



# An Introduction to PA 2-1-1 Southwest

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Similar to 9-1-1, 2-1-1 is a nationally recognized, easy to remember phone number that quickly and effectively connects people in need with resources. In the case of 2-1-1, the connections are to human services and community resources tailored to meet caller's needs.

Currently 2-1-1 is available to over 82% of the nation's population, including 48 states. The United Ways of Westmoreland, Butler, and Allegheny have worked together through implementation planning and soft-launched these services in Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties in July 2011. Service will begin in Indiana, Mercer and Washington Counties by January 2013, and outreach is underway to extend the service to the rest of the designated service area, which includes Beaver, Greene, and Lawrence Counties. Current estimates are that *PA 2-1-1 Southwest* will handle as many as 450,000 requests for assistance per year by the end of 2014.

Based on the experiences of existing 2-1-1 programs, the greatest value has been created through:

- 1) More **EFFECTIVE** connections to services for people in need;
- 2) Greater **EFFICIENCY** as existing services are fully utilized, greater collaboration among helping organizations and reduced duplication of effort; and
- 3) Use of **INNOVATIVE** technology, including a single statewide database (VisionLink's *Community OS*) for the entire state of Pennsylvania, to coordinate the availability of resources across county and state lines, track the met and unmet needs of callers, and allow for quick ramp up to serve hundreds of thousands in times of disaster.

## **1. A More Effective Connection to Services**

*PA 2-1-1 Southwest* improves connections to services for people in need. The phone lines are staffed by trained and certified Resource Navigators who quickly assess caller needs, and make referrals to the appropriate resources. This assessment often leads to referrals that the caller might not have known to ask for. For example, someone calling for help to avoid having their utilities shut off might also be referred to a food pantry or a foreclosure prevention specialist. The early intervention that can occur through a brief conversation with a 2-1-1 Resource Navigator can prevent many more serious and costly problems.

- ***One call quickly and effectively connects people in need with available resources***  
A recent Westmoreland County study found that callers in Southwest PA are making an average of 4-7 calls before they are connected to the right service.
- ***Early intervention can prevent many more serious and costly problems***  
Early intervention can prevent foreclosures, evictions and utility terminations. Prevention is not only a more cost-effective investment, but saves families and children from the significant trauma associated with more serious crises, such as becoming homeless.

## **2. Greater Efficiency for Pennsylvanians**

2-1-1 provides the infrastructure to promote new initiatives and respond quickly when situations arise. As an example, in 2011 the federal government awarded over \$100,000,000 in mortgage foreclosure

prevention funds to Pennsylvania through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA). PHFA contracted with *PA 2-1-1 Southwest* to promote the Emergency Homeowners Loan Program. More than \$13,000,000 in funding was secured to help 498 families in our 11-county region save their homes. Many of the states that received these federal funds failed to expend them and had to return the money unused while families desperately needed the help (roughly half of \$1 Billion was not spent). Pennsylvania was one of only three states able to expend all available dollars to help these low and moderate income families, and was also able to attract additional funds as a result of its demonstrated efficiency.

- ***In many states, 2-1-1 has reduced the need for government to create new 1-800 lines.***  
National studies have shown that single number systems, such as 2-1-1 or 9-1-1, save time and money. Resources saved can be redirected to provide valuable services to people in need. In Connecticut, instead of the state ramping up a new Quit Line (smoking cessation) call center with 5 to 7 people, 2-1-1 was able to staff it with the addition of just one person, saving taxpayers more than \$250,000 per year. The value of avoiding the infrastructure, marketing, staffing and maintenance cost of one new 1-800 number/ hotline is estimated to be about \$135,000. There are currently more than 450 “hotlines” for various health and human services in Pennsylvania.
- ***Support for emergency and disaster services***  
*“Throughout the country, 2-1-1 has helped countless people and plays critical public safety roles. One of its most important has been reducing the number of non-emergency calls to the 9-1-1 center, especially during times of disaster. I’m thrilled that the 2-1-1 system will be activated in Pennsylvania and look forward to working with the United Way to advance the project.”*  
**Glenn Cannon**  
***Director and Homeland Security Advisor for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency***
  - During recent wild fires in Ft. Carson, CO, calls to 911 dropped 65% with the availability of 2-1-1, freeing up 9-1-1 workers to focus on the most dangerous situations.

### **3. Enhanced Services Through Innovative Technology**

*PA 2-1-1 Southwest* will draw on best practices from the corporate world to present system-wide improvements to the way people connect to health and human services through regional partnerships and innovative technology. *PA 2-1-1* will operate via a single statewide database system (VisionLink’s *Community OS*) that will track the availability of ever-changing community resources, and the met and unmet needs of callers, to provide a better understanding of the challenges facing our region. Building this comprehensive multi-county database – the first of its kind in our region – will enhance existing partnerships, build new bridges, and ensure that accurate information about existing resources and services are easily accessible by all.