



United Way of the Bay Area

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## United Way of the Bay Area Calls for 2-1-1 Expansion Locally & Nationwide

United Way of the Bay Area's HELPLINK actively pursuing government funds and community support to launch full-time 2-1-1 service in Bay Area

**SAN FRANCISCO (February 11, 2005)** – Today, United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA) is rallying, along with dozens of other local communities nationwide, to support stronger efforts and Federal funding to make 2-1-1 service available in the Bay Area, as well as across the nation.

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember three-digit dialing system (similar to 9-1-1 and 4-1-1) that makes a simple, but critical connection between individuals and families seeking services. The service also links people who wish to help others with opportunities and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. It is a cost-effective answer to help Bay Area families navigate the complex and ever-growing maze of human service agencies and programs.

United Way of the Bay Area's HELPLINK has been designated by the California Public Utilities Commission as the official 2-1-1 provider for the City and County of San Francisco. UWBA continues to seek funding support for HELPLINK from community, government and corporate sponsors as the service moves toward 2-1-1 deployment (operating 24 hours a day, 7 days per week). To provide full-time 2-1-1 service, HELPLINK will need to supplement federal funding with substantial local support, according to United Way HELPLINK director Ed Schoenberger.

United Way of the Bay Area's HELPLINK currently provides free and confidential information and referral services to more than 45,000 callers each year through its toll-free number, 800-273-6222. It is San Francisco County's only comprehensive source of assistance to thousands of individuals who do not know where or how to access the help they need. Plans by HELPLINK to collaborate with other entities to launch 2-1-1 in other Bay Area counties are also well underway. Currently, the service is available in English, Spanish, Chinese and for the hearing impaired, Monday – Thursday from 8am to 2pm, with a live answering service after-hours and on weekends. HELPLINK also works with a translation service to serve callers who speak languages other than those cited above.

2-1-1 was first launched by United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta in 1997 and in only a few years, this service has grown to currently serve nearly 102 million Americans – over 34 percent of the U.S. population – in a total of 141 active 2-1-1 systems in 30 states and Washington, DC. United Way's goal is to help ensure that 50 percent of the U.S. population is covered by 2-1-1 service by the end of 2005.

“With the assistance of HELPLINK, people can more quickly access a full range of community resources,” said Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area. “In a country where we are only as strong as our local communities, we must also strive to ensure that all, not just some, have the ability to give and get help when and where they need it. A local and nationwide 2-1-1 system would do that, and citizens can make it happen.”

### **Congressional Support for 2-1-1**

Efforts are underway in Congress to facilitate the expansion of 2-1-1, with the recent re-introduction of *The Calling for the 2-1-1 Act* (S. 211) in the Senate by Senators Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY). This bill spearheads a bipartisan effort to secure \$150 million in federal funding for 2-1-1 and support its nationwide adoption. Similar legislation will soon be introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Representative Anna Eshoo (D-CA) were sponsors in 2004 and are helping reintroduce the legislation this year as well.

Bay Area residents interested in supporting 2-1-1 can do so by calling a toll free line, 1-888-PASS-211 (1-888-727-7211), which will automatically connect them to the Washington, DC offices of their members of Congress, so they can encourage passage of the funding legislation. For more information, residents can visit United Way of the Bay Area's website at [www.uwba.org](http://www.uwba.org).

### **Cost Benefit Analysis**

Recently, United Way of America commissioned a study to assess the expected costs and anticipated benefits of a nationwide 2-1-1 system. The study, completed by the University of Texas Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, concluded that 2-1-1 would ultimately provide American taxpayers up to \$1.1 billion in net value over the next 10 years. Furthermore, when an individual seeks information or referral services for which they have little or no prior knowledge or experience, dialing 2-1-1 is much simpler than other options. The research also found that dialing a general information system (such as 4-1-1) is no substitute for 2-1-1 since the telephone directory system lists entities by name only, which provides information that is too general in nature to be very useful and may also charge a fee for the service. To obtain a copy of the cost benefit analysis please visit [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org).

### **About United Way of the Bay Area**

United Way of the Bay Area is one of the largest private funders of health and human services in Northern California. For more than 80 years, United Way has been focusing on "what matters" -- improving lives and transforming communities in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano Counties. Through the Bay Area Community Fund, United Way is helping create meaningful change in the areas of early childhood education, health care access, youth violence prevention and economic independence for working families. For more information, please visit [www.uwba.org](http://www.uwba.org).

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