Call 211 LA County Help Starts Here

News Release

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2-1-1 Launches in Los Angeles County!

Start of 2-1-1 Service Brings Great Benefits to LA County Residents

Los Angeles, July 5, 2005 – Ushering in a new era of better access to social services in Los Angeles County, the launching of the new dialing code 2-1-1 was announced today at a press conference at the County Hall of Administration.

2-1-1 is the phone number to find help in Los Angeles County. 2-1-1 is the new dialing code approved by the Federal Communications Commission to connect people with the health and social services they need. Like 9-1-1 for emergency calls, 2-1-1 can connect people to emergency food and shelter, support services for seniors and the disabled, childcare, employment assistance, child and adult protective services, and legal assistance.

"There's no doubt that 2-1-1 is a win-win for both residents and taxpayers," said Los Angeles County Supervisor **Zev Yaroslavsky**. "And 2-1-1 LA County has the experience, expertise, capability, and resources to provide 2-1-1 services in a professional and efficient manner."

"The day we've been waiting for has arrived," said **Maribel Marin**, executive director of 2-1-1 LA County, the not-for-profit agency that actually handles the calls. "We're making the switch to 2-1-1, and the residents of Los Angeles County are the big winners."

"More than 26 year's ago, United Way of Greater Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles recognized the need for a centralized information and referral service and established what is now 2-1-1 LA County - one of the first services of its kind in the country," stated **Elise Buik**, president of Untied Way of Greater Los Angeles. "In a diverse community, our priority is that people have an easy way to get help and one way is helping them get connected. We are excited to be part of 2-1-1 Los Angeles County system that will facilitate public access to social services for all in need."

By substituting "2-1-1" for the myriad of toll-free and other numbers that exist today, Los Angeles County residents benefit by being able to quickly and easily get access to the social and disaster services they need.

"2-1-1 is the phone number for people to call to find help in their own community," noted Marin. "2-1-1 is designed to connect people with the health and social services they need. With 2-1-1 in place, 2-1-1 LA County expects to handle 500,000 calls per year."

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"2-1-1 will make the entire social service delivery system more efficient by connecting people to the services they need the first time they call," noted Los Angeles County Supervisor **Gloria Molina**. "Residents and tax payers both win."

"One of the great benefits of 2-1-1 is that the number will reduce non-emergency calls to 9-1-1, freeing up emergency services resources, and letting 9-1-1 operators do their jobs more quickly and efficiently," added Los Angeles County Supervisor **Yvonne B. Burke**.

"Our health and human service departments will now be able to transfer general information and referral calls to 2-1-1, rather than having them handled by specialized hotlines," said Los Angeles County Supervisor **Don Knabe**. "County residents and taxpayers will benefit from this increased efficiency in the delivery of services."

"2-1-1 is part of an effective disaster response and recovery plan," noted Los Angeles County Supervisor **Mike Antonovich**. "With only one number to remember, affected residents can get the services and help they need quickly."

"I've been answering calls and helping people find the resources they need to resolve their problems for more than ten years," said **Yolanda Villasenor**, a service specialist with 2-1-1 LA County. "With 211, we are looking forward to helping even more people."

The Los Angeles County launch is part of a statewide and national trend toward 2-1-1. 2-1-1 was first introduced in Atlanta in 1997, and now well over one-third of the country has access to 2-1-1. California joined 29 other states when 2-1-1 HelpLine in Ventura County was launched on February 11, 2005. There are now over 141 2-1-1 call centers serving over 102 million Americans.

Today's event highlights the fact that 2-1-1 is a cost-effective answer to help people navigate the complex and ever-growing maze of human service agencies and programs. 2-1-1 call centers made a dramatic difference in the aftermath of Florida's four major hurricanes last year. Residents of counties where 2-1-1 was operative were able to quickly find emergency shelters, food and essential services without navigating a maze of 800 numbers set up by Red Cross and other service agencies.

As the Riverside Press-Enterprise noted at the time, "The 211 system has proven its effectiveness in Florida after Hurricane Charley. . . . Call centers quickly referred residents to services and reduced the volume of calls to 911, the three-digit number reserved for emergency response calls." (August 27, 2004)

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In fact, INFO LINE Los Angeles has changed its name to "2-1-1 LA County" to reflect the importance of the launch and the new service. Established more than 22 years ago by the County and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, 2-1-1 LA County is the largest, most technologically advanced I&R service agency in the nation, helping over 350,000 individuals and families each year. 2-1-1 LA County is accredited by the national Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). It is the County's only AIRS-accredited agency. 2-1-1 LA County is funded by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services, the City of Los Angeles' Community Development Department and the United Way.

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