

For immediate release

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United Way Officially Launches Alaska 2-1-1
Statewide health and social services help line becomes a reality

United Way of Anchorage today announced the official launch of Alaska 2-1-1, a health and social services help line that enables Alaskans statewide to get help easily and reliably.

“Just as you call 9-1-1 for an emergency or 4-1-1 for information, Alaskans can now call 2-1-1 when they need help finding health and social services,” said Michele Brown, President of United Way of Anchorage at the press conference today. “We know how confusing, frustrating and intimidating it can be to find needed services. We know some people give up before they get the help they need. We want Alaskans to think of 2-1-1 as their GPS for getting help in a complicated world.”

Most Alaskans can access the Alaska 2-1-1 call center by dialing 2-1-1, many even from their cell phones. All Alaskans, no matter where they reside, can connect by dialing 1-800-478-2221. The call center is staffed with trained specialists who assess each caller’s needs and refer them to the right resources in their area. Alaska 2-1-1 phone service is currently available Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Alaska 2-1-1’s comprehensive database is also accessible online 24/7 at www.alaska211.org.

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Services available through Alaska 2-1-1

Alaska 2-1-1 offers access to a wide variety of services including:

- **Basic Human Needs Resources:** food, clothing, shelter, and utility assistance
- **Physical and Mental Health Resources:** health insurance programs, medical clinics, drug and alcohol treatment, counseling and support groups
- **Employment supports:** financial assistance, job training, and transportation assistance
- **Assistance for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities:** adult day care, meals on wheels, respite care, and home health care
- **Support for Children, Youth and Families:** childcare, recreation programs, family resource centers, mentoring, and protective service

Other benefits of Alaska 2-1-1

Alaska 2-1-1 isn't just for those who need help; it's also for people who want to give help, through volunteering or donations, and for those who help others.

“Human resource professionals are finding that 2-1-1 is a goldmine of easy-to-access, reliable information on services ranging from mental health counseling and consumer issues, to education and help with aging parents,” said Sue Brogan, Alaska 2-1-1 Project Director. “And from the calls received, we can mine data that enables service providers and community planners to track needs, identify gaps, improve services delivery, and spot emerging trends.”

Under a partnership agreement with the Municipality of Anchorage, the Alaska 2-1-1 call center is located at the Anchorage Emergency Operations Center. Other states have found that when 2-1-1 is available, it plays a significant role in preparing for and responding to community crises. Studies and reports after the September 11 attacks, the 2005 hurricane disasters and the 2007 California wildfires found that when 2-1-1 service is in place, it significantly expands the capacity of emergency response systems, manages unmet needs, reassures callers, mobilizes and manages volunteers and serves as intake for service. (References cited below.)

About Alaska 2-1-1

Alaska 2-1-1 operations are managed by United Way of Anchorage, but the system is a partnership with the other five Alaska United Ways: Kenai Peninsula United Way, United Way of Matanuska-Susitna Valley, United Way of Southeast Alaska, United Way of Tanana Valley, and United Way of Valdez.

Alaska 2-1-1 start up costs were funded in large part by a federal appropriation supported by Senator Stevens and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration. Current operational costs are being funded by United Way of Anchorage.

The telephone companies ACS, and GCI, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Alaska Mental Health Trust, and the Anchorage Community Foundation have generously contributed critical talent and financial resources to helping make 2-1-1 a reality in Alaska.

“In this next phase of growing the service, we will actively pursue the support and engagement of additional partners,” said Michele Brown. “We all have a part to play in ensuring full access to a robust network of care and services.”

About United Way of Anchorage

United Way of Anchorage works to advance the common good by focusing on the building blocks for a good life: education, income and health. Our goal is to create long lasting change that prevents problems from happening in the first place. You are invited to be part of the change. Together, united, we can inspire hope and create opportunities for a better tomorrow.

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References:

- Study of post-September 11 recovery efforts by the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute.
- “Trial by Wind and Water: How 2-1-1 Played a Vital Role During the 2004 Florida Hurricanes,” Civil Society Consulting Group LLC.
- “2005 Hurricane Season After-Action Report,” Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- “Lessons From the Flames,” Newsweek, Nov. 5, 2007