



United Way Centraide Canada

Supplemental Policy Paper

211 for All Canadians:

Empowering people and Transforming lives by Improving Access
to Information and Navigational Support

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Executive Summary

The information and navigational assistance provided by 211 improves and saves lives.

211 now reaches two-thirds of Canadians, providing an infrastructure platform capable of supporting rapid expansion.

United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC) proposes the Government of Canada join the partnership comprised of local United Ways and Centraides, Provincial and Municipal governments to expand 211 to reach all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Federal support would be a game-changer, transforming 211 into a pan-Canadian gateway for community, social, non-clinical health and related government services to create a powerful new form of social infrastructure for the digital age – an omni-channel source for information and help.

UWCC also proposes a new social innovation; leveraging 211 infrastructure to provide an enhanced level of service specifically designed to help individuals and families tackle poverty and homelessness. Employing proven case management techniques, 211 specialists will assist people to develop action plans geared to their specific situation. 211 will then work proactively providing coaching, encouraging follow-ups, assessing outcomes, and helping people plan next steps.

As a natural byproduct of helping people, 211 captures unique and valuable data about the human services sector and people's experience seeking and accessing services. This historic and real-time data provides a rich source of insights and indicators to inform decision-making, service planning and future investments.

Federal Government Support for 211

Responding to an application spearheaded by United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC), the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission recognized the challenges people face when seeking information and assistance, and formally designated the three digit dialing code 2-1-1 to improve public access to “information and referral related to community social, health and government services”.

UWCC has worked with the assigned lead, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), in the recent past, exploring how 211's information system could be expanded to benefit all Canadians. In light of the federal government's commitment to develop a National Housing Strategy and a Poverty Reduction Strategy, UWCC also proposes an enhanced support service to persons experiencing or at risk of poverty. By reaching out to low-income households, persons will be connected with the solutions required to tackle and overcome poverty or homelessness, and reach their full citizenship. This natural evolution of 211 is consistent with Canada's social innovation agenda.

What is 211?

211 is the information source Canadians trust when seeking access to services to deal with life's challenges. 211's award-winning telephone help line (2-1-1), website and social media channels provide a gateway to community, social, non-clinical health and related government services. 211 helps to navigate the complex network of human services quickly and easily, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in over 100 languages.

"I can't get over how much information I got by dialing 211. I wish I had known about you before I started to make the many calls looking for what I needed." – 211 caller

211's stringent quality standards for data processes and management, coupled with a rigorous regime of staff training and certification, and organizational accreditation, ensure exceptionally high levels of service quality and customer satisfaction. The ongoing evolution of 211 is based on a deep commitment to continuous innovation designed to maximize the delivery of value and public benefits.

211 - Strengthening Canada; Empowering Canadians

Canada 211 has taken stock of the 'anytime, anywhere' expectations created by an increasingly connected citizenry inhabiting a digital world.

Human services are fragmented, to varying degrees, across Canada. Residents, looking for services can face significant barriers and delays in finding the right resource. In critical cases, timely access can prevent daily challenges from escalating into personal emergencies and, indeed, tragedies.

211 complements the role of community hubs, but gives people the added convenience of anytime, anywhere support. Using any communications technology – mobile device, computer, or traditional telephone landline – 211 is available 7/23/365, in countless languages, including those of Indigenous persons, without requiring travel to a specific site or making an appointment.

By connecting all Canadians with the appropriate information and services through multiple channels, we will enhance our nation's social infrastructure and play an important role in enable it to be more responsive to people in need.

Recent developments in 211 have strengthened our business intelligence capacity, while increased systems integration has further strengthened 211's world-class service metrics including cost per client transaction and quicker response.

211 – Human Services Business Intelligence; Informing Decisions

Doing good is not good enough. Sound business intelligence is fundamental to being even more responsive to changing needs of clients, funders and donors. Public confidence in institutions, like donor confidence, depends on our ability to demonstrate tangible results and real impact.

The information from 211 service records is already being used at the municipal level to geo-code and map the location of particular service providers, and services. The insights gleaned help inform the placement and provision of service for specific client groups, and in the land use planning process. 211 also captures a wide range of demographic, and other types of data, as a result of the transactions people have with 211 when seeking information and help.

211's data, covering both the supply of and the demand for human services, acts as a dynamic focal point for identifying trends, provide gap analysis, improving service planning and more effective delivery. Insights available from 211 data can serve as a powerful driver for adaptation and spur innovation in the human services sector.

National Leadership; a pan-Canadian 211 system

1. A national partnership - the Federal government partners with UWCC and the Provincial / Territorial and municipal governments to improve access for all Canadians to important programs and services.
2. National leadership - Federal government investment significantly expand 211 service and impact, and catalyze further investment.
3. Supporting Provincial/Territorial Leadership - Federal investment in 211 acknowledge and support the leadership of those Provincial and Territorial governments (Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, and Nunavut) who have already invested in 211 and proved its value.
4. Incenting Provincial/Territorial investment – the expanded 211 partnership – the government of Canada, UWCC and the Provincial / Territorial and municipal governments – encourage Provinces and Territories that have not yet invested in 211 to join the partnership to build and sustain a Pan-Canadian 211 system and ensure all Canadian have access to 211.
5. Transformation and efficiency - Federal investment and leadership help transform 211 into an integrated national service delivery system capable of serving Canadians across provincial boundaries, and leveraging new technology and national economies of scale to significantly improve the cost structures of 211 and increase its impact – provinces who have already invested in 211 will benefit from these efficiencies.

