

50 Ways 2-1-1 Works

1. **Laid-Off Workers:**

2-1-1 provides one memorable number that works for any kind of health or human service need. In a *Brookings Institution* Study, researchers reviewed the experience of laid-off hotel workers after the September 11th attacks and found that even when social service agencies were doing a good job making housing, food, and other assistance available, displaced workers couldn't figure out how to get help. Pat Atkins, a researcher from George Washington University noted that 2-1-1 " ... enables people to get assistance before they decide to give up."

2. **Disease Epidemic:**

2-1-1 helps people during epidemics as it did for the residents of Toronto, Canada during the SARS outbreak – People needed to know, for example, how to get groceries while quarantined. 2-1-1 will be used to provide information on West Nile virus, as well as such threats as anthrax and smallpox attacks.

3. **Flu Shots:**

2-1-1 provides easy access to information about how to get flu shots and how to pay for them if necessary. This year, complete flu shot information is available in Palm Beach County, Florida by calling 2-1-1.

4. **Evacuation Routes:**

2-1-1 can provide information about emergency shelters and evacuation routes during natural and man-made disasters.

5. **SCHIP, Etc:**

2-1-1 provides basic information and connection to state - provided income and insurance benefits such as the Children's Health Insurance Program. In Florida, United Way 2-1-1 of Jacksonville has a partnership with the State Agency for Health Care Administration to pilot a strategy that uses 2-1-1 as the entry point for Medici's, Kidcare and other state benefits.

6. **Crime Victims:**

2-1-1 could provide information to crime victims on services and benefits available to them.

7. **Travelers' Aid:**

2-1-1 can help people who are stranded. In Atlanta, thousands of people were stranded at Hartsfield International Airport for several days after September 11th. According to Dan Williams, former national 2-1-1 coordinator, "Not only did people call looking for rooms, we had people calling 2-1-1 offering rooms in their homes for people who were stranded." In all, hundreds of people received temporary housing until the crisis passed.

8. **ESL Help:**

2-1-1 helps non-English speaking people get comprehensive health and human service information. It was important in the SARS outbreak in Toronto, for example, to be able to serve the Mandarin Chinese speaking population. In

addition to the large Spanish speaking population in this country, many pockets of other non-English speaking people exist in nearly every community.

9. Reliable, Comprehensive Human Services Database:

2-1-1 provides a comprehensive, continuously updated human service web-based database for everyone, including social workers, doctors, and others trying to help people. In Connecticut, at least 15% of calls to 2-1-1 are from helping professionals and legislators looking for information to help someone. The database is available on disk and through the 2-1-1 website.

10. Community Response to Economic Emergencies:

2-1-1 helps communities hit by industry shutdown --- 2-1-1 was the critical community connection for residents of Atlanta who were unemployed in the sudden decline of the airline industry in the aftermath of September 11th. 2-1-1 provided the focal point for community leaders to respond quickly.

11. No stigma, confidential:

2-1-1 provides a neutral, confidential resource for help in any situation. People will call 2-1-1, because it is neutral and anonymous and does not require people to call themselves homeless, abused, elderly, mentally ill or other "labels".

12. Alternative solutions and plans:

2-1-1 helps people with multi-faceted problems – such as a sudden serious illness. Many people need help but find it hard to formulate a plan. They just know what their predicament is.

13. Targeting Assistance:

2-1-1 provides a knowledge base to steer funding to where it can help the most --
-In Battle Creek Michigan, data collected between 11/02 and 1/03, showed that 131 of 160 unmet needs were in the area of utility assistance. As a result, the United Way released an additional \$10,000 to help local residents pay heating bills. Upon hearing this, Semco Energy matched the \$10,000 donation.

14. Rural Assistance:

2-1-1 will give rural Pennsylvanians better access to health and human service information. There are 14 of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania that currently do not have access to a comprehensive information and referral service.

15. Parent Support and Education:

2-1-1 gives parents immediate access to parenting information. In Hawaii, which has statewide 2-1-1 service, the Hawaii Children's Trust Fund has provided a grant that will help fathers in Hawaii access resources through Aloha United Way 2-1-1.

16. 9-1-1 Relief: 2-1-1 provides an outlet for the non-emergency calls that can flood 9-1-1 centers during a disaster. The *Switchboard of Miami* has a standing agreement with their 9-1-1 center that when a hurricane is imminent, *Switchboard* staff relocate to the 9-1-1 center to handle all the non-emergency requests for information that come in. *Switchboard* is not yet a 2-1-1 service

but its proven usefulness to the 9-1-1 service center will only increase when it makes that change.

