

## **211 Program**

### **Bringing People and Services Together**

### **What is 211?**

211 is an easy to remember 3 digit phone number that, in one call, connects people to a full range of community, health, government, and social services information.

211 is free, confidential, multilingual and available 24 hours a day. 211 is answered by Certified Information and Referral Specialists who are carefully trained to assess complex needs and refer the caller to appropriate services.

### **How is 211 different from 311, 411 and 911?**

211 – Information and referral services that connects people to community, health, government and social services

311 – Customer service line for municipal services in the City of Calgary and the City of Edmonton (i.e. road repairs, garbage removal and building permits) – Here in Wood Buffalo this is “Pulse”.

411 – Telephone directory listings

911 – Emergency number for medical, fire and police assistance

### **Who can find help through 211?**

The short answer is everyone. 211 benefits the public by making it simple and easy to navigate the complex maze of human services.

211 benefits human services professionals by reducing the time spent searching for referrals for clients.

Community, social service and government organizations benefit by reducing the number of inappropriate referrals made to them. 211 can also increase awareness of their services.

Examples of people who find the help they need by calling 211:

- A son seeking transportation for his aging parents;
- A senior searching for home-care support;
- A laid-off employee looking for assistance with a job search;
- A teenager attempting to deal with school or social issues;
- A family exploring options for childcare services in the community.

### **What are the other benefits of 211?**

- 211 does not replace, but enhances local information and referral services by providing service 24 hours a day and in multiple languages;
  - 211 collects valuable social data that helps to identify service gaps and emerging trends that can influence future community service planning. Information can be used by communities to map where services are provided and caller statistics can provide service demand information;
  - Provide data to government specially related to human services on an ongoing basis helping to reduce overlap and duplication of services among government silos.
  - Across North America, 211 services have been proven to play an important role in disaster recovery situations where the public's need for accurate up to date information is high, and when surges of donations and offers to volunteer are common;
  - The availability of a simple, easy to remember number for community and social service information reduces the burden of agencies responding to misdirected phone calls;
  - People with time to volunteer can be more easily and more suitable matched with organizations in need of volunteers.
- The Community Index of Wellbeing reflected that belonging was one of the more important factors for residents to be happy living in Wood Buffalo. 211 will be able to connect new members in the community to the Volunteer Engagement Program within FuseSocial. Volunteering has proven to be an effective way to help newer and longer term individuals become engaged in their community;

**Since their respective launch dates through 2011; 211 Calgary and 211 Edmonton together have responded to over 750,000 calls.**

## *Some Other Solutions*

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- A significant number of calls to 911 are considered non-emergency calls that could be more appropriately dealt with by 211, freeing up 911 resources to real emergencies;
- 24 hour access is convenient for individuals with daytime obligations or seeking services when most agencies are closed. Providers are assured that clients receive some assistance when they are not available.
- By providing information and referrals related to employment/unemployment, 211 can provide unemployed workers access to information about programs and benefits designed to help them re/enter the workforce and reduce unemployment;
- By providing information and referrals related to addiction, counseling and youth programs, 211 can positively impact crime;

### **211 across Alberta and in Wood Buffalo**

211 was launched in Edmonton in 2004 by The Support Network and Calgary in 2005 by Distress Centre Calgary. United Way was instrumental in bringing 211 to cities in Alberta, and it is now playing a leading role, along with many community partners, to initiate and implement a provincial service so more people can benefit from the 24 hour support.

211 in Wood Buffalo is supported through the services of The Support Network in Edmonton. SOS partners with The Support Network who provides expertise from Information and Referral Specialists working in their call centre to answer Wood Buffalo's 211 calls. SOS is responsible to ensure that the information The Support Network refers to when answering calls using 211's database is correct, current, and updated. 211 has 1,000 plus services and agencies listed from Wood Buffalo in their data base.

There are very strict guidelines that are followed to ensure that information stays updated. Each of these services and agencies are contacted on a yearly basis to verify the information is the same. The services and agencies are checked on a rotation basis divided among each month of the year. SOS requires has a part time staff to ensure all the agency's information on the monthly rotation list is accurate. The confirmed information is sent to The Support Network who enter the new or changed information into the 211 database.

## **211 and Disaster Response & Recovery**

Recent flooding disasters in Calgary and High River have been examples how 211 was able to support Alberta in a responsive manner during a disaster. Standards related to disaster planning are a part of the accreditation process requirements for all 211 services.

### **What has 211's role been in disaster response?**

The types of disaster can vary; from a large crisis like an apartment complex fire; natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes or forest fires, or a pandemic like the H1N1 flu. In times of disaster, the public has a high need for accurate, timely and up-to-date information.

211 has proven itself to hold a vital role in disseminating information to the public, referring people to the necessary services and directing surges of donated items and willing volunteers to where they are needed.

### **How 211 can help in a disaster:**

- Two-way information about response and developing needs;
- Provides referrals to services to meet needs created by the disaster;
- Create a volunteer and donation database for emergency response teams to draw from;
- Information for evacuated residents ;
- Be a resource for agencies to complement their roles in the disaster;
- Phone for a person who is visually impaired, TTY services for a person who is hearing impaired;
- Interpretation in 150+ languages/ 24/7;
- Reduces non-emergency calls to 911;
- Prevents confusing number of help lines and processes;
- Provides accurate information to residents needing help;
- Able to collect information to find qualified volunteers and needed donations;
- Prevents non-useful items from being dropped off in the community.