



## 50 Ways 211 Works

Here are 50 ways that 211 benefits local communities.

1. **Laid-Off Workers:** In a study by the Brookings Institute, 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.
2. **Disease Epidemic:** 211 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. 211 will be used to provide information on the West Nile virus, as well as such threats as anthrax and smallpox attacks.
3. **Flu Shots:** 211 provides easy access to information about how to get flu shots and how to pay for them if necessary. In Florida, complete flu shot information was available by calling 211.
4. **Evacuation Routes:** 211 can provide information about emergency shelters and evacuation routes during natural and man-made disasters.
5. **SCHIP, Etc:** 211 provides basic information and connection to state provided income and insurance benefits such as the Children's Health Insurance Program.
6. **Crime Victims:** 211 can provide information to crime victims on services and benefits available to them.
7. **Travelers' Aid:** In Atlanta, thousands of people were stranded at Hartsfield International Airport for several days after 9/11. According to Dan Williams, former national 211 coordinator, "Not only did people call looking for rooms, we had people calling 211 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:** 211 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 a large Mandarin-speaking population.
9. **Reliable, Comprehensive Human Services Database:** 211 provides a comprehensive, up-to-date resource database for everyone, including social workers, doctors, and others trying to help people.
10. **Community Response to Economic Emergencies:** 211 helps communities hit by industry shutdown. 211 was the critical community connection for residents of Atlanta who were unemployed in the sudden decline of the airline industry following 9/11. 211 provided the focal point for community leaders to respond quickly.

11. **No stigma, confidential:** People call 211 because it's neutral and doesn't require individuals to label themselves homeless, abused, elderly, mentally ill, etc.
12. **Alternative solutions and plans:** 211 helps people with multi-faceted problems, such as a sudden, serious illness. Many people need help but find it hard to formulate a plan.
13. **Targeting Assistance:** 211 provides a knowledge base to steer funding to where it can help the most. In Battle Creek Michigan, 211 data showed that 131 of 160 unmet needs were in the area of utility assistance. As a result, the United Way chapter there released additional funding to help local residents pay heating bills.
14. **Rural Assistance:** 211 gives rural communities better access to health and human service information.
15. **Parent Support and Education:** 211 gives parents immediate access to parenting information. The Hawaii Children's Trust Fund has provided a grant that is helping fathers in Hawaii access resources through 211.
16. **911 Relief:** 211 provides an outlet for the non-emergency calls that can flood 911 centers during a disaster. The 211 provider in Miami has a standing agreement with its 911 center that when a hurricane is imminent, 211 staff relocate to the 911 center to handle all the non-emergency requests for information that come in.
17. **Employee Retention:** 211 helps companies retain employees and reduce absenteeism. In an article in "Business Direct Weekly," Ted J. Baird, an employment law specialist in Michigan, noted, "211 has the potential to save time, decrease stress, increase employment opportunities, increase labor pools, and reduce pressure on employers to increase benefits."
18. **Inventory of Beds for the Homeless:** 211 can provide an up-to-date, broad geographic inventory of shelter beds available to homeless people. At Connecticut's 211, 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 :** 211 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:** The American Association of Suicidology evaluates Connecticut's 211 workers and certifies them for the clinical practice of this specialized type of crisis management.
21. **Assistance to Local Governments:** Many local governments don't have the extra tax dollars needed to establish 311 service to provide information about government services. As an alternative, 211 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:** Texas is considering using 211 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 also could use the line to discuss concerns about potential elder abuse.
23. **Reduce Government Waste:** 211 can prevent the proliferation of government-sponsored toll-free, 800-number helplines.
24. **Rumor Control:** 211 can provide a means to control rumors by providing one trusted information source during events such as nuclear power plant failures.
25. **Power blackouts:** In Toronto, calls to 211 tripled during the night of a blackout as residents sought information about the cause, duration, and impact of the power failure.
26. **Health Education Campaigns:** 211 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 211. It takes only two staff for 211 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:** A 2004 edition of *Parade* magazine profiled Joshua Webbert of Holland, Michigan. 211 helped him obtain special care while waiting for a heart transplant.
28. **Basis for Case Coordination System:** In Florida and elsewhere, 211 is providing the basis for electronic case coordination systems. These systems save precious staff time by allowing system-wide entry of callers' basic information, needs, and service requests. A secure email system between human service workers often is built into these case coordination systems. 211 is moving further in some locations, piloting programs where 211 is 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 don't. 211 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 HUD's Moving to Opportunity project have found remarkable health improvements in people who have moved out of crowded urban conditions, including decreased asthma in children, decreased depression in adults, and greater feelings of happiness overall.
30. **Forest Fires:** Since forest fires are a yearly concern in California, 211 is a way to provide up-to-date information on how far fires have spread.
31. **Crisis Counseling:** Specialized lines that provide expert help to victims of rape and domestic violence serve most communities. 211 connect peoples in need to these lines and to other special crisis lines. For many of life's crises, however, there are no special

