



## Background

In July 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserved the 211 dialing code for community information and referral services. The FCC intended the 211 code as an easy-to-remember and universally recognizable number that would enable a critical connection between individuals and families in need and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies.

Currently, active 211 systems cover all or part of 50 states. As of February 2015, 2-1-1 serves over 291 million Americans (93% of the entire population) covering portions of all 50 states (including 41 states with 90%+ coverage) plus Washington DC and Puerto Rico. Yet, millions of Americans still need to be connected to make 2-1-1 accessible nationwide.

## How 211 Works

211 works a bit like 911. Calls to 211 are routed by the local telephone company to the 211 call center (Helpline Center in South Dakota). The 211 center's referral specialists assess the caller's needs, access a database of resources available at human service agencies, match the callers' needs to available resources, and link or refer them directly to an agency or organization that can help. The referral specialists also provide listening and support as often times the callers are struggling emotionally.

The essence of 2-1-1 is in its simplicity:

- 2-1-1 is for everyone and can be remembered by everyone.
- 2-1-1 is free and confidential.
- 2-1-1 makes the entire social services system and every level of government work more efficiently.
- 2-1-1 has proven itself time after time as an invaluable resource in the aftermath of a disaster.
- 2-1-1 is the number to call to give help and to get help.

## Types of Referrals Offered by 211

211 provides callers with information about and referrals to social 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 Resources – including food and clothing, shelters, housing, utility assistance.

- Mental Health and Health Resources – including counseling, support groups, drug and alcohol treatment, health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health resources, health insurance programs for children, medical information lines, clinics, hospitals and crisis intervention services.
- Employment Supports – including job training, employment services, transportation assistance and education programs.
- Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities – including adult day care, community meals, respite care, home health care, transportation and homemaker services.
- Children, Youth and Family Support – including child care, after school programs, educational programs for low-income families, family resource centers, and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring and protective services.
- Volunteer Opportunities and Donations - Individuals who wish to donate time, goods or money to community organizations can find this information by dialing 211.

### 2-1-1 in South Dakota: 62.5% access to SD residents

The Helpline Center has been the 211 provider in South Dakota since 2001.

## 211 Coverage Map



## **There are several key roles that statewide 211 will provide:**

- Disaster Response
- Veteran's Services
- Basic Needs Assistance
- Mental Health Supports

## **Benefits of Statewide 211**

- Increased efficiencies for government departments
- Increased effectiveness of public education campaigns
- Earlier identification of problems and access to support
- Reduces the number of inappropriate calls to 911, freeing them to handle emergency response calls
- Systematic report of unmet needs and statewide trends

## **211 has telephone technology that is flexible and expandable**

- Centralized call center that can respond to calls efficiently 24/7
- Expand lines in minutes to meet "surge" of calls – can currently answer 24 calls at one time and has the ability to utilize prompts to provide immediate information as would be required during a disaster
- Added texting in February 2016

## **211 database and call record software**

- Social service and government resources are maintained in a database
- Real time updates to database for emerging information
- Ability to provide reports on call volume, caller needs – as every call is tracked by zip code, needs of the caller and the program referrals provided
- Database is also available online

## **2-1-1 staff are trained professionals**

- Certified Information and Referral Specialists
- Remain calm; comfortable handling crisis calls
- Offer empathy and understanding
- Hear and/or assess caller's primary and secondary needs
- Assess the safety needs of callers
- Provide support and information
- Knowledgeable about social service and government resources

The Helpline Center is the only entity in the state accredited by the Alliance for Information and Referral Systems and the only entity in the state that provides a certified crisis line through the American Association of Suicidology. The Helpline Center is a blended call center, meaning that all of the staff are cross trained to handle crisis and information/referral phone calls.

Dial 211

  
**helpline**  
center  
connect • prevent • support

How can  
I get help  
paying my  
**HEAT  
BILL?**

I'm really struggling and  
**NEED TO TALK**  
to someone.

Where can I get a  
**DRIVER'S  
LICENSE?**

Where can I find **FOOD**  
to get me through the week?



For Simple Answers or Serious Help



Whether it's food for your family, parenting classes, addiction treatment or counseling, Helpline Center will point you in the right direction. You can dial, text, or email 211 anytime, day or night – and the service is free!

Helpline Center can answer questions and provide referrals to social service agencies, non-profit organizations and government offices.



**Social Services · Government Programs  
Health Resources · Financial Assistance  
Services · Housing Resources · Child Care  
Mental Health**

**DIAL 2-1-1**

  
**helpline  
center**

Text your zip code to 898211

Email [help@helplinecenter.org](mailto:help@helplinecenter.org)

Visit [helplinecenter.org](http://helplinecenter.org)

