Community-Level Data Reveals Human Service Needs of North Carolinians

The first step in finding help is knowing who to call. 9-1-1 is for emergencies, 4-1-1 is for directory assistance, and 2-1-1 is for finding community health and human service resources.

A veteran in Greensboro recently experienced a financial hardship which caused him to fall short on his rent. Facing eviction, he contacted a few local agencies that he thought could help, only to be informed that they were out of funds. He was encouraged to call United Way of North Carolina’s NC 2-1-1 number. Call center staff at NC 2-1-1 connected him to the Saint Vincent DePaul Society that was able to help prevent his eviction.

2-1-1 is free, confidential, and available all day, every day, and in any language. Last month alone, more than 10,000 North Carolinians called 2-1-1 in need of human services support. The most cited needs were for housing and shelter (e.g., rent/mortgage assistance, shelters, low-cost housing), utility assistance, and...
healthcare (e.g., insurance, providers, prescriptions). Needs differ slightly by region; access to food rounds out the top three highest needs in the Triangle, with support for mental health and addiction services in Western NC. **2-1-1 Counts**, a dashboard of 2-1-1 data, allows community leaders, service agencies, philanthropic organizations, and others to assess real-time community needs, examine trends, and share information. The online tool also allows users to compare data by county, region, zip code, state legislative and U.S. congressional districts.

In addition to human service needs, 2-1-1 can help users identify the best place to donate an item – such as a couch or appliance – and connect to volunteer, advocacy, and community enrichment opportunities. The data tool can also be used to find services during a natural disaster, and most recently, to provide accurate information about North Carolina’s new voter ID law (a partnership with the NC State Board of Elections). In a new partnership with the NC Department of Health and Human Services’ **No Wrong Door** initiative, NC 2-1-1 will soon offer information and referral services to adults with disabilities, older adults, their families, and others who support them.

"United Way of North Carolina and the 55 local United Ways throughout the State are proud to provide North Carolinians in all 100 counties with the valuable service of 2-1-1," said Laura Zink Marx, President and CEO of United Way of North Carolina. "Through 2-1-1, citizens across our State have access to the resources and information they need to solve problems and improve their lives. We’re also excited to continue to increase the depth of NC 2-1-1 service through strategic partnerships with State government and agencies providing critical human services.”
United Way has a long-standing commitment to funding information and referral services in their communities. As a result of this commitment, in 1999, United Way of North Carolina (UWNC) began exploring the possibilities of a 2-1-1 system. A 2-1-1 task force submitted an application to the NC Public Utilities Commission for designation of the three-digit number to be used for health and human service information, referral, and volunteer opportunities. The Commission designated UWNC as the “holder” of the 2-1-1 dialing code on November 18, 1999. In 2000, United Way of America was designated as the national holder of the 2-1-1 dialing code. UWNC manages the 2-1-1 service and with the support of local United Ways throughout the State, provides the information on local resources used to connect callers and meet their needs.

2-1-1 Counts, the online, real-time data dashboard, was created by Washington University’s Health Communication Research Laboratory, launching in 2014 in North Carolina and Florida. Thanks to generous support from the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust, 2-1-1 Counts continues to expand across the U.S.

I am proud to serve on the board of UWNC, and am grateful for their long history of improving the quality of human life in North Carolina. The public-private partnerships supported by our local United Way and others across the state are making a measurable and important impact here in North Carolina. Just ask the veteran from Greensboro.

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