



THE CALLING FOR 2-1-1 ACT (S. 211)

LEAD SPONSORS: SENATOR PATTY MURRAY (D-WA) AND SENATOR RICHARD BURR (R-NC)

WHAT IS 2-1-1? 2-1-1 is an information and referral line that connects people to vital social services provided by a range of nonprofit and government agencies. This easy-to-remember number saves time and frustration by eliminating the need for callers to navigate a maze of agencies and help-lines. When a person calls 2-1-1, specially-trained information and referral personnel analyze what services are needed and provide the appropriate resource and related information. Currently 2-1-1 is available to 78% of the U.S. population, with more than 240 active 2-1-1 call centers in 46 states. 2-1-1 call centers nationwide received nearly 14 million calls in 2008—a 42% increase above the 2007 call total.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED BY CALLING 2-1-1? Although the services offered by 2-1-1 vary from community to community, 2-1-1 provides callers with a wide range of information about and referrals to human services for every day needs and in times of crisis. For example, 2-1-1 connects people to food banks and hot meals, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance, health care services, crisis intervention, substance abuse intervention and rehabilitation, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) assistance, job training and education programs, transportation assistance, child care, Head Start centers, services for seniors, and disaster recovery.

WHY IS THE CALLING FOR 2-1-1 ACT NEEDED? Although the 2-1-1 system has developed over the past decade through United Way and state government funding, the 2-1-1 system lacks stable long-term financing. Because of the expanding reach and increasing visibility of 2-1-1, many 2-1-1 call centers lack the resources needed to build an adequate telecommunications infrastructure, provide appropriate staff levels and training, establish or maintain 24-hour-a-day service, ensure complete and accurate informational databases, and reach rural populations. The Calling for 2-1-1 Act would provide the funding needed to meet these needs.

WHAT DOES S. 211 DO? S. 211 would create a federal grant program to complete implementation of a nationwide 2-1-1 system. Specifically the bill would:

- Direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to award a grant to each state to establish a program or fund an existing program which will make 2-1-1 service available to all the residents of a state with phone service.
- Require a state match, meaning each participating state must ensure that at least 50% of the resources of the program funded by the grant will be derived from other sources.
- Mandate that grant recipients collaborate with human service organizations to provide an exhaustive database of services with which to provide information and referral to persons utilizing the 2-1-1 service.
- Provide \$150 million for each of first two years, \$100 million for the next four years, for a total of \$700 million.

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