



## ISSUE BRIEF

### 2-1-1 Health and Human Services Information and Referral

#### **REQUEST FOR STATE FUNDING**

\$4.4 million funding to support 2-1-1 services now serving over 90% of the state's residents, as well as provide services to the rest of the state.

#### **HOW TO FINANCE THIS REQUEST**

Multiple state 800 numbers and single issues databases require their own investments to update and maintain the data bases as well as respond to callers. Consolidating these and allowing 2-1-1 to provide these services, would enhance the provision of needed information while freeing state employees to do other important work.

#### **CASE STATEMENT**

Today, more than ever, economic uncertainties are affecting New Yorkers who never expected to need assistance. 2-1-1, an easily remembered number to provide people with health and human services information and referral, has become New York's 1<sup>st</sup> responder in getting people the help they need. **Through the end of 2009 2-1-1 has made over 2.7 million referral across the state**, with nearly two-thirds of these calls directly related to economic conditions (basic needs, income support and consumer services.) This represents a significant increase over the 1.8 million calls for all of 2008.

Callers are assisted by well trained individuals who provide them with information and link them to appropriate services on a year-round basis. Calls are free and confidential. Although established with the goal of meeting people's day to day services needs, 2-1-1 has proven its value in disaster relief and long-term recovery across the country and in NYS.

Most recently 2-1-1 has stepped up to respond to flooding in Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties. 2-1-1 responded to calls in the immediate aftermath of the floods and has continued to provide residents information about where to obtain relief recovery and assistance, working closely with emergency responders, county governments, other voluntary agencies, and VOAD organizations.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Over three years, \$13 million in state funding combined with United Way, local government, and private investment resulted in the launch of services across the state. Last year's state budget contained no funding for 2-1-1 which has caused reductions in service hours and staff. Without a renewed state investment, this statewide system cannot continue.

Call centers in the Capital Region, Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley, Susquehanna River Region, Southern Tier, New York City, and Western New York provide free and confidential services in multiple languages to respond to this state's diversity.

To improve efficiency, 2-1-1 centers have developed arrangements for shared services. For example, 2-1-1 Hudson Valley now provides services for the North Country (Clinton, Essex and Franklin Counties) and Long Island.

## HOW 2-1-1 SAVES NYS GOVERNMENT MONEY

- 2-1-1 handles the 1<sup>st</sup> call from someone seeking help, which is the most time consuming and expensive. The referral call costs less for the government agency receiving it because the intake or pre-screening information can be shared. This is especially true for "other language" calls since 2-1-1 maintains the translator on the line. There is also a reduction in time and significant savings as a result of government staff not handling misdirected calls.
- 2-1-1 call specialists probe beneath the caller's initial question, often uncovering other issues they need help with. The cost of these interventions tends to be less expensive the faster they are addressed.
- 2-1-1 reduces the need for multiple state agency "single issue" databases, freeing state employees to do other work. 2-1-1 regions are required to develop and maintain a comprehensive database of voluntary, public and disaster services. The data is updated on a continual basis, negating the need for future investment in single subject databases.
- 2-1-1 offers nationally accredited information and referral services that eliminates the need to set up a new 800# for each new disaster as well as a public awareness campaign to promote that number
- 2-1-1 is a partner in the event of an emergency or disaster - *NYS is the 5<sup>th</sup> most frequently "declared" disaster state in the nation.* SEMO or local emergency responders can provide real time updates to 2-1-1, as they do in NYC with 3-1-1.
- As the point of entry for residents to access services in a disaster, 2-1-1 tracks what services have been provided to support requests for federal reimbursement.
- 2-1-1 has been hailed by FEMA representative Gale Martin who said:  
  
*"We have become heavily dependent upon the 2-1-1 system during federal declarations in the past four years. We find your referral system is the best way to inform disaster applicants of the many disaster resources available to them within their local area. During our recent efforts to care for Hurricane Ike and Gustav disaster victims, we partnered daily with your staff in Louisiana to keep both agencies informed of local shelters available, POD sites, disaster food stamp sites, and other emergency assistance. "We could not have done it without you."*
- 2-1-1 reduces the inappropriate calls to 9-1-1 (documented in NYC and Texas study) Call centers are required to have an MOU with 911 and their crisis service or suicide prevention provider. In two cases the suicide prevention service is provided by the 2-1-1 call center – Hudson Valley and Finger Lakes.

## **2-1-1 HELPS PEOPLE FIND HELP**

- 2-1-1 responded to 1.88 million calls in NYS alone in calendar year 2008, and 2.5 million through the end of November 2009. Close to two-thirds of those calls were for basic needs, income support/employment and consumer services, including credit repair and financial management.
- Because 2-1-1 is part of a national system, which now serves 80% of the population, New York residents can also receive help for children or aging relatives living in other parts of the country.
- Calls to a single issue hotline can only assist the caller with one issue, while 2-1-1 information and referral specialists have access to a comprehensive database of programs and agencies to assist callers with multiple needs.
- 2-1-1 call specialists are often called upon to “advocate” on behalf of callers, and do contact multiple government or voluntary agencies until a solution is found.
- 2-1-1 connects eligible individuals and families to public benefits and strengthens the local safety net. For example, 2-1-1:
  - Provides pre-screening and appointments for low income families eligible for free tax preparation.
  - Provides pre-screening for local DSS for home heating and energy assistance, and Medicaid buy-in for persons with disabilities (a pilot program in late 2009).
  - Conducts follow up to determine if callers have received services or benefits, i.e. disaster assistance.
  - Has the capacity to implement an evacuation registry for the elderly or disabled in a disaster or emergency (a partnership with IBM.)
  - Brings attention to a particular services need, like financial issues by providing and advertising special call-in hours for this particular concern.
  - Has in place the capacity to conduct reverse calls such as checking on the elderly living alone or calling parents in the event of a school lockdown, as occurred this fall in Dutchess County.

*Approved – December 1, 2009*

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