What is the enhanced support service for persons in poverty or who are homeless?

Lifting people out of poverty or breaking the cycle of homelessness - transforming lives - requires access, often sustained access, to a complex set of supports. Reliable information is foundational for individuals and families to make choices that promote resilience while increasing the responsiveness of the human services sector.

Currently, callers to 211's telephone help line or visitors to its social channels receive service on an in-out basis. That is, they make a request and receive information and navigational support. No individual records are maintained and while interaction occurs to establish what services best meet the needs, generally follow up to ensure that solutions are pursued is only done when clients appear incapable of acting on a referral.

The proposed enhanced support service would provide additional guidance and support to a sub-set of callers, on the basis of informed consent, by:

- identifying those with a poverty or homelessness risk profile (low income, homeless/eviction risk, food insecure, etc.)
- needs assessments performed by specialists trained to build trust and identify the full spectrum of underlying issues and needs
- an invitation to participate in the enhanced support program, promising ongoing service and full confidentiality
- creation of a client record, recording activities, action plan, and follow up supports
- a 211 specialist assigned as the primary contact and client service coordinator
- out-calls (including emails, text messages) to encourage take-up of identified services, as part of ongoing client coaching and support
- monitoring and reporting to document impacts as part of an assessment package
- creation of a poverty website to provide links to 211's chat and text channels as well as resources such as income, housing, food banks, etc.

This proposal builds on an initiative funded by Ontario's Local Poverty Reduction Fund to develop more comprehensive data for an individual's health, social and community assessment. Participating family doctors in Toronto use a Poverty Screening Tool with willing clients to identify low income risk factors (use of food banks, threatened evictions, disability, etc.) Those risk factors are linked to 211's service taxonomy and in turn those codes are sent back into the EHR (Electronic Health Record) platform for the physician and their patient. This creates a richer set of patient history through which to guide diagnostic procedures. It also provides the patient and doctor with a tailored list of relevant resources or services drawn from the 211 database. With patient consent 211 is then able to provide follow up assistance.

Similarly, 211's experience with a pilot project funded by Greenshields Foundation demonstrates that with enhanced service, individuals are far more likely to connect with the solutions that provide meaningful change. This proposed enhancement will benefit families in poverty by encouraging follow through with community and government services.

Opportunity for federal participation in 211

In the relative absence of federal leadership on housing and social policy issue the past two decades, communities and provinces/territories attempted to fill void. This is equally true for social infrastructure. Through the efforts of early adopters and advocates, 211 now reaches two-thirds of Canadians. However, it remains a patchwork across the nation, and underinvestment limits awareness and impact. Modest support from the federal government would further

strengthen 211's role as an authoritative source of information and service. It would also encourage participation by provinces/territories not already engaged, and help spur additional investment by donors and the private sector.

A solid base of infrastructure to support a pan-Canadian 211 system is now in place. 211 is at the tipping point in its efforts to reach all Canadians, helping them to find the solutions for life's challenges. Now is the time to leverage and build on the infrastructure and existing base of investment to expand the capacity of 211 to positively impact the lives of Canadians.

Moreover, federal investment and participation would fuel and accelerate the transformation of 211 from a network of localized or provincial services into an integrated pan-Canadian service delivery system.

In addition to breaking down the jurisdictional silos that limit the ability of Canadians in one region or province from helping loved ones in another, using 211, transformation into a pan-Canadian system opens a host of new opportunities to leverage 211 for public good. For example, the HIFIS development team at ESDC would like to leverage and integrate 211 into the next iteration of the HIFIS software used in shelters across Canada. Our work to facilitate this is proceeding, but is hampered by incomplete national service coverage and data anomalies that reflect local accountabilities.

What will federal participation achieve?

1. Roll out 211 service to all Canadians - moving from 65% coverage of the population to 100% within 2 years.
2. Transform the 211 service delivery model from a series of provincial services into an integrated national system – leveraging state-of-the-art technology to offer improved service and significant efficiency gains.
3. Establish the basis for a sustainable national funding partnership between the Federal, Provincial / Territorial governments, municipalities and United Way.
4. Introduce an enhanced support service, similar to case management, designed specifically for personal transformation out of the cycle of poverty and/or homelessness

How does 211 differ from other telephone lines?

- 211 connects you to health and social services in your community and across the province
- 311 provides access to the local municipal information, programs, and services (where available)
- 411 provides access to general telephone directory listings
- 511 provides information on road conditions in the Province
- 911 is an emergency number for medical, fire, and police emergencies only

How does 'virtual' case management differ from case management offered by agencies?

The difference is more one of intensity than kind. Case management includes an initial assessment to identify the goals, needs and capacity of the person. The client formulates a plan of action and the case manager can follow up with the client to determine what actions were taken and what outcomes were realized. In addition, the case manager may follow up with agencies to establish what next steps are available.

211's enhanced support is particularly relevant for persons facing short term and/or chronic conditions of poverty. Those with acute needs, i.e. persons with addictions, severe mental health or physical limitations would be referred to agencies providing in-depth services.