31, 2000. See *Use of N11 Codes and Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements, Third Report and Order and Order on Reconsideration*, 15 FCC Rcd 16753 (2000) (“*Third Report and Order*”).

From 2000 to 2005

2-1-1 began in 1996 as a grassroots program in Atlanta with the donation of telecommunications equipment, previously used for a local non-profit's three-digit information line, to United Way. Within four years, calls increased from 120,000 to more than 300,000 annually. Capitalizing on the opportunity to expand this best practice nationally, UWA and AIRS led a national roll-out, formed the National 2-1-1 Collaborative, and, by providing scalable services, took the lead in technical assistance, training, resource development, public policy, and regulatory issues, in order to support local communities' 2-1-1 efforts.

When the FCC designated the 2-1-1 number for health and human services information and referral in July 2000, only 4 percent of Americans could access the 2-1-1 service. Today, over 46 percent of the U.S. population can call 2-1-1, spanning 32 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, with 171 active 2-1-1 centers.

The 2-1-1 field enjoys support of a cross-section of the human services field. 2-1-1 is provided by United Ways, crisis centers, area agencies on aging, volunteer centers, governmental organizations, and other community-based organizations. 2-1-1 enjoys diverse funding, including United Way, governmental grants, foundations, fundraisers and other contributions.

The majority of 2-1-1 Centers promote 2-1-1 as the resource for referrals to “give and get help.” This helps promote civic engagement.

Sixty percent of 2-1-1 Centers report having an informal relationship with 9-1-1 Centers. Nearly one-fourth have completed formal memoranda of understanding about call transfer protocols for both 2-1-1 to 9-1-1 and 9-1-1 to 2-1-1.⁴

Everyday Use of 2-1-1

The services provided by 2-1-1 community information and referral professionals on a daily basis address critical human needs affecting life, health, shelter, and other critical well-being issues that are not addressed by either 911 emergency assistance or 311 non-emergency police assistance or local government services

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:

⁴ Survey of active 2-1-1 service providers, conducted July 2005 by AIRS and United Way of America (“2-1-1 Survey”).

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

A national cost benefit analysis commissioned by United Way of America and 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. The analysis is based largely on the data of eleven 2-1-1 centers in the following areas: Hawaii; Idaho; Connecticut; Houston, TX; Twin Cities, MN; Salt Lake City, UT; Albuquerque, NM; Grand Rapids, MI; Atlanta, GA; Sioux Falls, SD; and Jacksonville, FL.

Examples of Cost Savings and Benefits for Taxpayers, Employers and Government

- Time saved for individuals and families through a one-stop call center for a variety of services.
- Decreased need for public assistance because of timely connection with appropriate intervening services, including community-based and faith-based organizations.
- Reduction in non-emergency calls to 9-1-1.
- Reduction in the number of 1-800 numbers funded by government and more effective use of public education campaigns.
- Enhanced tax assistance and recovery, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Volunteer recruitment for non-profits and ability for government to mobilize volunteers in times of crisis.
- Savings for business through reduced absenteeism and increased productivity due to enhanced information on where employees can find services.
- Planning information for cities and counties informed by the data collection of call volume and referrals for a comprehensive array of services.
- A broad communication network for public dissemination of information about changes in federal, state and local programs.
- Cost avoidance for state and local government of misdirected calls for services.

- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week service.
- Ability to disseminate public health and crisis preparedness and response information.

The benefits of 2-1-1 systems increase over time, as new, innovative uses are employed for the number. For example, Connecticut's statewide 2-1-1 system managed the State of Connecticut's Quitline, a tobacco use cessation hotline. To implement this service, Connecticut 2-1-1 hired one program manager and trained 2-1-1 call specialists on how to handle Quitline-specific calls. It was estimated that without the 2-1-1 partnership, the state would have needed to establish a call center and hire five to seven people to handle the calls.

Other Key Findings of the University of Texas Study

The study also determined that the national 2-1-1 effort is ripe for enhanced public/private sector collaboration. There is greater opportunity to maximize resources as the 2-1-1 call centers, and the public and non-profit agencies to which they make referrals, 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.

2-1-1 and Crisis Response

In Southwest Florida, 2-1-1 played a pivotal role in the preparation and post-storm recovery for the Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. The Florida 2-1-1 Network responded to hundreds of thousands of calls, directing victims to needed services such as shelters, food, medical assistance, disaster preparedness and response activities, post-disaster assistance, and recovery information. In addition, local 2-1-1 call specialists matched volunteers with opportunities to give help in affected communities, such as assisting local media outlets with their food drive efforts by soliciting assistance in loading trucks in designated areas. In the areas hardest hit, the 2-1-1 centers were taking as many as 500-800 calls an hour during the first few days following the storms. In the two weeks following Hurricane Charley, the 2-1-1s in Florida handled over 100,000 calls. In Orlando, the 2-1-1 was able to use its mapping tools to determine from which parts of the community elderly residents were calling.