17. **Employee Retention:** 2-1-1 helps employers retain employees and reduce absenteeism. In a May 8, 2003 article in *Business Direct Weekly*, Ted J. Baird, an employment law specialist in Michigan, wrote that, " 2-1-1 has the potential to save time, decrease stress, increase employment opportunities, increase labor pools, and reduce pressure on employers to increase benefits We need to answer this call."
18. **Inventory of Beds for the Homeless:** 2-1-1 can provide an up-to-date, broad geographic inventory of shelter beds available to the homeless. At Connecticut's 2-1-1 Info line, a statewide count is maintained daily, so that every homeless person can be accommodated, especially during dangerously cold weather.
19. **Reaching At-Risk Populations in an Emergency:** According to Burt Wallrich, long time Coordinator for Information and Referral in Los Angeles, 2-1-1 systems can reach the majority of at-risk people through a broad network of small agencies serving the homeless and others who are disconnected by language, recent immigration, transience, distrust of government or mental illness. "The risks of not reaching these people [in a major disaster] include unnecessary loss of life and injury if services don't reach them, disease spreading from improvised camps to the rest of the community, civil disorder if people feel neglected and cut off from help, and political pressure and litigation brought to bear by advocates for these groups."
20. **Suicide Prevention:** Connecticut's 2-1-1 Infoline receives several calls every night from people who are contemplating suicide. The American Association for Suicidology evaluates Connecticut's crisis workers and certifies them for the clinical practice of this specialized type of crisis management.
21. **Assistance to Local Governments:** Many local governments do not have the extra tax dollars to establish a 3-1-1 service to provide information about municipal government services. As an alternative, 2-1-1 can provide an up-to-date official directory of detailed contact information so that residents know who to call for non-emergency information such as tax information, to report a dangerous road condition, or to ask a question about codes and zoning.
22. **Reporting Scams Aimed at the Elderly:** In Texas, there is discussion about using 2-1-1 as a statewide "clearing house" to assist senior citizens seeking advice about suspicious services or offers and keep track of potential scams. Neighbors and others could also use the line to discuss concerns about potential elder abuse. Funding such a service through 2-1-1 could come possibly from the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund.
23. **Reduce Government Waste:** 2-1-1 can prevent the proliferation of government sponsored 1-800 helplines. In some states, government agencies are required to use 2-1-1 if possible before being permitted to create a new 800 helpline.

24. **Rumor Control:** 2-1-1 can provide a means to control rumors by providing one trusted information sources during events such as nuclear power plant failures.
25. **Power blackouts:** In Toronto, calls to 2-1-1 tripled during the night of the blackout. Cheryl May, 2-1-1 Director, said, "The call center is always up to speed and on top of events, and counselors work with information specialists to collect and maintain the information required throughout a crisis."
26. **Health Education Campaigns:** 2-1-1 provides an easy way for government to do short and long term public information and education campaigns. For example, in Connecticut, the Tobacco Quitline can be reached through dialing 2-1-1. It takes only 2 staff for 2-1-1 to operate this service in contrast to the six to eight staff that would have been required for state government to establish Quitline.
27. **Responds to Individual Needs:** The 11/30 edition of PARADE Magazine profiled Joshua Webbert of Holland, Michigan who 2-1-1 helped to obtain a special outlet that he needed to keep him alive while awaiting a heart transplant. 2-1-1 Centers can allocate staff to search for solutions to special problems.
28. **Basis for Case Coordination System:** In Florida and elsewhere centralized I&R systems and 2-1-1 are providing the basis for electronic case coordination systems. These systems will save precious staff time by allowing system wide entry of callers' basic information, needs and service requests. A secure e-mail system between human service workers is often built into these case coordination systems. 2-1-1 systems are moving further in some locations, piloting programs to use 2-1-1 as the enrollment point for public benefit programs such as the children's health insurance program.
29. **Housing Assistance:** Although some communities provide specialized information and referral to address housing needs, many do not. 2-1-1 can provide housing information so that everyone in need can get appropriate housing assistance and create a better life. During the past 10 years, researchers in the HUD *Moving to Opportunity* project have found remarkable health improvements in people who have moved from crowded urban conditions including decreased asthma in children, decreased depression in adults, and greater feelings of happiness overall. (See *New York Times Magazine*, 10/13/03, "Enough to Make You Sick?")
30. **Forest Fires:** Since the recent forest fires in California, 2-1-1 is under consideration as the way to provide up to date information on how far fires have spread.
31. **Crisis Counseling:** 2-1-1 will provide crisis counseling for any crisis. Specialized lines that provide expert help to victims of rape and domestic violence serve most communities. 2-1-1 will connect people in need to these lines and other special crisis lines. For many of life's crises, however, there are no special telephone lines. 2-1-1 will provide trained crisis counselors to help people regain emotional control and make a plan to defuse a personal crisis.

