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Pennsylvania
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United Way
of Pennsylvania

FUNDING PA 211 IN 2024



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OVERVIEW

Since 2017, PA 211 has been available statewide, 24/7/365, providing access to state and local supports, including publicly and privately funded services, for any need. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, PA 211 partnered with the public sector and community-based organizations to address historic needs across the Commonwealth. United Way of Pennsylvania, our network of local United Ways, and PA 211 continue to be collaborative partners with the Commonwealth with the goal of addressing the needs of all Pennsylvanians who are struggling with everything from unemployment to homelessness.

United Way of Pennsylvania applauds Governor Shapiro for his proposal to create consistent funding for the 988 Suicide Prevention and Crisis Support hotline. To truly leverage that investment, the Commonwealth must also address the root causes of mental health and substance abuse crises.

CRISIS COMES IN MANY FORMS AND IS OFTEN COMPLICATED BY A VARIETY OF FACTORS.

For some, it can start with unemployment or a medical emergency that leads to an inability to afford household basics. In other instances, it can be a run of bad luck that causes a household budget to be stretched beyond its limit. Regardless, PA 211 is available 24 /7/365 to connect every Pennsylvanian with information and make referrals to supports and services to address issues such as housing and food insecurity, utility assistance, financial literacy, and a variety of other needs.

Past Investment, Future Returns

In Fiscal Year 2023-24, the United of Pennsylvania and our network of local United Ways sought an increase in PA 211 funding from \$750,000 to \$2 million. While we are thankful for the annual \$750,000 appropriation, it falls drastically short of supporting our more than \$5 million budget, which is mainly funded by local investments.

**WITH ENHANCED ANNUAL FUNDING, PA 211 WILL
LEVERAGE THE COMMONWEALTH'S ONE-TIME \$4 MILLION
INVESTMENT MADE IN FISCAL YEAR 2022-23, BY CONTINUING
TO UPGRADE TECHNOLOGY AND ENHANCE STAFFING TO
SERVE EVERY PENNSYLVANIAN MORE EFFICIENTLY AND
EFFECTIVELY.**

The Commonwealth's one-time investment in PA 211 in Fiscal Year 2022-23 resulted in a drastic reduction in call wait times, as it was intended. This was thanks to technological investments, additional staffing, and database upgrades. With three points of contact - call, text, and web chat - plus an online searchable web database, PA 211 provides a platform for all our neighbors in need. To ensure access to those who speak English as a second language, or do not speak English, PA 211 invested in a chat translation tool to allow requesters to chat in the language in which they are most comfortable. In addition, PA 211 expanded support for regional call-center staffing and VITA sites. Ultimately, return on investment has led to a national award, increased requester satisfaction, and more efficient and effective service delivery.

Investment to Innovation

SERVICE



- ◆ Gathered customer feedback in a partnership with Listen4Good via a survey



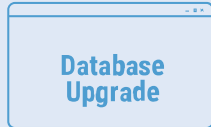
Regional Staff Enhancements

- ◆ Supports information & referral, housing, and quality assurance to improve customer service and reduce wait times

Tax Season

VITA Support

TECHNOLOGY



- ◆ Migrated to VisionLink database
- ◆ Customizability of the platform improved workflow, enhanced data integrity, and upgraded agency accessibility
- ◆ Capability for referral pathways between 211, community-based organizations and healthcare



Chat translation tool

- ◆ Translation in 75 languages
- ◆ English-speaking PA 211 agents interact in the customer's preferred language

COMING SOON



- ◆ Ensures availability of live support even in the event of an emergency



- ◆ Will assist with online database searches and connect users to live agents



Data Visualization Integration

- ◆ Will provide more real-time, searchable, sortable data



Improved Search

- ◆ Will simplify and enhance user experience for self-guided search on PA 211 website

Return on Investment



Received national recognition from AIRS/Inform USA for the chat translation tool



Listen4Good survey yielded 84% approval rating for service received from PA 211



53% of respondents indicated that referrals met their needs very to extremely well



Additional VITA support yielded 21,243 tax appointments (17,710 by phone; 3,533 self-scheduling) across 17 counties with an average wait time of 48 seconds



Resulted in an average tax return of \$1,786



5,484 live chat sessions were conducted with 50% conducted through chat translation



Of the top chat translation languages utilized, 40% were Spanish, and 10% consisted of Nepali, Russian and Ukrainian.



