

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



The City of Chicago, Cook County, and United Way of Metro Chicago are partnering with private philanthropy to stand up and fund a 2-1-1 line, which provides comprehensive information and referral support for any health and social services that individuals may need. 211 Metro Chicago is available in Chicago and suburban Cook County.

Overview

What is 2-1-1?

- A free, easy-to-access helpline that connects residents to the health and social service support they need
- An information and referral resource, helping connect people to **food, housing, utility payment assistance, health care, transportation, childcare, employment, mental health, disaster information and assistance, and more**
- A go-to resource for any health or social service needs, utilizing comprehensive, accurate information and delivering a user-friendly experience
- Residents across Cook County can access 2-1-1 in the following ways, 24/7/365:
 - By dialing 2-1-1 to speak with a live Resource Navigator
 - By texting your zip code to 898211 to text with a live Resource Navigator
 - By visiting 211MetroChicago.org and searching the database of services available on the website
 - By using the webchat feature on the website to chat with a live Resource Navigator

What 2-1-1 is NOT

- A non-emergency request form of direct service, i.e., it does not replace 3-1-1 or other nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government agencies.
- An emergency medical assistance or dispatch line. For all emergencies, individuals should continue to call 9-1-1.
- A tool for surveillance, evaluation of services, or reporting on individuals or agencies
- 9-8-8 is a support line for individuals experiencing a crisis related to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Individuals can call 9-8-8 if they are experiencing a crisis and need immediate phone support.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between 2-1-1, 3-1-1, 9-1-1, and 9-8-8?

- 2-1-1 is an information and referral helpline for health and social services, including food, housing, utility assistance, workforce development resources, youth services, and more.
- In the City of Chicago and other communities where 3-1-1 may be available, 3-1-1 is the number to call if you need a city service related to infrastructure (or other services) as well as non-emergency safety-related requests.
- 9-1-1 should be called in an emergency for things like health emergencies and crimes.
- 9-8-8 is a support line for individuals experiencing a crisis related to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Individuals can call 9-8-8 if they are experiencing a crisis and need immediate phone support.

What happens if someone calls 2-1-1 for a request that is appropriate for 3-1-1, 9-1-1, or 9-8-8?

The 2-1-1 system includes protocols for handling all types of requests (including requests that may involve emergency situations) and referral protocols to other helplines and emergency services when necessary. This is a standard element of 2-1-1 systems across the country and ensures that individuals are connected with the appropriate system. Depending on the situation and preferences of the individual, this may include warm hand-offs directly to other helplines/services.

How does 2-1-1 interact with other helplines? What will happen to other helplines and similar resources that the City and County fund?

There are no immediate plans to phase out any other funded helplines or resources, most of which provide specialized services that the 2-1-1 operators are not trained to provide. 2-1-1 refers and connects residents to these resources as needed. As the 2-1-1 system develops over time, we will continue to evaluate the best way to provide these services.

Will 2-1-1 replace the Coordinated Entry System (CES) for shelters?

2-1-1 does not replace the CES for shelters. At this time, in the City of Chicago, individuals in need of shelter should still call 3-1-1 to initiate their request for shelter

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services. In suburban Cook County, individuals and families experiencing homelessness or who are at-risk of homelessness should contact the Suburban Cook Call Center at 877-426-6515 or visit www.myentrypoint.org. If individuals do call 2-1-1 requesting shelter, they will be connected with the appropriate system for intake.

Does 2-1-1 work with law enforcement?

The purpose of 211 Metro Chicago is to create greater access to social services in our communities and address the needs of individuals contacting 2-1-1, regardless of their identity and/or status. Emergency services (i.e. police, fire, etc.) are brought into 2-1-1 cases only if the person contacting 2-1-1 poses a threat to themselves or others. Data made publicly available regarding 211 Metro Chicago does not include identifying information. Any additional data sharing requires the consent of the resident and/or the service provider on behalf of and with consent of the resident.

Is this service available in languages other than English?

All 2-1-1 services (web chat, text, and phone support with live operators) are available in English and Spanish. Over time, 2-1-1 will build capacity to provide all services (text, web chat, and call-in services) in the most spoken languages in Cook County. 211metrochicago.org has translation available through Google translation services.

How are you updating and maintaining the database? How can I be sure my organization's services are in the database?

United Way of Metro Chicago has hired dedicated staff to operate and manage the 2-1-1 system, including staff members dedicated to updating the database on an ongoing basis. The goal for this system is to have all available free-to-low-cost health and social service resources in the database, regardless of whether these services are funded by government entities. The 2-1-1 system includes strategies to proactively collect information on resources and tap into existing information networks to ensure that the database is up-to-date and includes hyper-local resources. This includes close collaboration with service providers and consistent communication to ensure that 2-1-1 has the most up-to-date information possible. The 2-1-1 team will work to continuously improve and optimize the system. Service providers may email info@211metrochicago.org with updates and information.

My agency has limited capacity that is constantly fluctuating. How can I ensure that we do not get referrals when we are at maximum capacity?

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The software that 2-1-1 is using has a function to ‘turn off’ any service entry in the database if that service is at capacity and can no longer take referrals. Communication with service providers is an integral part of the system and there are dedicated 2-1-1 staff whose sole responsibilities are to update resources and communicate with service providers. A critical part of 2-1-1 is the partnership with service providers to provide feedback that allows for optimal functionality and continuous improvement. Service providers may email info@211metrochicago.org with updates and information.

What happens if a service that someone needs isn’t available?

Although having a central location for health and social service information is a step in the right direction, it does not change the fact that in some cases there aren’t enough resources to match the need. When services are not available, the 2-1-1 system collects this information and shares it with stakeholders to identify service gaps and inform funding strategies.

What kind of services are provided through 2-1-1?

The 2-1-1 contact center staff are Resource Navigators. They are able to help individuals search for and locate the right resources according to their needs. They engage in conversations with individuals that allow them to assess their situation and screen for additional needs. Navigators can provide a range of services when it comes to referring individuals to resources, from assisting with a direct connection to service providers to simply providing them with contact information. The help and support from the Resource Navigators depends on each individual’s preferences.

My organization works in other counties in the Metro Chicago area. Are these covered by 2-1-1?

The following counties bordering Cook County are already covered by 2-1-1 systems: DuPage County, Lake County, Kane County, McHenry County, and Will County. Referral protocols are being developed as part of the 2-1-1 system in the case that individuals in border areas need to be referred to nearby 2-1-1 systems.