

211 Fact Sheet

November 2011

211 is the national, toll-free, three-digit phone number to call for information about all kinds of local health and social services. It enables people to find out about resources in their community quickly and easily.

Why 211 Is Important

Studies show that people seeking health and social services often call seven to eight wrong numbers before finding the right one, or give up before getting the help they need. This is especially true of people from diverse cultures whose primary language isn't English. For everyone, 211 eliminates guessing and misdirected calls. It also plays a major role in disaster response. After 9/11, in Connecticut, which had 211 already, 95 percent of all calls for mental health counseling, volunteering, and other services went to 211 because people knew that it was the number to call for help and information. Conversely, in New York, which didn't have 211, more than 400 separate hotlines were set up after 9/11, leading to confusion and frustration. 211 is mentioned specifically in Homeland Security legislation as part of the infrastructure needed for disaster preparedness, although no federal funding has been allocated for 211 to date.

Nationwide Status

With the recent addition of Arizona, 211 is now available in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. In 37 states there is 90 to 100 percent coverage. A total of 260 million Americans (87 percent of the population) have access to the service. 211 also exists in Canada, with 19 million Canadians (56 percent of the population) having 211, plus Puerto Rico.

Twenty-eight of California's 58 counties, including all counties in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, have 211. These counties, primarily serving metropolitan areas, comprise 90 percent of the state's population.

211 Contra Costa

In Contra Costa County, 211 has been fully operational since 2006. 211 is the number to call locally for information about the Earned Income Tax Credit program, CalFresh (formerly known as Food Stamps), health care services, and much more. Calls are answered 24 hours per day, 365 days per year by the Contra Costa Crisis Center, the designated 211 provider for Contra Costa County. The Crisis Center is the only agency in the county, public or private, that meets all of the criteria: 1) operates 24 hours a day; 2) offers multilingual access and access to the hearing impaired; 3) manages and maintains a comprehensive database of health and social services (www.211database.org); 4) coordinates with local and state disaster responders; and 5) has a local presence and support from local stakeholders, including the county board of supervisors.

The FY 2011-12 operating budget of 211 in Contra Costa is \$536,500. Primary funders include United Way, First 5 Contra Costa, John Muir/Mt. Diablo Community Health Fund, Pacific Gas & Electric Company, Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department, Contra Costa County Community Development Department, and the cities of Antioch, Concord, Richmond, and Walnut Creek.

Long-term, 211 providers have counted on federal funding from the Calling for 211 Act, bipartisan legislation before Congress. In 2010 the bill had 61 co-sponsors in the Senate and 246 in the House; however, a Pennsylvania congressman blocked it from coming to a vote in a committee because 211 providers include abortion services in our databases. The future of the legislation is uncertain.

www.211us.org
www.211contracosta.org

