

# What is 211?

Real People.Real Connections.Real Help



## **211 Santa Cruz: Get Connected**

211 is an easy to remember phone number. It is a free, confidential, help and referral hotline that connects county residents to local health and human services. Callers receive personalized information from a live resource specialist. 211 is also available in more than 170 languages.

Like 9-1-1 for emergency services, 211 has been set aside nationally by the Federal Communications Commission for the public to more easily access community information. 211 is also a central resource for community information during and in recovery from disasters.

## **Who answers 211 calls?**

211 calls are answered by an Information and Referral Specialist. Specialists are trained in navigating the maze of human service agencies and programs. Non-English speaking callers are assisted by a bilingual Specialist or seamlessly through a telephone interpreting service with access to interpreters in more than 170 languages.

## **What are the benefits of 211?**

- 211 simplifies access and increases the effectiveness of the entire health and human services system.
- 211 relieves 911 call volume, allowing for faster response to real emergencies and cost savings.
- 211 plays a major role in disaster response. 211 proved effective after the 9/11 terrorist attacks where 211 Connecticut received 95 percent of all calls for mental health counseling, volunteering, and other services. New York did not have 211 and 400 new information lines were created resulting in confusion and a waste of precious resources. Now, in the wake of Hurricane Charley, thousands of Floridian's are turning to 211 for help in their time of need ([www.211.org](http://www.211.org)).

## **How many Californians have access to 211?**

Ninety-six percent of California residents now have access to 211. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) ruled in 2003 that 211 service would be established on a county-by-county basis. California's first 211 service launched on February 11, 2005 in Ventura County. Currently, 211 is in 35 counties. For more information on 211 in California, visit [www.cairs.org](http://www.cairs.org).

## **Do other states have 211?**

As of February 2014, 211 serves over 285 million Americans (91% of the entire population). Every few weeks, these coverage numbers increase. Visit <http://www.211us.org/status.htm> to check the current status.

## **What's the difference between 211, 3-1-1, 9-1-1, and other N-1-1 numbers?**

2-1-1: Community services

3-1-1: Non-emergency government services

4-1-1: Directory assistance

5-1-1: Traffic and transit

6-1-1: AT&T repair service

7-1-1: California relay for hearing impaired

8-1-1: "Call before you dig" for locating underground utility lines

9-1-1: Life-threatening emergency services

### **211's role in disaster response and recovery**

-2007 Southern California Wildfires: The importance of 211 during disaster was underscored during the October 2007 wildfires in Southern California, where 211 San Diego call volume peaked at 30,000 calls a day – up from 800 daily – as residents sought information about evacuation sites, road closures, shelters, medical assistance, pet and large-animal care, and more.

- 2005 Hurricane Katrina: Calls to Texas' statewide 211 system increased from 2,500 to more than 10,000 a day after the storm as people sought food, shelter and other assistance. Three weeks after Katrina, more than 170,000 Texas callers had received 211 assistance.

- In Sacramento: 211 Sacramento works with Sacramento County Office of Emergency Services and Sacramento Regional Office of Homeland Security as a public information partner in disaster preparedness and response.

### **If you have trouble reaching 211**

If you have trouble dialing 211, call (800) 273-6222. Because 211 is a fairly new dialing code in the Santa Cruz area, it may not be accessible from some phone systems. If you have problems at work, contact your information services staff to change permissions on the telephone system to allow 211 dialing access. If you have problems at home, contact your telephone service provider's repair number to make sure they have programmed 211 into your service.