- 32. Volunteer Opportunities:** Although many communities have Volunteer Centers to help people find an appropriate match for their skills and time, many do not. 2-1-1 can help callers identify community Volunteer Centers and help people find opportunities where volunteer placement services do not exist.
- 33. Calls to 2-1-1 Can Warn Public Health Authorities of Emerging Outbreaks of Disease:** States are now developing the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS), a national project to provide a centralized internet-based system for doctors to report disease to public health authorities. Like NEDSS, 2-1-1 provides a data collection system that can provide early warning of disease outbreaks through a built-in analysis of data as it is received and entered.
- 34. After Hours Support for Agencies:** In Connecticut, the calls to over 40 agencies are forwarded to 2-1-1 after hours so that caseworkers and others can be reached after hours when needed.
- 35. State Homeland Security Plan:** States such as Arizona have included establishing statewide 2-1-1 service as a goal in state Homeland Security plans. 2-1-1 complements emergency lines by taking non-emergency calls, thus freeing emergency workers to handle real threats to life and property.
- 36. Help for Helpers:** In Connecticut, about 45,000 calls per year (15% of total) are from social workers, clergy, doctors, legislators and other helpers who want to know how best to help the people they are serving.
- 37. Court Ordered Case Plans:** Courts often order parents to obtain counseling, improved housing and other services as a step toward regaining custody of children placed in foster care. The juvenile justice system makes similar requirements of adjudicated youth and their parents. 2-1-1 will provide a great way for social workers and criminal justice employees to help their clients take responsibility for achieving the goals included in court ordered plans.
- 38. Tracking and Helping Former Welfare Clients:** In Connecticut, 2-1-1 makes sure that former TANF clients are followed and get support and services, providing a safety net after TANF benefits end.
- 39. Quality Childcare:** 2-1-1 can provide callers with information on childcare options and openings in their locale and assist them with information to evaluate quality and suitability for their child and family situation.
- 40. For Kids:** Parents and educators can teach kids to call 2-1-1 when they are faced with confusing, non-emergency situations and do not know where to turn. Connecticut Infoline provides a "Teen Yellow Pages" on its web-site that is just for kids.
- 41. When Services Don't Work Out:** Sometimes, people do not get the help they need because for some reason things just don't work out. They may be

frightened or may have been sent to the wrong service. Many people then just walk away because they are in an emotionally charged situation and do not know what to do. 2-1-1 provides trained counselors who can review why the help did not work and plan what to do next.

- 42. Donations of Goods:** Whether you represent a corporation wishing to donate excess building materials or are a homeowner who is moving and would like to donate a large appliance to charity, 2-1-1 can be used to find an appropriate place to donate excess goods. Besides providing central information on the donation acceptance policies and hours of food banks and Goodwill stores and other traditional recyclers of used goods, 2-1-1 can match donors of more unusual in-kind gifts with charities that can use them. This function is particularly useful in the aftermath of a disaster when many donors emerge to help.
- 43. Help Through Phone, Website, E-mail, Walk-In:** 2-1-1 can be used as an Information and Referral resource regardless of how people choose to connect to help. In today's internet service environment, people need the choice of personalized service --- especially for those who are not computer literate.
- 44. Training:** Because of the high standards for 2-1-1 call center operation, 2-1-1 centers are used to provide training to government and non-profit staff who answer phones, especially for crisis or human services calls.
- 45. Avoiding Litigation:** By assuring that one reliable and accessible gateway to services exists, government can have confidence that all people have access to a comprehensive range of assistance regardless of physical or language barriers.
- 46. Employee Assistance Programs:** Many businesses provide "Employee Assistance Programs" --- providing a way for employees to get help with individual and family problems before they get out of hand is the right thing to do and is also good business. 2-1-1 provides a major resource in support of "EAP's".
- 47. e-Library:** Through its companion website and recorded informational tapes, 2-1-1 can provide important legal, health and safety information. The Connecticut Infoline website lists, for example, special information on child support enforcement and how to check for an individual's criminal record.
- 48. Specialized Information and Referral:** Excellent specialized I&R programs exist through Area Agencies on Aging, Mental Health / Mental Retardation offices, Drug and Alcohol agencies, HIV / AIDS programs and others. 2-1-1 can make a direct connection with these specialized I&R programs.
- 49. Daily "Are You OK?" Call to the Homebound:** Through automated phone technology, calls can be placed on a daily basis to homebound individuals to be sure that they are OK --- if there is no answer or a person indicates a need for help, immediate follow-up is made.

50. Public Policy Research: Because of the high volume of calls and the structured nature of the assistance and follow-up that is provided, 2-1-1 creates a real-time source of data on people's needs. This provides an "instant focus group" which can serve as the basis for research to guide the efforts of legislators and other public policy makers.

(Compiled by United Way of Pennsylvania)