

CALIFORNIA 211 OVERVIEW

What is the 211 Project? The California Alliance of Information & Referral Services (CAIRS) is working to develop a new statewide service delivery strategy designed to dramatically increase the public's access to essential health and social services. 211 represents an advance in the field of health and human services comparable to that created by the implementation of 911 for police and fire emergency calls.

Why is 211 needed: The goal of the 211 project is to create a hassle-free single telephone point of access overlay to the existing community health and social services information and referral programs. Standard 10-digit, 1-800, and local 7-digit access numbers will be replaced with one easy-to-remember phone number. This single point of contact will simplify access to both government and non-profit community services and resources by eliminating the need for people to struggle with hundreds of telephone listings attempting to find the "right" phone number for the "right" service or resource they need. 211 is a proven concept. It is already in use, with very good results, in the Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area and the State of Connecticut. It is also being developed on a statewide basis in Michigan, Texas, and Wisconsin.

What are the advantages of 211: The key benefits of 211 include –

- *Streamlined access to services by eliminating confusion and frustrating searches.*
- *Ease of recall and dial over traditional phone numbers.*
- *One simple number to link to essential community services for people who are most vulnerable (the elderly, disabled, non-English speaking, those incapacitated by crisis, the illiterate, migrant workers and people new to their communities.*
- *Efficiencies created by reducing duplication of information phone lines needed by the community to find services.*

FCC Approves 211: In May, 1998, a partnership led by the United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems filed a petition with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requesting that 211 be set aside as the universal number for accessing information about community resources. On July 21, 2000 the FCC approved the request to dedicate 211 for community I&R.

The FCC's ruling says, in part: *"We find that the Information and Referral Petitioners have demonstrated sufficient public benefits to justify use of a scarce public resource, and we therefore assign 211 to be used for access to community information and referral services. Individuals facing serious threats to life, health, and mental well being have urgent and critical human needs that are not addressed by dialing 911 for emergency assistance or 311 for non-emergency police assistance...."*

"We believe that the Information and Referral Petitioners have shown a public need exists for an easy to use, easy to remember N11 code to efficiently bring community information and referral services to those who need them, providing a national safety network for persons to get access readily to assistance. Therefore, we find that the public interest standard has been met here. We are persuaded by the Information and Referral Petitioners' assertion that, with a large number of toll-free telephone numbers, confusion is inevitable and the increased margin for error in dialing eleven digits creates obstacles to use of community information and referral services, particularly in urgent situations."