



June 16, 2011

Dear Southwestern Pennsylvania Community Stakeholder,

After many months of hard work we are excited to announce the launch of 2-1-1 in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Similar to 9-1-1, 2-1-1 is a nationally recognized, easy to remember phone number that quickly and effectively connects people in need with resources. In the case of 2-1-1, the connections are to human and community services tailored to meet caller's needs.

Currently 2-1-1 is available to over 82% of the nation's population, including 48 states. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of United Ways across the state and region, the PA 2-1-1 Board, the Pennsylvania Association of Information and Referral Specialists (AIRS), and many other partners, 2-1-1 is rolling out across the Commonwealth this summer. This work would not have been possible without strong leadership from the business community and the support of our early funders, including Duquesne Light Company, Staunton Farm Foundation, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

The United Way of Allegheny County will manage the delivery of these services, in partnership with neighboring United Ways in the Southwestern region. The United Ways of Westmoreland, Butler, and Allegheny have worked together through the implementation planning and are looking forward to the launch of PA 2-1-1 SW. Our collaborative efforts will support the launch in Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties later this month, and outreach is underway to extend the service to the rest of the designated service area, which includes Beaver, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer and Washington Counties by 2013.

Based on the experiences of 2-1-1 centers across the country, the greatest benefits have been:

- Improved connections to services for people in need;
- Greater value for taxpayers and grantmakers as existing services are used more efficiently and effectively; and
- Consistent, reliable and timely data at the organizational, county, regional, and state levels. Data at each level will provide breakdowns of service requests and resources utilized that can be used to support community and government planning, resource allocations and collaborations within and across systems.

You may still be wondering, "Why start a new program now??" Let us explain:

- 1) ***During this time of great need, 2-1-1 will make sure that those seeking assistance find it quickly.*** The majority of the callers to the existing information and referral lines in our region have been looking for help with basic needs services. The AIRS certified 2-1-1 call specialists are trained to assist callers in not only making referrals related to the initial request, but to make sure that they know about other resources that may prevent further crises – such as foreclosure counseling services for someone calling for help to avoid having their utilities shut off.
- 2) ***While the 2-1-1 dialing code is new in our area, the actual service builds on an existing infrastructure.*** The staff of United Way of Allegheny County's existing HelpLine (a 60-year old initiative) and partnerships with existing information and referral services in neighboring counties will provide the basis for the new service.

- 3) **PA 2-1-1 SW and the other 2-1-1 centers in Pennsylvania will use a single state-of-the-art software system** to track all calls - the information being sought and the referrals being made. It will provide timely and accurate information about the emerging and unmet needs of residents, which will be critical as we continue to advocate with policy makers. Information will also be available online to the general public - www.pa211sw.org is under construction and will launch by mid-July.
- 4) **2-1-1 provides the infrastructure to promote new initiatives and/ or respond quickly when situations demand.** As an example, the federal government recently awarded over \$100,000,000 in mortgage foreclosure prevention funds to Pennsylvania through the Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency (PHFA). This program has the potential to help thousands of Pennsylvanians avoid foreclosure, but the funds were just recently released and must be obligated by the end of September! PHFA has recently contracted with PA 2-1-1 SW to promote this program and provide quick access for individuals at risk of mortgage foreclosure to these preventative resources.
- 5) **By connecting people to the right services, 2-1-1 can help cut down on the number of inappropriate calls that can clog agency phone lines** so that staff can direct their time and efforts towards those they are most able to serve.
- 6) In many areas **where 2-1-1 exists inappropriate calls to 9-1-1 have reduced significantly during times of disaster.**
- 7) **The easy-to-remember 3-digit dialing code will most certainly attract more callers.** Our estimates, based on benchmark studies of more than 20 existing 2-1-1 centers, is that there will be at least 130,000 calls and 250,000 electronic inquiries by 2015. Through this increased reach we hope to engage those who have not previously known where to turn, so that we can prevent a “bump in the road” from becoming a crisis.

We are very excited about the possibilities that 2-1-1 will bring to this region and look forward to working with you as it grows. There are many ways that you can get involved:

- Make sure that information about your agency is included and up to date in the new software system;
- Help us build partnerships throughout the region to strengthen the effort; and
- Learn more about the statewide software system and how your agency or those that you work with may become more directly involved.

To find out more please contact Julie DeSeyn at United Way of Allegheny County at (412) 456-6823 or jdeseyn@uwac.org, Dana Bauer at United Way of Westmoreland County at (724) 834-7170 or dana@unitedway4u.org, or Leslie Osche at United Way of Butler County at (724) 285-4883 or losche@butlerunitedway.org.

Most sincerely,



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