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2-1-1: NEW, NATIONAL NUMBER FOR ACCESS TO HUMAN SERVICES

— Free, Easy-To-Remember Number To Be Available Throughout U.S. —

(Washington, D.C.) — People who are in need of human services information soon may simply dial 2-1-1 anywhere in the United States. The easy-to-remember and universally recognizable number will make it possible for callers in need to more easily make critical connections with appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. Rather than searching for telephone numbers for human services organizations that can help with particular needs — such as after-school programs, food banks, crisis intervention, home health care — callers will be able to get all the information they need from 2-1-1 centers.

Members of the “2-1-1 Collaborative” — which include United Way of America, the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), The Texas I&R Network, United Ways in Connecticut and Atlanta, and the Florida Alliance of Information & Referral Services — requested that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) nationally designate 2-1-1 for universal access to human services information and referral (I&R). Recently, Senators Max Cleland (D-GA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced legislation designating 2-1-1 for human services I&R. Today the FCC issued a ruling granting the 2-1-1 Collaborative’s request.

“Everyone involved in the 2-1-1 Collaborative has worked very hard to reach this day and is grateful to the Commissioners for granting our request,” said Dimon McFerson, chair of the Board of Governors of United Way of America and chairman and CEO of Nationwide.

“By linking people who need help to those who can give help, 2-1-1 promotes self-sufficiency and self-directedness throughout America,” pointed out Betty Beene, president and CEO of

(more)

United Way of America. “Not only will 2-1-1 provide resources for vulnerable populations, and individuals and families in need, but also for those wanting information about how to volunteer and make donations.”

The service, which originated in the Atlanta area and is now statewide in Connecticut, is also available in Columbus, Ga.; Lafayette, La; and Knox County, Tenn. Since the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta and the United Way of Connecticut switched from 10-digit numbers to 2-1-1, the volume of calls received at both agencies has increased by 40 percent, with each handling more than 200,000 calls in 1999.

Coalitions in Alabama, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, and Utah currently are implementing 2-1-1 for human services I&R. Nearly every other state is pursuing or exploring 2-1-1 implementation. By approving 2-1-1 designation, the FCC is permitting states to take the next steps in providing 2-1-1.

“We’re thrilled to now have 2-1-1 designated throughout the country,” said Linda Daily, president of the AIRS board of directors and executive director of the Family Information and Referral Service Teams, Inc in White Plains, N.Y. “We’re seeing 2-1-1’s positive impact on people’s lives and in their communities, and eventually people in every state will be able to take advantage of this service.”

I&R specialists assess callers’ needs and determine the service provider best equipped to handle them. Additionally, I&R specialists are trained to determine whether a caller may be eligible for other services in the community. I&R providers maintain comprehensive databases of resources, including the whole range of government and community-based organizations.

“2-1-1 makes it possible for people in need to navigate the complex and ever-growing maze of human services’ agencies and programs,” said Peter Aberg, executive director of AIRS. “People now will be able to easily access one-stop shops for their human services needs.”

United Way of America is the national service and training center for 1400 independent United Way organizations.

The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems is a national membership organization for nearly 1,000 I&R providers.

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**(Editors please note: Further, detailed information may be found online at:
<http://national.unitedway.org> OR www.211.org)**