+883K people accessed the PA 211 database online in 2023



+237k contacts and +356k referrals made in 2023



NEEDS ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

211 By the Numbers

According to the most recently available data on PA 211 Counts, <https://pa.211counts.org>, PA 211 received over 253,000 calls, text messages and chats for a variety of supports and services. In addition, over 903,000 web sessions were conducted on pa211.org for a total of more than 1.1 million contacts in 2023.



252,268 calls, texts, & chats

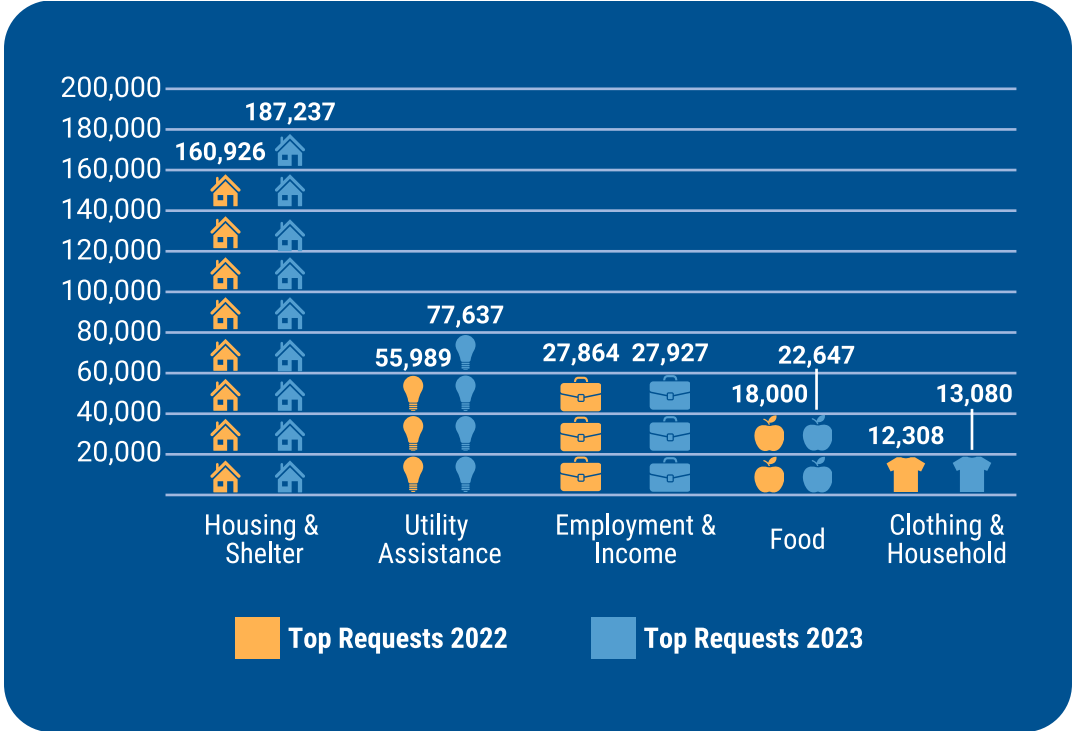


903k web sessions

AS COMPARED TO 2022, PA 211 SAW INCREASES IN REQUESTS FOR UTILITY ASSISTANCE (+43%), FOOD (+26%) AND HOUSING & SHELTER (+16%) AND CLOTHING & HOUSEHOLD GOODS (+6%) IN 2023. OVERALL, DIRECT CONTACTS – CALLS, TEXTS, AND CHATS – WERE UP 19%.

