

Priority Issue: Ohio 2-1-1 2012

Information and referral programs have operated in most Ohio counties since 1963. In 1978 the Ohio Council of Information & Referral Providers (OCIRP, aka, Ohio AIRS) was formed for the purpose of promoting professionalism in the delivery of Information & Referral services. On July 21, 2000 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated the telephone number "2-1-1" as the universal number for access to community resource information. 2-1-1 call centers operate 24 hours each day; 7 days each week; 365 days each year; using both information & referral specialists and tele-interpreters who speak over 170 different languages.

In Ohio, calls average 4-5 minutes in duration with over 1.2 million calls received during 2011. The majority of calls are for basic human needs (food, housing, shelter, utilities, rent assistance, mortgage assistance, medical care, and clothing).

2-1-1 call centers also experience increased call volume during tax season, providing information and referral assistance about the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), linking callers to area VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites and Ohio Benefit Bank Tax sites. These referrals help return millions back to Ohio's citizens and communities.

To date there are 20 fully operated 2-1-1 call centers located throughout Ohio, providing services in 54 of Ohio's 88 counties to over 87% of Ohio's population. In 2012, Ohio United Way will again focus its efforts to help bring coverage to the 34 counties remaining without 2-1-1.

Total operating costs for the call centers exceed \$9 million annually. Call center funding comes from a variety of sources, of which over 50% is from local United Way agencies. Other financial contributors include local government, private foundations, community businesses and partners.

Expansion Funding for 2-1-1:

Federal funds received in 2009 expired in February 2011. In 2011, Ohio United Way received grant funding from The UPS Foundation for 2-1-1 expansion and continues to aggressively seek federal, state and private funding.

Ohio United Way supports continued funding for 2-1-1:

If continuation funding is received to facilitate statewide expansion of Ohio 2-1-1, it is estimated the project will require an additional two years to bring all 88 counties onto the Ohio 2-1-1 system. Updates are provided via email to all of the county information and referral providers who are not yet providing 2-1-1 service in an effort to make certain they are both educated and informed of the statewide 2-1-1 process, and ready to make the transition when funds become available.

Ohio United Way supports the following legislative initiatives:

- Encourage integration of statewide hotlines into the Ohio 2-1-1 system, freeing funds which could be used to expand 2-1-1.
- Support funding for completing universal 2-1-1 coverage in the state operating budget.
- The use of local TANF dollars toward establishing a statewide 2-1-1 system to assist low-income individuals in need of being linked to important social service programs.
- Support funding to continue the ongoing operations of the completed Ohio 2-1-1 system.

