

20 Ways 2-1-1 Works

1. **When You Don't Know Where To Start:** 2-1-1 provides one memorable number that works for any kind of health or human service need. In a *Brookings Institution* Study, researchers reviewed the experience of laid-off hotel workers after the September 11th attacks and found that even when social service agencies were doing a good job making housing, food, and other assistance available, displaced workers couldn't figure out how to get help. Pat Atkins, a researcher from George Washington University noted that 2-1-1 "...enables people to get assistance before they decide to give up."
2. **Disease Epidemic:** 2-1-1 helps people during epidemics as it did for the residents of Toronto, Canada during the SARS outbreak – People needed to know, for example, how to get groceries while quarantined. 2-1-1 will be used to provide information on West Nile virus, as well as such threats as anthrax and smallpox attacks.
3. **Evacuation Routes:** 2-1-1 can provide information about emergency shelters and evacuation routes during natural and man-made disasters.
4. **ESL Help:** 2-1-1 helps non-English speaking people get comprehensive health and human service information. It was important in the SARS outbreak in Toronto, for example, to be able to serve the Mandarin Chinese speaking population. In addition to the large Spanish speaking population in this country, many pockets of other non-English speaking people exist in nearly every community.
5. **Reliable, Comprehensive Human Services Database:** 2-1-1 provides a comprehensive, continuously updated human service web-based database for everyone, including social workers, doctors, and others trying to help people. In Connecticut, at least 15% of calls to 2-1-1 are from helping professionals and legislators looking for information to help someone. The database is available on disk and through the 2-1-1 website.
6. **Community Response to Economic Emergencies:** 2-1-1 helps communities hit by industry shutdown --- 2-1-1 was the critical community connection for residents of Atlanta who were unemployed in the sudden decline of the airline industry in the aftermath of September 11th. 2-1-1 provided the focal point for community leaders to respond quickly.
7. **No stigma, confidential:** 2-1-1 provides a neutral, confidential resource for help in any situation. People will call 2-1-1, because it is neutral and anonymous and does not require people to call themselves homeless, abused, elderly, mentally ill or other "labels".
8. **Parent Support and Education:** 2-1-1 gives parents immediate access to parenting information. In Hawaii, which has statewide 2-1-1 service, the Hawaii Children's Trust Fund has provided a grant that will help fathers in Hawaii access resources through Aloha United Way 2-1-1.
9. **9-1-1 Relief:** 2-1-1 provides an outlet for the non-emergency calls that can flood 9-1-1 centers during a disaster. The *Switchboard of Miami* has a standing agreement with their 9-1-1 center that when a hurricane is imminent, *Switchboard* staff relocate to the 9-1-1 center to handle all the non-emergency requests for information that come in. *Switchboard* is not yet a 2-1-1 service but its proven usefulness to the 9-1-1 service center will only increase when it makes that change.

10. **Reaching At-Risk Populations in an Emergency:** According to Burt Wallrich, long time Coordinator for Information and Referral in Los Angeles, 2-1-1 systems can reach the majority of at-risk people through a broad network of small agencies serving the homeless and others who are disconnected by language, recent immigration, transience, distrust of government or mental illness. “The risks of not reaching these people [in a major disaster] include unnecessary loss of life and injury if services don’t reach them, disease spreading from improvised camps to the rest of the community, civil disorder if people feel neglected and cut off from help, and political pressure and litigation brought to bear by advocates for these groups.”
11. **Power blackouts:** In Toronto, calls to 2-1-1 tripled during the night of the blackout. Cheryl May, 2-1-1 Director, said, “The call center is always up to speed and on top of events, and counselors work with information specialists to collect and maintain the information required throughout a crisis.”
12. **When Services Don’t Work Out:** Sometimes, people do not get the help they need because for some reason things just don’t work out. They may be frightened or may have been sent to the wrong service. Many people then just walk away because they are in an emotionally charged situation and do not know what to do. 2-1-1 provides trained counselors who can review why the help did not work and plan what to do next.
13. **For Kids:** Parents and educators can teach kids to call 2-1-1 when they are faced with confusing, non-emergency situations and do not know where to turn. Connecticut Infoline provides a “Teen Yellow Pages” on its web-site that is just for kids.
14. **Response to Individual Needs:** The November 30, 2003 edition of PARADE Magazine profiled Joshua Webbert of Holland, Michigan who 2-1-1 helped to obtain a special outlet that he needed to keep him alive while awaiting a heart transplant. 2-1-1 Centers can allocate staff to search for solutions to special problems.
15. **Donation of Goods:** Besides providing central information on the donation acceptance policies and hours of food banks and Goodwill stores and other traditional recyclers of used goods, 2-1-1 can match donors of more unusual in-kind gifts with charities that can use them. This function is particularly useful in the aftermath of a disaster when many donors emerge to help.
16. **Help Through Phone, Website, E-mail, Walk-In:** 2-1-1 can be used as an Information and Referral resource regardless of how people choose to connect to help. In today’s internet service environment, people need the choice of personalized service --- especially for those who are not computer literate.
17. **Specialized Information and Referral:** Excellent specialized I&R programs exist through Area Agencies on Aging, Mental Health/Mental Retardation offices, Drug and Alcohol agencies, HIV/AIDS programs and others. 2-1-1 can make a direct connection with these specialized I&R programs.
18. **Inventory of Beds for the Homeless:** 2-1-1 can provide an up-to-date, broad geographic inventory of shelter beds available to the homeless. At Connecticut’s 2-1-1 Info line, a statewide count is maintained daily, so that every homeless person can be accommodated, especially during dangerously cold weather.
19. **Quality Childcare:** 2-1-1 can provide callers with information on childcare options and openings in their locale and assist them with information to evaluate quality and suitability for their child and family situation.
20. **Help for Helpers:** In Connecticut, about 45,000 calls per year (15% of total) are from social workers, clergy, doctors, legislators and other helpers who want to know how best to help the people they are serving.