NEEDS ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

2022 v. 2023 Call, Text, and Chat Top Needs Requests

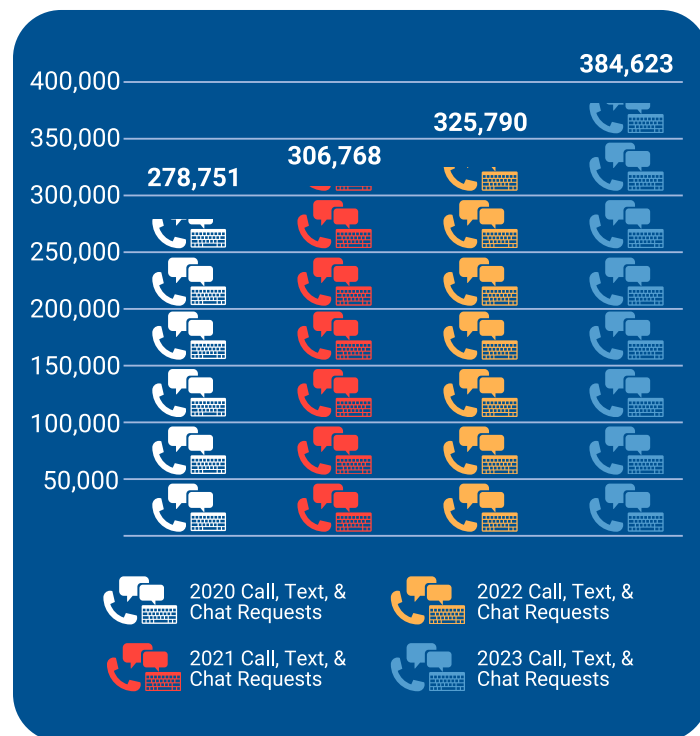


Some of these items make up the basic essentials that **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE)** Households struggle to afford. ALICE households, those working and living above the Federal Poverty Level, but not earning enough to afford the basics, make up 27% of households across PA. PA 211 does not request household income data, unless an individual is trying to qualify for an income-based program, however, based on data, it appears ALICE represents a large portion of PA 211 users.

Since 2020, total requests, housing & shelter and utility assistance have seen steady growth while other needs-based categories have fluctuated. While COVID-19 and related effects (inflation, job loss, lost wages, etc.) played a role in increased requests from 2020 through 2021, and into 2022, it is likely the expiration of many pandemic-related benefits and inflation drove request increases throughout 2023. With the last of the pandemic supports terminated in 2023-2024 is likely to see additional increases across many categories.

TOTAL REQUESTS INCREASED 10% FROM 2020 TO 2021, 6.2% FROM 2021 TO 2022, AND 19.2% FROM 2022 TO 2023.

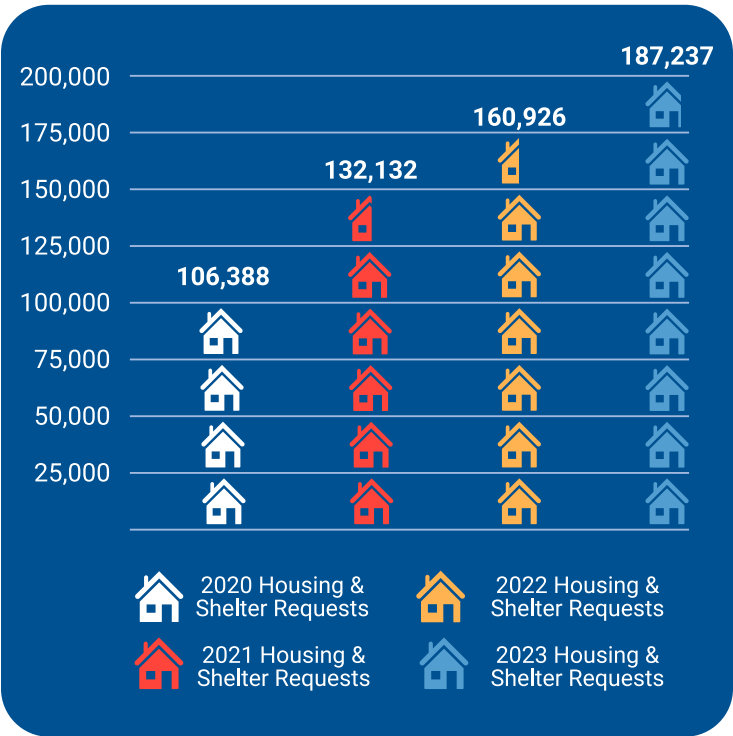
Call, Text, and Chat Requests (2020 - 2023)