The mapping ability of 2-1-1 is indicative of another feature that local 2-1-1 centers are beginning to utilize. Calls are tracked geographically by type of call allowing the 2-1-1 center to identify neighborhoods where specific problems are especially acute. This social planning tool is extremely helpful to local and state

policymakers as well as nonprofit organizations in putting together budgets and identifying where social services are needed.

Real life story: Lauren Baker

Lifelong Florida resident Lauren Baker always loved the rain and was no stranger to storms. But when the hurricanes struck in 2004, she didn't know where to turn. A single mother of four, Ms. Baker found herself with no power, a refrigerator full of spoiled food, and a closet full of water-soaked ruined clothes in her ground-floor apartment. Worse yet, she could not work – her hours were cut because business was slow due to the storms. As a result, she had no paycheck to cover new food or clothing purchases, or her \$200 a week rent. "It was very stressful," she recalls. "It was a very dark time."

She did not know where to turn. "Half the numbers we called we couldn't get through," according to Ms. Baker. Then someone told her to call 2-1-1. Frank, the I&R Specialist who handled her case, found a program that could help cover her rent, and connected her to the Red Cross, which gave her food and clothing for her family. He also followed up with her to make sure the promised aid was in fact provided. "I was calling in the blind," says Ms. Baker. "I didn't know what they could do, but everything fell into place."

Ms. Baker was especially grateful that Frank didn't make her feel embarrassed about asking for help. Some people "may not be compassionate when you ask for help," she notes. But not Frank." He was absolutely like an angel that God sent," says Ms. Baker.

The 2005 hurricane season was catastrophic for the Gulf Coast regions. 2-1-1 was operational at a statewide level in Louisiana and Texas for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Governor Kathleen Blanco had promoted 2-1-1 as the number to call for evacuee assistance. In Louisiana the 2-1-1 system boasts six regional call centers; due to the need to evacuate many of the Parishes, the 2-1-1's had to roll over calls to the 2-1-1 center out of United Way of Northeast Louisiana in Monroe, LA. This call center only had a four-person call center but with the generosity of CenturyTel, a local telecommunications company, United Way of Northeast Louisiana in Monroe expanded its call center from six lines to sixty-six taking in over 10,000 calls a day. The calls that came in were not only evacuees calling for shelter and food information but life and death situations such as lost medication and victims that needed to be rescued from their rooftops due to severe flooding. 911 was not operational in some parishes in the aftermath of Katrina. Calls also came in from family members that had lost contact with other members during the evacuation.

The Texas 2-1-1 system was heavily utilized during this time by Katrina evacuees that moved into communities like Houston, Dallas and San Antonio,

and then had to handle the preparation and response to Hurricane Rita. Texas' government also promoted 2-1-1 as the number to call for evacuee needs and volunteerism. The state of Texas 2-1-1 system received more than 267,000 calls during and in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes in September alone. 2-1-1 proved to be an invaluable tool to assist evacuees displaced by Katrina and Rita, determining what services are most needed and how best to administer them. Because it is a statewide system, when call volume peaked at one center, the overflow could be shifted to other less-taxed centers throughout the state, ensuring that people got served in a timely, efficient manner.

2-1-1 as a Social Barometer

A coalition of Milwaukee agencies recently developed a report on the community highlighting data collected by the 2-1-1. Featured were types of calls, needs identified in the calls and needs that were unmet by any agencies in the community. This is valuable information for community planners available from their local 2-1-1.

Sustainability

Communities across the nation have launched 2-1-1 centers using a variety of funding sources, including state and local funds, foundation grants, corporate contributions, and nonprofit funds. 2-1-1 remains a free call by the user, and there is no 2-1-1 surcharge on any phone bill.

Public-private partnerships have enabled the launch and sustainability of 2-1-1 service. Increasingly, state governments have become a vital partner for 2-1-1. For example, the State of Washington included a \$1 million line item in its 2005 budget for 2-1-1 service and the State of Vermont just announced a \$450,000 commitment to 2-1-1.

Grants from several of the country's leading charitable and policy foundations have also helped to build out and sustain 2-1-1. For example, UWA has secured grants from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. AIRS has secured grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. United Way of Southeastern Michigan (Detroit) recently secured funding from the Kresge Foundation and the McGregor Foundation.

Corporations have also assisted with the development of 2-1-1. Wal-Mart has given generously to the National 2-1-1 Initiative. In Indiana, Cinergy Foundation, is a significant corporate sponsor in Indiana's and Ohio's 2-1-1 system.

