

2-1-1 IN PENNSYLVANIA



2-1-1 is like 4-1-1 but for health, human services, and disaster relief.

WHAT IS 2-1-1?

2-1-1 was designated for nationwide use as a health and human services information and referral dialing code by the Federal Communications Commission in 2000. Since then, 2-1-1 has been spreading state-by-state, throughout the United States. It is available to some residents in all 50 U.S. states and is now accessed equally by web and phone, with text contacts on the increase. In Pennsylvania, 2-1-1 will be available to all residents by June 30, 2019. People can also text their zip code to 898-211 for help.

The 2-1-1 system is funded by a combination of United Way support, grants and private contributions, and contracts. As of 2017, 2-1-1 received its first state budget appropriation to help strengthen the service across Pennsylvania. Leadership for the system is provided at the national level by United Way Worldwide and the Alliance of Information and Referral System in partnership with their state and local networks. In Pennsylvania, the United Way of Pennsylvania and the non-profit, PA 2-1-1, are partners supporting this community-strengthening service.

BENEFITS OF 2-1-1

2-1-1 is designed to serve three major objectives:

1. Connect people in need to health and human service assistance available through government programs and private non-profit organizations in their communities;
2. Provide assistance to communities in time of disaster, allowing 9-1-1 to work primarily with first responders; and
3. Connect volunteers and donors with organizations who can leverage these resources to meet the needs of the community.

Through 2-1-1 people connect to a wide range of services from disaster relief to utility assistance, senior citizen programs, emergency food, job counseling, youth programs, and much more. The information provided to people who contact 2-1-1 comes from one shared statewide resource database. The common software also records information about consumer contacts and needs. Thanks to local relationships in communities across the state, and a strong partnership with United Way, PA 2-1-1 is the single-most comprehensive source of assistance and volunteer information covering all sectors of service both private and public.

CURRENT STATUS OF 2-1-1 IN PENNSYLVANIA

Much has been accomplished by PA 2-1-1 since 2011:

1. Seven regions coordinate 2-1-1 service through five contact centers which have contracts with PA 2-1-1, and will cover 100% of the state's population by July of 2019. Currently, 97% of Pennsylvania's population is covered by 2-1-1;
2. All regions have database specialists working together to grow a comprehensive resource and data collection system using the same state-of-the-art software and data standards;
3. PA 2-1-1 usage increases each year by helping families, first responders and care givers. Our partners are also helping us get the word out to people who don't know about 2-1-1.

But much more needs to be done to achieve the promise 2-1-1 holds for people in need:

1. The partnership between PA 2-1-1 and state government should continue to strengthen. PA 2-1-1 is currently serving as the coordinated entry point for homeless services in more than half of the state, but can scale up capacity to handle more initiatives state agencies are considering to streamline services and become more efficient in information dissemination and data collection.
2. Additional state funding will help regional centers increase their capacity to handle growing contact volume, assure 2-1-1 services are available by phone, text and chat across the state, increase awareness through marketing and community outreach, and allow 2-1-1 to create a public dashboard that shows the needs and service gaps in every community across the state.
3. Professional statewide coordination must continue to make sure the whole PA 2-1-1 network is meeting national quality standards, and Pennsylvanians receive a consistent level of services regardless of where they reach out for help.

FUTURE USES FOR 2-1-1 AND ITS DATA

Emergency response - In other states, during disasters people are directed to 2-1-1 for their non-life-threatening emergencies so that 9-1-1 capacity is not overwhelmed. And the data collected from contacts to 2-1-1 can be used by community organizations to organize and target their response. A strong 2-1-1 system, available to everyone and coordinated statewide, is the partner the State and municipalities need for managing emergencies, including everything from a flood, snowstorm or tornado to the accident that shuts down a portion of a major highway for hours.

Reduce duplication/cost – Each year, government needs to get information out to the general public on a variety of topics including flu shots, energy assistance, lead poisoning, access to health care programs and numerous others. Either state workers or their contractors set up individual 1-800 numbers to transmit messages. The 2-1-1 system has the potential to be the portal the State can use quickly to get information out. It can be made available through mobile-friendly technology in addition to the current phone, text and web site access points. The data collected by 2-1-1 can be used by state and local government entities, which are responsible for planning. And 2-1-1 is a tool to connect people to resources in their community which may help them avoid the need for more costly levels of care.

Support partnerships and policy to enhance 2-1-1, a service for all Pennsylvanians

Whether a Pennsylvanian's need is help for an aging parent, or figuring out how to pay the electric bill in order to avoid a utility shutoff, there are many partnerships needed to make a strong 2-1-1 system for Pennsylvania. United Ways remain committed to this life-changing service, and additional financial support is needed from state government for PA 2-1-1 to reach its full potential. Many county governments have stepped up to financially support 2-1-1 with direct funding or contracts. Human service providers, community groups, religious organizations and other people-serving nonprofits are all essential partners for a robust and up to date resource database. Corporate partners with a business interest related to helping connect people with resource to meet their needs can step up to become sponsors of 2-1-1 at a regional or statewide level.

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