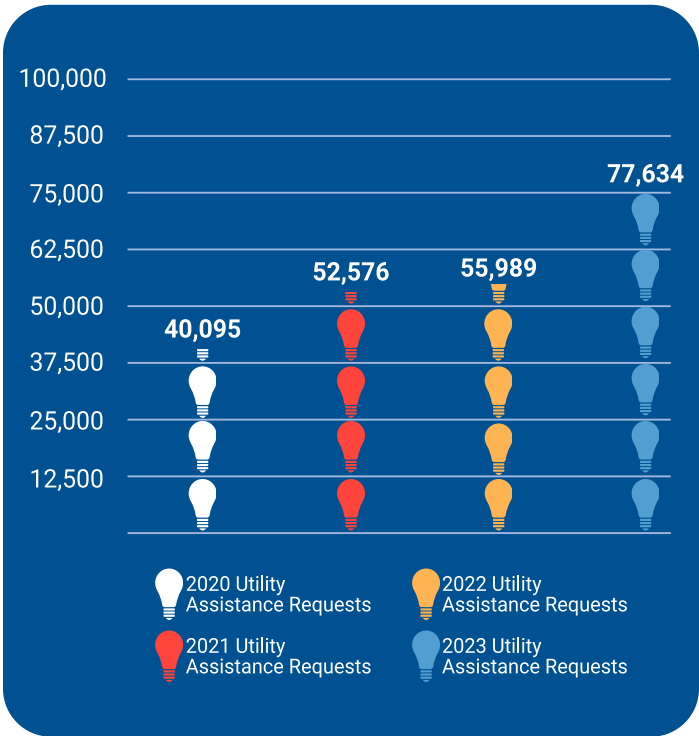
NEEDS ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

Across the board all top requests saw an increase during the four-year period. However, housing & shelter saw the greatest year-over-year increases. From 2020 through 2023, housing & shelter requests increased 24% from 2020 to 2021, 22% from 2021 to 2022, and 16% from 2022 to 2023. While there is a slowing in the increase of requests, the additional supports needed to stabilize households continue to grow.

Housing & Shelter Requests (2020 - 2023)

