

211 IN PENNSYLVANIA



211 is like 411, but for health, human services, and disaster relief.

WHAT IS 211?

211 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, 211 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, 211 will be available to all residents by June 30, 2019. People can also text their zip code to 898-211 for help.

The 211 system is funded by a combination of United Way support, grants and private contributions, and contracts. As of 2017, 211 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 211, are partners supporting this community-strengthening service.

BENEFITS OF 211

211 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 911 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 211 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 211 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 211 is the single-most comprehensive source of assistance and volunteer information covering all sectors of service both private and public.



CURRENT STATUS OF 211 IN PENNSYLVANIA

Much has been accomplished by PA 211 since 2011:

1. Seven regions coordinate 211 service through five contact centers which have contracts with PA 211, and will cover 100% of the state's population by July of 2019. Currently, 97% of Pennsylvania's population is covered by 211;
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 211 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 211.

But much more needs to be done to achieve the promise 211 holds for people in need:

1. The partnership between PA 211 and state government should continue to strengthen. PA 211 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 211 services are available by phone, text and chat across the state, increase awareness through marketing and community outreach, and allow 211 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 211 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 211 AND ITS DATA

Emergency response - In other states, during disasters people are directed to 211 for their non-life-threatening emergencies so that 911 capacity is not overwhelmed. And the data collected from contacts to 211 can be used by community organizations to organize and target their response. A strong 211 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 211 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 211 can be used by state and local government entities, which are responsible for planning. And 211 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 211, 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 211 system for Pennsylvania. United Ways remain committed to this life-changing service, and additional financial support is needed from state government for PA 211 to reach its full potential. Many county governments have stepped up to financially support 211 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 211 at a regional or statewide level.

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