UWA has made significant strides toward the goal of federal sustainability funds for local 2-1-1 centers. In September 2003, Senators Clinton and Dole, and

Congresspersons Eshoo and Burr introduced the Calling for 2-1-1 Act (S 211 and H.R. 896), which propose a \$600 million appropriation for distribution as matching funds to states' 2-1-1 lead entities. Since that time, UWA has worked to secure bipartisan co-sponsorship of this legislation.

Implementation Issues

The pace of 2-1-1 implementation depended on the responsiveness of the telecommunications carrier and the ability to negotiate agreement on costs and technical requirements. Depending on the state public utility commission (PUC) requirements and the carrier preference, major carriers have required tariffs, contracts or simple orders to complete translations.

2-1-1 Centers continue to deal with “phantom call” and routing issues. A phantom call is a telephone call where the telephone rings and the service connection is present, but there is no caller placing the call. Phantom calls are produced through “misdirected” calls within the central office switches due to numbers containing the 2-1-1 digits within a 7-digit number or area code, “wet” lines, and simple “misfiring” or “misinterpretation” of the tones for 2-1-1. Some telecommunications providers report that they have found ways to minimize or reduce 211 phantom calls after the initial testing period.⁵ These issues are presently addressed on a case-by-case basis with the telecommunication provider(s) involved and, to date, the telecommunications providers have been responsive when contacted about specific technical issues.

2-1-1 implementation with wireless carriers is underway, but has been slower due to different cost and routing requirements.

Regulatory Issues

United Way/AIRS believes that the public interest value of the 2-1-1 assignment has largely borne itself out since the number was assigned in 2000, due to the proliferation and success of 2-1-1 community and information referral services throughout the nation. Currently, 171 active 2-1-1 systems serve over 139 million people comprising over 46 percent of the population of the United States.⁶ Based on information gathered from 2-1-1 call centers, it is estimated that approximately 6,731,431 million calls were made for information and referral services via 2-1-1 in 2004.⁷ UWA and AIRS believe that the 2-1-1 system has

⁵ For example, Verizon representatives report they have addressed phantom calls by programming a delay at the host switch where the translation takes place (2003).

⁶ See <http://www.211.org/status.html> for detailed information on the deployment of 2-1-1 nationwide.

⁷ 2-1-1 Survey.

clearly met the Commission's five-year utilization benchmark established in the Third Report and Order.⁸

The United Way/AIRS welcomes Commission action and clarification around two key regulatory issues.

1. The Commission Should Clarify the Role of the State Public Utilities Commissions (PUCs)

As discussed in a prior filing,⁹ the United Way/AIRS believes that it would be beneficial for the Commission to clarify that states are authorized to determine which entity should use the 211 code in a given state or locale. A few state utility commissions, including Florida, Hawaii, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Virginia have been reluctant to act absent more explicit Commission direction. In contrast, 2-1-1 implementation has been made easier by state PUC involvement in states such as California, Connecticut, Iowa, Indiana, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Texas, Vermont and West Virginia.

2. 2-1-1 Should Apply to Wireless Carriers, Internet Telephones, Payphones and Emerging Technologies

UWA previously discussed that 2-1-1 should apply to wireless carriers.¹⁰ 2-1-1 should also apply to internet telephones, payphones and emerging technologies. This is increasingly important with the growing role of 2-1-1 in disaster response. Experience with implementation has made 2-1-1 providers aware of emerging issues such as number portability, wireless access, internet- and cable-based telephone service. Number portability has potential to affect identification and resolution of 2-1-1 technical issues, as it is increasingly more difficult to identify the carrier associated with a particular telephone number. Similarly, number portability affects NPA-NXX routing.

Furthermore, the Commission should clarify how 211 entities may learn if a telecommunications provider has entered its geographic area. As carriers enter a market, they should be required to inform the authorized 211 entity so that 2-1-1 implementation may be completed.

Conclusion

2-1-1 builds America's capacity to strengthen the way people access help and engage in civic life. In the five years since the FCC formally assigned the number, the public interest value of the 2-1-1 assignment has been demonstrated by the proliferation and success of 2-1-1 community and information referral services throughout the nation. The 2-1-1 initiative has demonstrated cost savings and benefits. The goal of the National 2-1-1 Initiative

⁸ See *Third Report and Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 16766-67, ¶ 21.

⁹ See *Reply Comments of the United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems*, CC Docket No. 92-105, at 9 (filed Nov. 19, 2004).

¹⁰ *Id.*

is to ensure access to high quality community information and referral service across America.

The United Way/AIRS believes that continued use of the 2-1-1 dialing code for community information and referral is essential to the public interest. The United Way/AIRS welcomes clarification and guidance in regulatory issues, particularly around the role of state PUC authority and application of 211 requirements to wireless, internet telephones and emerging technologies.