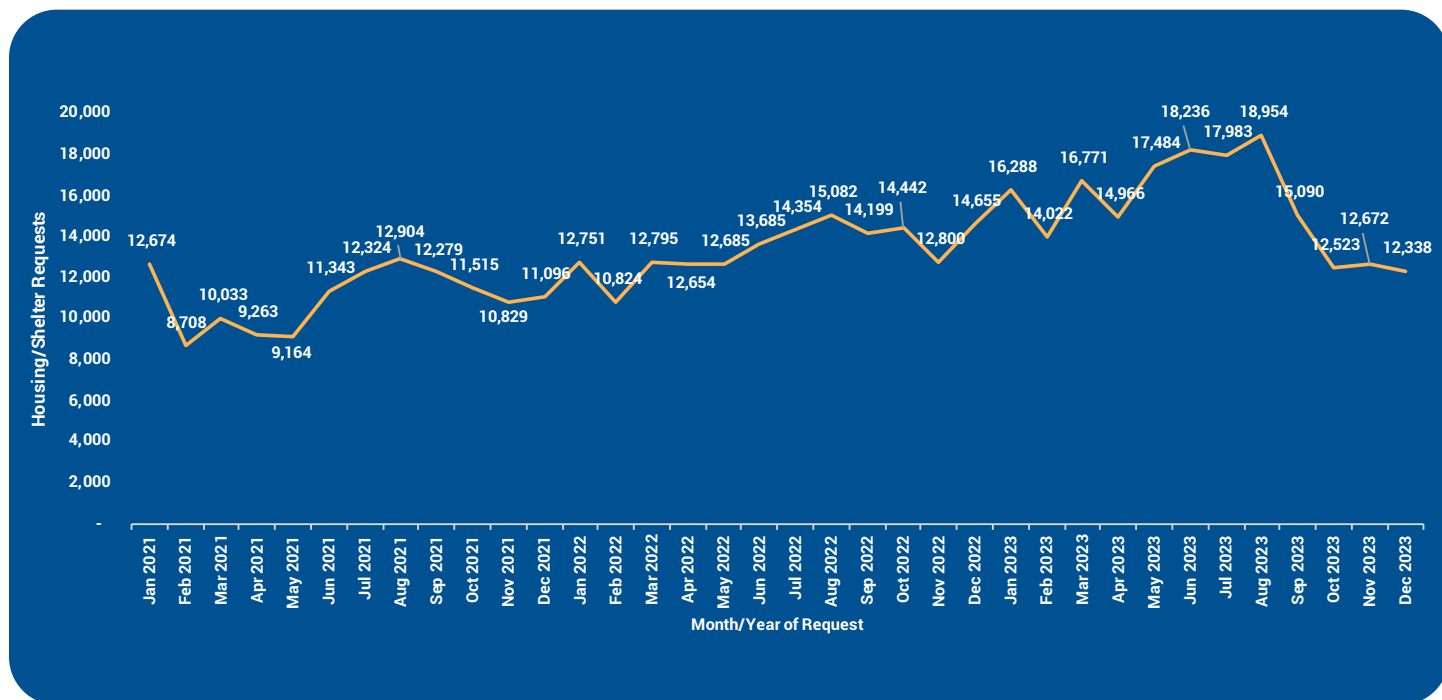


Utility Assistance Requests (2022 - 2023)



Of note, utility assistance requests saw a dramatic increase - 21,645, or 39% - from 2022 to 2023. A variety of factors, such as seasonal rate increases, and energy price fluctuations appear to be driving these needs.

Housing/Shelter Requests by Month 2021 - 2023 (Calls, Texts and Chats)











Housing Requests: Needs and Challenges

Each year, housing/shelter are the most requested services that PA 211 receives. Consequently, housing requests have the most involved intake process of all supports and services provided by 211. The Commonwealth's investments in PA 211 in Fiscal Year 2022-23 were utilized to reduce call wait times. Through July 2023, the number of calls, texts, chats, and clicks related to housing were on the rise, however, August saw the first major dip in requests since pre-pandemic. This is likely due to the expiration of federal rental assistance funds.

NEEDS ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

As previously noted, housing needs fluctuate month-to-month, despite overall annual growth. From 2021 through 2023, the most requested housing support was rent assistance. This was likely due to the availability of Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds allocated via the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). In some counties, PA 211 served as the primary point of entry for ERAP programs. In addition, PA 211 is involved in coordinated entry in 59 out of 67 counties.