telephone lines. In these instances 211 provides 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 don't. 211 helps callers connect to volunteer centers and find opportunities where volunteer placement services don't exist.
33. **Calls to 211 Can Warn Public Health Authorities of Emerging Outbreaks of Disease:** States are now developing the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS), a project to provide a centralized Internet-based system for doctors to report disease information to public health authorities. Like NEDSS, 211 is a data collection system that can provide early warning of disease outbreaks through a built-in analysis of data as they are received and entered.
34. **After-hours Support for Agencies:** In Connecticut, the calls to more than 40 agencies are forwarded to 211 after hours so that callers get immediate help if they need it.
35. **State Homeland Security Plan :** Arizona and other states included establishing statewide 211 service as a goal in state Homeland Security plans. 211 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, 45,000 calls per year (15 percent of the total) are from social workers, clergy, doctors, legislators, and other helpers who want to know how best to help their clients.
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. 211 provides 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, 211 makes sure that former TANF clients are tracked and get support and services, providing a safety net after TANF benefits end.
39. **Quality Child Care:** 211 provides callers with information about child care options and openings in their locale. 211 also provides parents with information to evaluate the quality of care and the suitability for their child and family situation.
40. **For Kids:** Parents and educators can teach children to call 211 when they face confusing, non-emergency situations and don't know where to turn. Connecticut 211 provides a "Teen Yellow Pages" on its web site that's just for kids.
41. **When Services Don't Work Out :** Sometimes, people don't get the help they need because things don't work out for some reason. They may be frightened or may have been sent to the wrong service, for example. Many people then just walk away because they're in an emotionally-charged situation and don't know what to do. 211 provides

trained counselors who can determine why the help didn't work and assist callers in planning what to do next.

42. **Donations of Goods:** Whether someone represents a corporation wishing to donate building materials or is a homeowner who's moving and wants to donate a large appliance to charity, 211 can be used to find an appropriate place to donate. Besides providing central information on the donation acceptance policies and hours of food banks, Goodwill stores, and other traditional recyclers of used goods, 211 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, Web Site, Email, Walk-In:** 211 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 aren't computer literate.
44. **Training:** Because of the high standards for 211 call center operation, 211 centers are used to provide training to government and nonprofit staff who answer phones, especially for crisis and human service-related 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 offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to help employees deal with individual and family problems before they get out of hand. This is both the right thing to do and a good way to build employee loyalty to a company. 211 provides a major resource in support of EAP services.
47. **eLibrary:** Through its companion web site and recorded informational tapes, 211 provides important legal, health, and safety information. The Connecticut 211 web site, for example, has special information on child support enforcement and how to check for an individual's criminal record.
48. **Specialized Information and Referral:** Specialized information and referral programs exist through area agencies on aging, local and national mental health offices, drug and alcohol agencies, AIDS/HIV programs, and others. 211 makes a direct connection with these specialized I&R programs, facilitating access for users.
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 make sure they're okay. If no one answer or a person asks for help, 211 can initiate immediate follow-up.
50. **Public Policy Research:** Because of the high volume of calls and the structured nature of the assistance and follow-up that's provided, 211 creates a real-time source of data on people's needs. In essence, this is an "instant focus group" that can serve as the basis for research to guide the efforts of legislators and other public policy makers.