



2-1-1 in Pennsylvania

Background

2-1-1 is like 4-1-1 but for health, human services and disaster relief. 2-1-1 was designated for nationwide use as an information and referral phone line by the Federal Communications Commission in 2000. Since then, 2-1-1 has been spreading, state-by-state, throughout the United States. It is available in all 50 U.S. states and is now accessed equally by web and phone, with other mobile applications on the way.

The 2-1-1 system is funded by a combination of United Way support, grants and private contributions, and contracts. Leadership for the system is provided at the national level by United Way Worldwide and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems in partnership with their state and local networks. In Pennsylvania, the United Way of Pennsylvania and the non-profit, PA2-1-1, are partners supporting this community-strengthening service.

Benefits of 2-1-1

2-1-1 is designed to serve three major objectives:

- 1) Connect people in need to health and human service assistance available through government programs and private non-profit organizations in their communities;
- 2) Provide assistance to communities in time of disaster, allowing 9-1-1 to work primarily with first responders; and
- 3) Connect volunteers and donors with organizations who can leverage these resources to meet the needs of the community.

Through 2-1-1 people connect to a wide range of services from disaster relief to utility assistance, senior citizen programs, emergency food, job counseling, youth programs and much more. The information provided comes from the 2-1-1 state-wide resource database, the common software also records information about consumer calls and needs. PA 2-1-1 is the single-most comprehensive source of assistance and volunteer information covering all sectors of service both private and public.

Current Status of 2-1-1 in Pennsylvania

Much has been accomplished by PA 2-1-1 since 2011:

- 1) Six regional 2-1-1 independent centers operate through contracts with the PA2-1-1, covering about 85% of the state's population;
- 2) All working together to grow a comprehensive resource and data collection system using the same state-of-the-art software and data standards;
- 3) Usage increasing by 15% each year helping families, first responders, care givers and creating brand recognition.

But much remains, challenging the promise 2-1-1 holds for people in need:

- 1) The required partnership between PA2-1-1 and State government has not progressed. Funding has not been available, nor have any MOUs been signed that could help PA2-1-1 coordinate 2-1-1 services with the myriad of state initiatives that occur.
- 2) The entire northwest, which is 15 percent of the state's population, remains uncovered. The existing 2-1-1 network for the southwest, coordinated by Allegheny, is willing to expand to support providing coverage if costs

are covered by the region. The cost to begin this coverage has been projected at \$300,000 in each of the first two years. A yearly commitment of \$70,000 has been made but start-up funding must be found.

- 3) Because of scarce resources, the state-wide functions continue to be performed by the PA2-1-1 board, making it difficult to assure a common state-wide experience.

Optimal Future Uses for the 2-1-1 System and Data

Emergency response -Governors around the country support viable statewide 2-1-1 networks to help with disaster relief and emergency response. A strong 2-1-1 system, available to everyone and coordinated statewide, is the partner the State and municipalities need for managing emergencies, including everything from a flood, snowstorm or tornado to the accident that shuts down a portion of a major highway for hours .

In other states, during disasters, people are directed to 2-1-1 for their non-life-threatening emergencies so that 9-1-1 capacity is not overwhelmed. And the data collected from calls and "hits" by 2-1-1 can be used by community organizations to organize and target their response. Even in the course of normal day-to-day operations, 9-1-1 centers around the state receive many non-emergency calls that are more appropriately directed to 2-1-1.

Reduce Duplication/Cost – Each year the State needs to get information out to the general public on a variety of topics including flu shots, energy assistance, lead poisoning, Medicaid expansion and numerous others, and either state workers or their contractors set up individual 1-800 numbers to transmit messages. The 2-1-1 system has the potential to be the portal the State can use quickly to get information out. It can be made available through mobile, application-based technologies in addition to the current phone and web site access points. The data collected by 2-1-1 can also be useful for a multitude of state and local government entities which are responsible for planning. And 2-1-1 is a tool to connect people to resources in their community which may help them avoid the need for more costly levels of care.

Support Policy to Expand and Improve 2-1-1 for all Pennsylvania's Citizens

Assistance from state government is needed to help Pennsylvania achieve its full potential for leveraging 2-1-1 as a community strengthening tool. Nearly all start-up funds and ongoing costs are currently borne by local United Way organizations; their efforts are commendable but not enough to build the system to a consistent, solid experience for every user in Pennsylvania. Implicit in a consistent user experience is the need for state-wide functions of coordination, fundraising and state relationships currently provided by an all-volunteer PA2-1-1 Board. Without additional funding and a solid relationship with state government, the promise of 2-1-1 cannot be fulfilled.

For more information, contact:

Kristen Rotz, President, United Way of Pennsylvania - (717) 238-7365 or email krotz@uwp.org.

Nancy Kukovich, PA 2-1-1 Board – (412) 999-6015 or email Nancy.kukovich@adelphoi.org.