Housing Needs 2021 - 2023

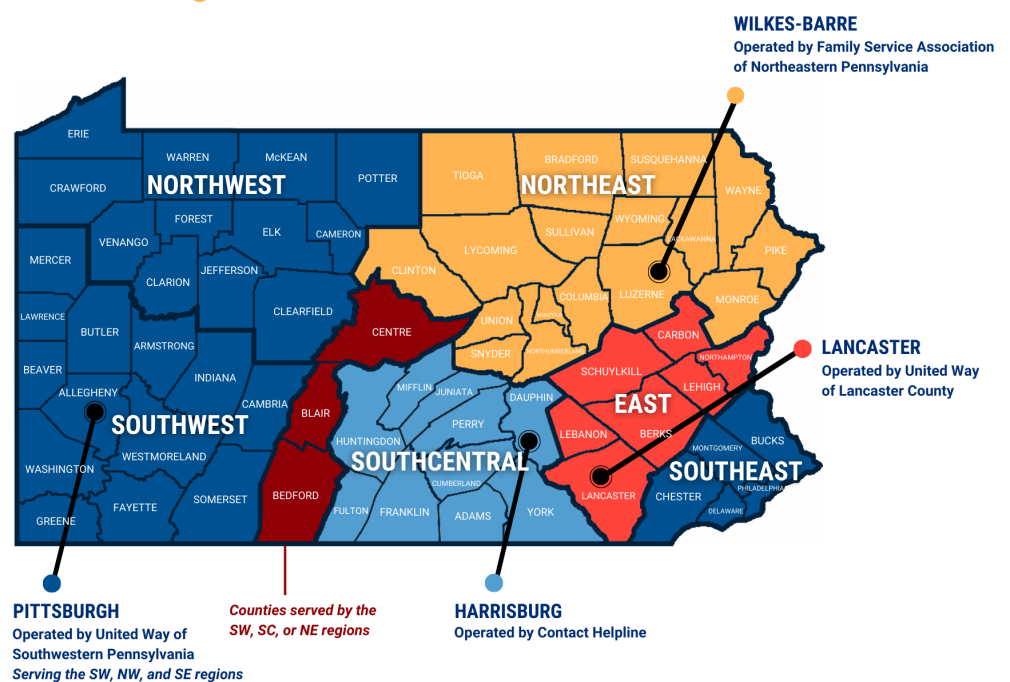
Housing Needs	2021	2022	2023
 Rent Assistance	51,089	62,310	68,543
 Shelters	43,580	55,286	67,007
 Low-cost Housing	22,518	28,742	34,571
 Home Repair/ Maintenance	5,122	5,858	6,443
 Landlord/ Tenant Issues	6,266	5,178	6,341
 Mortgage Assistance	2,824	2,846	3,392
 Contacts	521	455	731
 Other	159	201	281

On May 11, 2023, the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency declaration expired, marking the end of all pandemic-era programs including ERAP. Although ERAP funds have disappeared, the cost of housing, especially rent, remains overly inflated. PA 211 expects to continue to receive higher-than-normal call volume for housing supports, which means additional staffing will be crucial to address needs.

Needs Requests by PA 211 Region








PA 211 is divided into six regions - East, Northeast, Northwest, South Central, Southeast, and Southwest - with four regional contact centers. Each call center is supported by a combination of public and private funds, including local United Ways, contract work, and the Commonwealth appropriation.

PA 211 Regions and Call Centers



NEEDS ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA (continued)

Top 5 Requests by PA 211 Region in 2023 (Call, Text, Chat)

