



Press release

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2-1-1 Bay Area Phone Service Celebrates First Anniversary

Regional helpline answered more than 148,000 calls in 2008

Top Caller Needs: Housing and Utility Assistance

SAN FRANCISCO, February 10, 2009 -- Tomorrow, "2-1-1 Day," marks the first anniversary of 2-1-1 Bay Area regional phone service. Today, the 2-1-1 Bay Area coalition released a "Report Card" for 2008, which shows the region's call centers handled 148,138 calls last year.

Last February, the launch of the 2-1-1 Bay Area regional network eliminated the need for residents to remember ten-digit phone numbers to reach social service agencies or to call multiple agencies in search of the right service. Callers can now dial three, easy-to-remember numbers – 2-1-1 – to find assistance with child care, utility bills, legal aid, domestic violence, and so much more. Trained, caring specialists answer calls and conduct a thorough assessment to ensure an accurate referral.

Prior to launching 2-1-1, the region's five call centers operated several toll-free, "800 numbers" to provide information and referrals. Those numbers received a combined average of 6,995 calls a month (41,968 from July to December 2007). In 2008, 2-1-1 Bay Area handled an average of 12,345 calls per month, an increase of 76%.

The top needs of 2-1-1 Bay Area callers in 2008 are listed below. Please note that some callers receive assistance for more than one need or issue.

1. Housing and utility assistance: 55,187 needs or 50% of the 110,273 total needs recorded.
2. Public benefits: 10,989 or 10% of total needs recorded.
3. Healthcare (healthcare, mental health & addictions): 10,423 or 10% of total needs recorded.

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4. Legal and immigration aid: 9,769 or 9% of total needs.
5. Food: 7,986 or 7% of total needs recorded.

The 2-1-1 Bay Area 2008 Report Card can be downloaded at www.211BayArea.org.

"2-1-1 is so important during these tough times. We are receiving hundreds of calls about housing, utility and public assistance," said Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area, which operates 2-1-1 service in four Bay Area counties. "A year ago, many folks felt anxious not knowing where to turn for help. Today, they can simply dial 2-1-1 to find help or give help. And, instead of dialing many numbers to find one resource, people can dial one number for many resources."

Barbara Bernstein, Executive Director of Eden I&R, which manages 2-1-1 Alameda County, said, "In Alameda County alone, we receive up to 6,200 2-1-1 calls a month. The calls are becoming more crisis oriented. For example, seniors and veterans who are on fixed incomes are having difficulty paying their utility bills. There are also more callers asking for assistance for the first time due to foreclosures and job losses. The single point of entry that 2-1-1 provides is helping people with multiple needs weave their way through the ever-changing human services maze."

John Bateson, Executive Director of Contra Costa Crisis Center, which operates 2-1-1 in Contra Costa County, said, "With the need for services skyrocketing because of the economy, and the number of resources shrinking rapidly because of federal, state, and local budget cuts, 2-1-1 is more important than ever. People need accurate, up-to-date information from a trusted source, and 2-1-1 provides it."

2-1-1 Bay Area service became a regional network in February 2008, expanding from three counties (San Francisco, Santa Clara and Alameda) to seven, with the addition of Contra Costa, Napa, Marin and Solano. Monterey and Sonoma Counties will launch the service tomorrow. United Way is working to launch the service in San Mateo County this year.

About 2-1-1 Bay Area

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember, toll-free phone number that connects callers with local community services, such as food, shelter, counseling, employment assistance, quality child care and more. During a disaster, 2-1-1 provides critical information about evacuation routes, food and shelter, as well as support with finding new jobs and permanent housing during long-term recovery. 2-1-1 is confidential and available 24 hours a day in more than 150 languages. 2-1-1 Bay Area is operated by United Way, Eden I&R, and Contra Costa Crisis Center. For more information, visit www.211BayArea.org.

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