United Way • AIRS 2-1-1 Get Connected Get Answers

United Way AIRS

What is 2-1-1?

Every hour of every day, someone in the United States needs essential services-from finding substance abuse assistance to securing adequate care for a child or an aging parent. Faced with a dramatic increase in the number of agencies and help lines, people often don't know where to turn. In many cases, people end up going without these necessary and readily available services because they do not know where to start.

While services that are offered through 2-1-1 vary from community to community, 2-1-1 provides callers with information about and referrals to human services for every day needs and in times of crisis. For example, 2-1-1 can offer access to the following types of services:

- **Basic Human Needs Resource:** food banks, clothing closets, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance.
- **Physical and Mental Health Resources:** health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, Children's Health Insurance Program, medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention and rehabilitation.
- **Employment Supports:** financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs.
- **Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities:** adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, home health care, transportation, homemaker services.
- **Support for Children, Youth and Families:** childcare, after school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services.
- **Volunteer Opportunities and Donations.**

What will 2-1-1 Call Centers do?

- Provide information and referral services to inquirers for their designated geographic area with well-trained staff or volunteers who are knowledgeable about local resources
- Create and maintain a database of statewide community resources and referrals.
- Provide appropriate services to crisis callers which includes stabilization, safety assessment and connection to further resources (crisis line, domestic violence shelter, rape victim advocate etc.)
- Provide information regarding callers, service needs and resource gaps.
- Provide support to community and emergency service providers in the case of a disaster
- Participate in publicity plan for 2-1-1 in MT

What agencies will be providing 2-1-1 services?

2-1-1 services will be provided by Information and Referral call centers that are certified by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems and that meet the standards set by the MT 2-1-1 Community Coalition. Legislation will hopefully provide for an application and approval process to ensure that 2-1-1 call centers meet appropriate standards. We hope to build on existing infrastructure and are initially looking at Voices of Hope in Great Falls, The Help Center in Bozeman, First Call for Help in Missoula and First Call for Help in Kalispell. All four of those call centers have been providing services in their local communities for over 15 years.

Who will actually be answering calls?

Information & Referral Specialists and Resource Specialists who have received a minimum of 30 hours of training plus supervised phone experience. Their training and supervision will meet the standards of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).

All persons answering calls shall have a minimum of 14 hours of training to prepare him/her to respond to and stabilize crisis callers before routing them appropriately. The 14 hours of training will include the following: crisis intervention, active listening, suicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse.

How will 2-1-1 Call Centers handle domestic violence and/or sexual assault calls?

Call centers will have the ability to provide appropriate services to crisis callers. They will:

- Conduct a safety assessment and if necessary activate emergency services. (Where is your attacker/abuser? Are you in a safe place? Do you (or your children) need emergency medical care?)
- Determine caller location and closest community resources for sexual assault and/or domestic violence.
- Connect caller to closest community service provider. (Via three-way calling so that caller never loses contact or has to dial another number.)
- Log call to maintain a record of number of calls concerning domestic violence and sexual assault and the available resources.

What will be 2-1-1's role in a disaster?

Each 2-1-1 call center will be p*repared to serve as part of the state's system for response to emergencies and for homeland security.* **211 will be an important new resource in times of natural disasters or other large-scale emergencies. By working closely in advance with state government and, through our call centers with local government and service providers we will be ready to:**

- Connect people with the specific services they need to cope with the crisis, relieving first-responder organizations from the need to divert staff to handling such phone calls. For example, during the blackout of the East Coast in August 2003, the 2-1-1 in Toronto handled over 1600 calls between 4 PM and 8 AM the next day, three times the normal volume. In the week following, it helped to handle the aftereffects of the crisis by handling twice its normal volume of calls;
- Help federal, state, and local government get accurate, current information to the public and provide reassurance to callers by responding to rumors and letting them know where they could call or go for support if they feel anxious or isolated;
- Work directly with service providers to ensure that accurate information is given about the services that are available, hours of availability, etc.; and,
- Channel the efforts of those who want to help in an emergency – from spontaneous volunteers to people wishing to donate material goods or money – to the right places that can benefit most immediately and directly, again relieving first-responder organizations from the need to respond to such offers.

How can I get more information?

Please contact:
Susie McIntyre
Voices of Hope
Box 6644
Great Falls, MT 59401
(406) 771-8648 ext. 3370
susiemcintyre@sofast.net