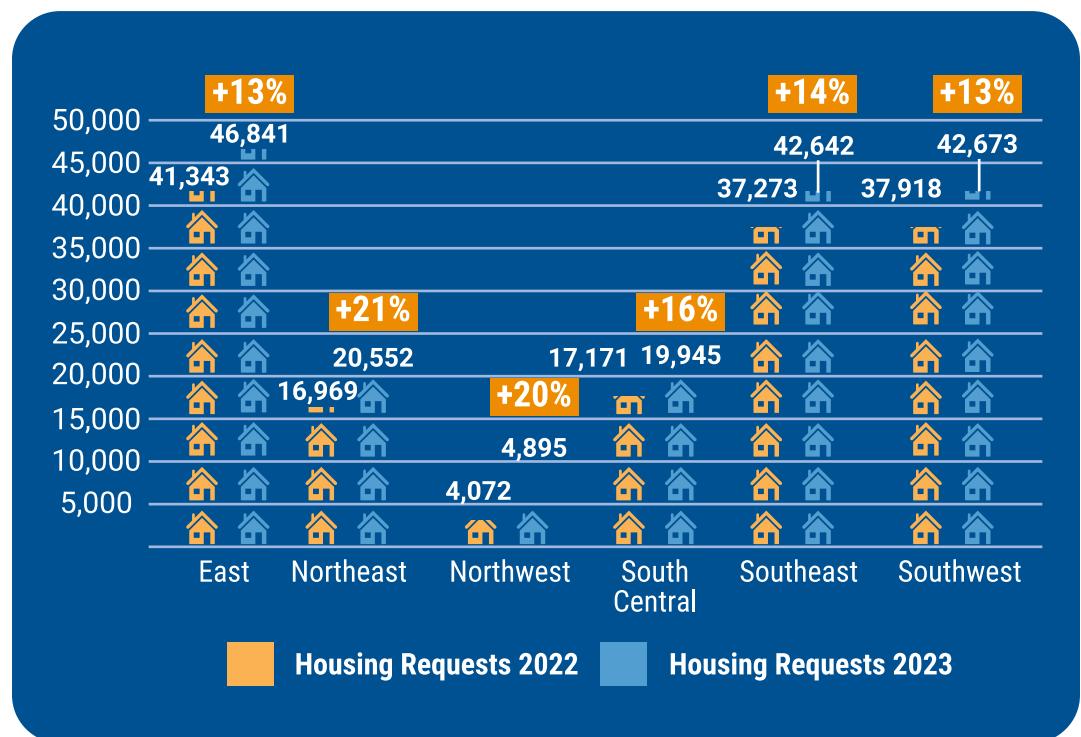
	East	Northeast	Northwest	South Central	Southeast	Southwest
 Housing & Shelter	46,481	20,552	4,895	19,945	42,642	42,673
 Utility Assistance	10,236	6,935	5,081	5,807	27,530	20,801
 Food	5,704	1,684	800	1,837	7,140	5,095
 Employment & Income	4,617	2,237	2,462	1,627	8,378	7,589
 Clothing & Household	1,745	750	793	839	4,117	4,654
 Other	4,833	2,410	897	1,552	4,921	4,647
 Healthcare & COVID-19	2,677	924	335	948	2,408	2,392

PA 211 Counts provides a breakdown of requests by PA 211 region in addition to a variety of municipal levels, zip codes and political subdivisions. The needs across the PA 211 regions are as diverse as Pennsylvania's landscape, but also similar as basic needs are among the top requested supports. For vulnerable populations such as **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE)** households, access to affordable housing is a major challenge that has only intensified due to inflation and a low housing stock. While all six regions had similar needs in 2023, some sought access to clothing and household items, while others requested information related to healthcare and other categories of need. The "other" category on PA 211 Counts includes: agency & other contact information, community development & enrichment, volunteering & donations, support & advocacy, complaints, special population services, special populations, and all other requests.

ACROSS EACH PA 211 REGION, HOUSING REQUESTS INCREASED AT VARYING RATES IN 2023.

PA 211 Northeast experienced the highest per capita increase in housing requests, 21%, however, PA 211 East and PA 211 Southwest continued to have the highest number of housing-related requests at 46,841 and 42,673, respectively. As previously stated, housing-related requests have the most involved intake process.

Regional Housing Requests 2022 v. 2023



For regional call centers, the challenge is finding and retaining qualified, highly-skilled housing intake specialists. PA 211 was fortunate to be able to leverage the one-time \$4 million investment to add six full-time housing intake coordinators. Unfortunately, when the last of those funds are expended in Spring 2024, PA 211 regions will lose that staffing, which will impact both call wait times and service delivery.





