

## **Priority Issue: Ohio 2-1-1**

Information and referral programs have operated in most Ohio counties since 1963. In 1978 the Ohio Council of Information & Referral Providers (OCIRP, aka, Ohio AIRS) was formed for the purpose of promoting professionalism in the delivery of Information & Referral services. On July 21, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated the telephone number "2-1-1" as the universal number for access to community resource information. 2-1-1 call centers operate 24 hours each day; 7 days each week; 365 days each year; using both information & referral specialist and tele-interpreters who speak over 170 different languages.

In Ohio, calls average 4-5 minutes in duration with almost 1.2 million calls received during 2009. The majority of calls are for basic human needs (food, housing, shelter, utilities, rent assistance, mortgage assistance, medical care, and clothing).

2-1-1 call centers also experience increased call volume during tax season, providing information and referral assistance about the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), linking callers to area VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites and Ohio Benefit Bank Tax sites.

To date there are 21 fully operated 2-1-1 call centers located throughout Ohio, providing services in 46 of Ohio's 88 counties, providing coverage to over 80% of Ohio's population. In 2010, coverage will be extended to 8 additional counties in part through the opening of 4 new call centers, increasing Ohio 2-1-1's statewide coverage to 87.2% of the population. The 2010 expansion will provide 2-1-1 services to Allen, Auglaize, Clinton, Holmes, Richland, Tuscarawas, Warren, and Wayne counties.

Operating costs for the current 21 call centers exceed \$9 million annually. Call center funding comes from a variety of sources, of which over 50% is from local United Way agencies. Other financial contributors include local government, private foundations, community businesses and partners.

### **Expansion Funding for 2-1-1:**

Ohio United Way received notice of a federal funding award in March 2009. The federal earmark funds will be used to continue expanding statewide 2-1-1 services in Ohio to the 8 counties detailed above. Funding some of the *next steps* identified in the Ohio 2-1-1 Business Plan, the federal funds will expire in February 2011.

### **Ohio United Way supports continued funding for 2-1-1:**

If continuation funding is received from either the state or federal government to facilitate statewide expansion of Ohio 2-1-1, it is estimated the project will require an additional two years to bring all 88 counties onto the Ohio 2-1-1 system. Bi-monthly updates are provided via email to all of the county information and referral providers who are not yet providing 2-1-1 service in an effort to make certain they are both educated and informed of the statewide 2-1-1 process, and ready to make the transition when funds become available.

### **Ohio United Way requests:**

- The Legislature support funding for completing universal 2-1-1 coverage in the state operating budget.
- The Legislature support the use of local TANF dollars toward establishing a statewide 2-1-1 system to assist low-income individuals in need of being linked to important social service programs.
- The Legislature support funding to continue the ongoing operations of the completed Ohio 2-1-1 system.