

United Way 2-1-1 An Elevated State System

2-1-1 in Utah: Past to Present

The 2-1-1 phone number was adopted in the state of Utah in 2002, and became a statewide service in 2005. The concept of 2-1-1 was born out of the need to **streamline information and referral in order to avoid duplication of services and simplify the connection process**. Today in Utah, two centers provide comprehensive information and referral statewide. Utah and Wasatch counties are served by the 2-1-1 center operated by United Way of Utah County. The remaining 27 counties are served by the 2-1-1 center operated by United Way of Salt Lake. Both centers are known as United Way 2-1-1.

United Way 2-1-1: A State System

United Way of Salt Lake and United Way of Utah County are actively collaborating to unite the two United Way 2-1-1 call centers in a meaningful way to provide a more seamless, comprehensive point of entry to health and human services for callers throughout Utah. Historically, the two 2-1-1 centers have operated separately, with individual phone systems and databases. **A statewide system would streamline these activities, avoid duplication of service, provide more meaningful data, better support state programs, and assist callers in finding services to address critical issues. The goal of a combined state system includes a strategy that demonstrates governance, access, and quality assurance.**

Governance

The 2-1-1 system would promote a shared and documented vision of 2-1-1, including a system-wide approach to information management, a statewide disaster plan, a system-level partnership with state government agencies, and the ability to integrate with a nationwide 2-1-1 system.

Access

United Way 2-1-1 provides a simple, single point of entry into the realm of human services. Ensuring that Utahns can access the 2-1-1 phone number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week is a top priority. This includes online access to referral information through resource lists available on the 2-1-1 website as well as a statewide online searchable database.

Quality Assurance

United Way 2-1-1 is dedicated to providing the highest level of quality and customer service to callers throughout Utah. In order to demonstrate this commitment, United Way 2-1-1 is seeking AIRS Accreditation through the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems. This process will align United Way 2-1-1 with a national standard of excellence for information and referral centers. Accreditation encompasses all aspects of the information referral process, addressing training and customer service, data quality and information management, data reporting, and caller follow up procedures.

2-1-1 Future: The Need for State Support

The current request for funding would supplement existing services as well as provide support for new implementations. United Way 2-1-1 is seeking **\$550,000** from the State of Utah to enhance the following aspects of the 2-1-1 Program:

- **Statewide Phone System:** The United Way 2-1-1 state system seeks to maximize telephone capabilities, support a simpler call routing pattern between the two 2-1-1 centers, and enhance internal reporting tools. Costs include new implementation of call center software and phone system, training, and support.
- **After-Hours Coverage:** United Way 2-1-1 seeks to become a 24/7 service. Achieving 24/7 status will ensure that Utahns in crisis or in times of a disaster have constant access to 2-1-1 services. Costs for this process include an after-hours contract with a local crisis line. Other costs include additional database user licenses, hardware, and extended hours with 2-1-1 call centers.
- **Database Resource Management:** To best serve the state, 2-1-1 requires two additional resource specialists that are dedicated to gathering and enhancing information to best guide inquirers to the most appropriate state and private programs. United Way 2-1-1 recognizes the critical need to ensure all statewide resources housed in the 2-1-1 database are accurate. This requires a biannual updating of information.
- **Disaster Planning and Outreach:** United Way 2-1-1 seeks state support to enhance our general outreach as well as disaster focused outreach strategies. Training state and private programs on how to best connect to 2-1-1 and utilize the online searchable database will assist human service providers as well as callers to best connect to critical resources, whether it be a personal/family crisis or a large-scale disaster.
- **Increased Staffing of Information Specialists:** A majority of the 2-1-1 budget supports the team of information specialists who are highly trained to answer community inquiries. Call volume is anticipated to grow as new public and private partnerships are further developed. United Way 2-1-1 strives to anticipate the growth of the program and meet increased demand with correct staffing by nationally certified information specialists.
- **Support for Existing Services:** United Way 2-1-1 has been a critical resource for the State of Utah in a number of unfunded ways including formal agreements naming 2-1-1 as the active phone number for HEAT assistance information, the state disability hotline (Access Utah Network), volunteer opportunities (Utah Commission on Volunteers), and the phone number in event of a disaster (Utah Department of Public Safety). Currently, nearly 25% of 2-1-1 callers are referred directly to state program, 20% of callers are referred to city, county and state funded programs, with the remaining 55% of referrals being supported by private organizations.

Support in these areas will allow 2-1-1 to function at a higher level, with increased focus on call quality as well as anticipated increase in call volume. United Way 2-1-1 strives to lengthen the average call time in order to fully understand the needs of the caller, identifying and addressing critical issues in the first call to ensure callers arrive at all the appropriate services. This push for call quality will allow 2-1-1 to truly be a comprehensive point of entry into human services. The simplicity of the 2-1-1 phone number makes it an easy tool for the state to promote within various systems. As a partner of the state, United Way 2-1-1 is dedicated to ensuring that callers begin with a positive experience as they view 2-1-1 as an extension of state services.