

WHAT IS 2-1-1?

2-1-1 is an information and referral line that connects people to vital nonprofit and government social services. 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**. This easy-to-remember number saves time and frustration by eliminating the need for callers to navigate a maze of agencies and help-lines. When a person calls 2-1-1, specially trained information and referral personnel analyze what services are needed and provide the appropriate resources and related information.

The appeal of 2-1-1 lies in its ability to provide accessible, preventative services to families and individuals throughout the state. 2-1-1 is uniquely suited to intervene early in situational crises to empower callers to take charge of their lives, which in turn can change their odds and the potential for long-term dependency on government assistance. United Way 2-1-1 provides specialized training to information specialists to ensure they are equipped to help callers understand their situations and make informed decisions about possible solutions. 2-1-1 also plays a vital role in identifying overall unmet needs within the service delivery system. By tracking gaps in services and the number of people affected, 2-1-1 can identify areas for future community planning. The ability to provide reports to the state includes aggregate data on the demographics of clients, primary areas of need, and unmet needs.

The 2-1-1 phone number was adopted in the state of Utah in 2002, and became a statewide service in 2005. 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.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED BY CALLING 2-1-1?

2-1-1 provides callers with a wide range of information and referrals to human services for every day needs and in times of crisis. For example, 2-1-1 connects people to:

- Food Banks / Hot Meals
- Shelters
- Rent Assistance
- Utility Assistance
- Health Care Services
- Services for the Disabled
- Crisis Intervention
- Substance Abuse Intervention and Rehabilitation
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Assistance
- Job Training / Education Programs
- Transportation Assistance
- Child Care
- Services for Seniors
- Disaster Recovery
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Holiday Assistance

In addition to connecting hundreds of people to services daily, United Way 2-1-1 is actively exploring ways to better serve the state. In 2013, United Way 2-1-1 hired a Navigator and three Certified Application Counselors to assist uninsured Utahns in accessing needed health coverage. Additional similar opportunities are being explored such as the potential for United Way 2-1-1 to become the coordinated access line for emergency shelter. This project would build upon the tens of thousands of housing-related calls 2-1-1 currently receives

and would help ensure a safe environment for individuals and families in need throughout our state. Special projects such as this and many others demonstrate the strength of the 2-1-1 program and show how strategic state alignment can be beneficial to both the state and 2-1-1 as each party more effectively leverages resources.

WHY IS ON-GOING STATE SUPPORT NECESSARY?

In 2011, United Way of Salt Lake acquired 2-1-1 from the Utah Food Bank. Since then, United Way of Salt Lake has committed to improving the overall 2-1-1 program by creating greater efficiency and quality, and increasing coordination between government and nonprofit service providers. **By creating a stronger public private partnership between United Way and the state, we can reduce duplication and save money in the long run through earlier diagnosis of problems, better use of local and faith-based services, and better use of volunteers.**

One of the key components of 2-1-1 is providing resources for individuals and families so they are able to access temporary services to get on their feet before problems necessitate long-term reliance on government programs. Currently, nearly 45% of 2-1-1 callers are referred to government programs, with the remaining 55% of referrals being supported by private nonprofits. With the extensive database and knowledge of community resources, 2-1-1 directs callers to nonprofits within the community that can meet callers' needs without accessing government services.

BUT WHAT WOULD \$550,000 DO?

The current request for funding would supplement a more than \$1 million annual investment to the program by United Way. State funding would be used in the following ways:

- **Statewide Phone System:** The United Way 2-1-1 state system maximizes integrated telephone capabilities, supporting a simpler call routing pattern between the two 2-1-1 centers, and enhances internal reporting tools. The system allows for the tracking of operational efficiencies to ensure services to the entire state are made effectively. Additionally, it enables Utah's 2-1-1 to partner with surrounding states during disasters and opens the door for cross-state partnerships.
- **After-Hours Coverage:** Utahns seeking assistance will have access to information and referral services at all times of the night and day. This ensures callers can be quickly routed to necessary services that can potentially reduce the need for reliance on government services. This will be a contracted service, allowing United Way 2-1-1 to leverage existing 24/7 services and reduce the cost of paying for additional staff to provide the overnight service in-house. United Way 2-1-1 will ensure the contracted 24/7 organization meets all service delivery and database standards as laid out in the national professional standards for information and referral organizations.
- **Resource Database:** To best serve the state, United Way 2-1-1 is dedicated to gathering and enhancing information housed in the 2-1-1 resource database. This comprehensive database serves as a statewide resource including all known service providers that make services available at a low cost or no cost to Utahns in need. Included in the 2-1-1 resource database are over 8,000 service programs. United Way 2-1-1 recognizes the critical necessity of ensuring all statewide resources housed in the 2-1-1 database are up-to-date. Accurate and timely information preserves relationships with service providers, saves partners the cost of maintaining their own databases, and helps to guide clients to appropriate services. The 2-1-1 data management strategy requires data to be actively updated on a biannual basis throughout the state. Reports on the various needs, referrals, demographics, and unmet needs of 2-1-1 callers will

be compiled from the resource database to support an annual report and meet data requests from various agencies.

- **Disaster Planning and Outreach:** As an easy to remember number, 2-1-1 can be a vital resource in the response and recovery stages of a disaster due to its ability to quickly staff up to meet dramatic increases in call volume, efficiently give out verified resource information, and run comprehensive tracking reports to best understand areas of need. In order to respond to increased call volume during a disaster, United Way 2-1-1 is creating a Disaster Volunteer Corps made up of staff/volunteers of local service agencies. The Disaster Volunteer Corps will complete an annual disaster response training created by United Way 2-1-1 which will allow them to respond to community needs in the event of a disaster as an extension of 2-1-1. This scalability will allow United Way 2-1-1 to provide additional services as needed, saving the costs associated with establishing and using another toll-free number. United Way 2-1-1 is also dedicated to creating formalized relationships within the existing emergency management system to ensure 2-1-1 is built into the disaster response strategy for the state. The easy to remember 2-1-1 phone number will effectively connect human service providers and clients, ensuring essential information is available to both groups while simultaneously freeing up crucial first responder resources such as 9-1-1.
- **Assessment of Needs and Referral to Resources:** United Way 2-1-1 is a resource for those who don't know where to turn. Through specialized assessment and referral training, information specialists are able to understand callers' situations and make referrals based on their specific needs. These referrals are made to both nonprofit and government programs, while also exploring the callers' personal resources for a potential solution. In the case that an individual is unable to secure the resources they need by their own efforts, 2-1-1 engages in advocacy on behalf of a caller to ensure wellbeing of the caller and his or her family. As the public becomes increasingly aware of the specialized assessment services available through 2-1-1, it is anticipated that call volume will increase to meet these critical needs.
- **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). The absorption of these calls into 2-1-1 from overloaded agencies has been an effective way for the state to manage these various projects in a fiscally responsible manner. United Way 2-1-1 is focused on improving quality assurance in an effort to decrease wait time and increase customer satisfaction.

Support in these areas will allow 2-1-1 to function at a higher level, with increased focus on call quality and an anticipated increase in call volume. United Way 2-1-1 strives to increase call quality in an effort to fully understand the needs of the caller, identify and address critical issues during a caller's first call to ensure they arrive at all the appropriate 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.