INVESTING IN NEED AND ADDRESSING CRISIS

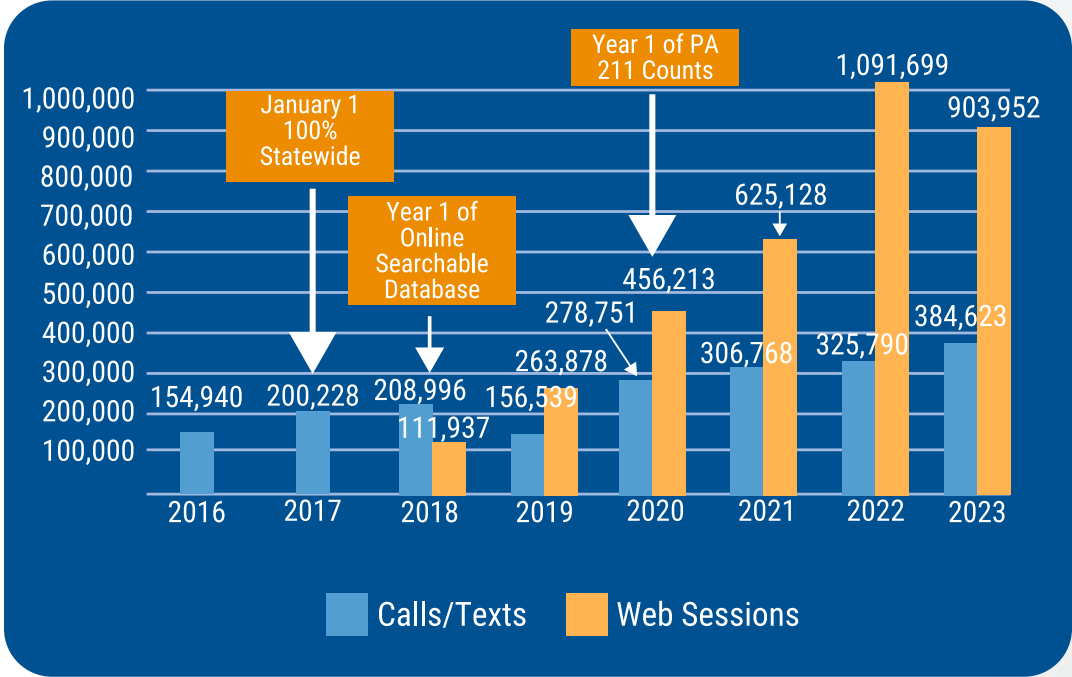
Since its inception, PA 211 has seen a year-over-year increase in contact volume, however, financial support from the Commonwealth has remained mostly stagnant. The \$4 million cash infusion allowed PA 211 to make system-wide enhancements, and invest in staffing in high-need resource areas. This greatly improved service efficiency and effectiveness.

**WITH THE ENTIRE \$4 MILLION SPENT, PA 211 WILL
BE FORCED TO MAKE DIFFICULT DECISIONS INCLUDING
REGIONAL STAFF RETENTION, WHICH HAS DRIVEN
SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVEMENTS.**

As previously noted, housing is the most requested support, and housing intake coordinators continue to be a major need at PA 211. Without adequate support, PA 211 will likely have to layoff regional staff, including intake coordinators, to continue to maintain technology improvements. This will mean a return to longer call wait times, higher abandon rates, and more unmet need. As we know, financial challenges can exacerbate mental health and substance abuse issues pushing individuals further into crisis. For households with children, this could mean a ripple effect.

INVESTING IN NEED AND ADDRESSING CRISIS (continued)

PA 211 Historical Contact Data



As partners in PA 211, United Way of Pennsylvania and our network of local United Ways is asking the General Assembly to **INCREASE** Governor Shapiro’s proposal of \$750,000 to **\$2 million for Fiscal Year 2024-25 and each year moving forward** for PA 211. With this enhanced support from the Commonwealth, PA 211 will work with 988 to address all crises across PA.





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