



# Fact Sheet

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## What is 211?

211 is a three-digit telephone number that connects callers to a full range of non-emergency community, social and government services in Calgary. It is free, confidential and multilingual. The service is available 24 hours a day, and the information & referral specialists who take the calls have access to interpreters of over 150 languages.

TTY access is also available for the hard of hearing. The TTY number is 543-1967. All the caller has to do is dial the number, then place the phone into the cradle of his or her TTY device. Once this has been done, a typed conversation can be held between both parties.

## Why call 211?

It can be difficult and frustrating to access the wide range of resources that exist in Calgary. Sometimes, it's hard to know where to start looking, or even what's available.

When you call 211, a trained information & referral specialist will listen to your situation and link you with the services you need. Talking to a trained specialist makes it easy to find information, discover options, and deal with a problem. Whether you are a senior seeking home care, a victim of violence needing help, a recent immigrant seeking language training, or a single parent facing eviction, 211 provides a single access point to the complete network of human services in Calgary.

## How does 211 work?

Trained information & referral specialists answer calls to 211 Calgary. The specialists, who also have training in crisis intervention, are trained to:

- assess the situation
- help find answers to callers' questions
- provide options and appropriate referrals.

The specialists have access to information on thousands of government and non-government social services and programs in the community (via the Inform Calgary/Inform Alberta database at [www.informalberta.ca](http://www.informalberta.ca)). The database is continually updated to ensure that callers are referred to the best available resources in the community.

### Who benefits from 211?

Calgarians of all ages, backgrounds and needs benefit from 211. Callers benefit because 211 helps them deal with day-to-day needs and cope with distressing situations before they escalate into crisis. Social service professionals and community agencies also benefit because 211 links their services with people who need them.

211 helped more than 30,000 callers in 2005. Here are just a few examples of people who find the help they need by calling 211:

- A son seeking transportation for his aging parents
- A senior seeking home care support
- A laid-off employee wanting to find out about employment insurance
- A teenager attempting to deal with school or social issues
- A family searching for child-care services in the community
- A concerned neighbor trying to help a friend in an abusive situation
- A single parent facing eviction and not knowing where to turn for help
- A mother asking how to enroll her daughter into soccer
- A recent immigrant seeking assistance with language programs and employment resources
- A homeless person seeking a place to get out of the cold
- A senior citizen looking for transportation to appointments
- A family member seeking help for a sibling's mental health issues
- A friend wanting to get information about counseling and rehabilitation for substance abuse to a friend

### Why does 211 work?

211 works for a number of reasons:

- *Single access point.* 211 provides a single access point to the full range of community, social and government services in Calgary, reducing confusion and frustration for the caller.
- *Targeted help.* 211 information & referral specialists are trained to seek out necessary information, assess the situation and find the organization or service that is best suited to provide help.
- *A personal touch.* 211 is about people talking to people. Callers can explain their situation in their own words and get the help they need on their own terms.
- *Confidential.* 211 offers a non-judgmental environment and provides confidential access to information
- *Free.* 211 is accessible at no cost to callers within Calgary (although callers using pay phones will still have to pay 35 cents, and callers using cell phones will still have to pay their usual calling rates).
- *Multilingual.* 211 information & referral specialists have access to interpreters of over 150 languages.

### **How is 211 different from 311, 411 and 911?**

211 – Information referral service for the full network of human services in Calgary – including more than 4000 government and community services

311 – Customer service line for City of Calgary municipal services such as road repairs, garbage removal and building permits

411 – Telephone directory listings

911 – Emergency number for medical, fire and police assistance

### **Who are the 211 partners in Calgary?**

211 Calgary is a joint initiative of United Way of Calgary and Area, the Distress Centre Calgary and The City of Calgary.

The Distress Centre delivers the 211 service and houses the information and referral specialists. The City of Calgary and United Way of Calgary and Area were instrumental in making 211 a reality in Calgary, and provided support and funding to attain its endorsement. They continue to support its operation.

Calgary Health Region, through its work with The City of Calgary in maintaining the Inform Calgary / Inform Alberta database, is also an important partner.

### **Why do United Way of Calgary and Area and The City of Calgary support 211?**

United Way of Calgary and Area helps find solutions to community problems and funds a network of social and health service agencies across the city. 211 complements these investments not only by connecting people to the services they need, but by providing a centralized point of information to increase coordination among services, monitor service usage and track any unmet needs to help address service gaps in the community.

The City of Calgary supports 211 with substantial funding through Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) based on the belief that, through communication, cooperation and coordination of services, the municipality can enhance, strengthen and stabilize family and community life. 211 uses Inform Calgary / Inform Alberta, a database that is an extension of the Community & Social Services Directory developed by The City of Calgary in the 1960s.

### **Is 211 available outside Calgary?**

At this time, 211 is only available within Calgary's city limits. People outside the city limits can access 211 by dialing (403) 266-1605. Please be advised, however, that at present, the information available pertains primarily to Calgary.

**Is 211 available in other Canadian cities?**

In Canada, 211 is operational in Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, the Niagara Region and South Georgian Bay (Simcoe County). In early 2006, Quebec City will become the world's first 211 centre operating primarily in French. By the end of 2006, Canada's first province-wide 211 service is expected to be up and running in Nova Scotia. 211 services are also planned in British Columbia, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Windsor, Kingston, Ottawa and Hamilton.

In the United States, 211 has grown rapidly and is now available in 32 states.

**Can't people just look in the phone book for services?**

No. Telephone books are not organized in a manner that enables people to easily find the services they need. Many organizations provide multiple services and are not listed by each service, nor are the services always reflected in the organization's name. Often, people also require more than one service or agency to transition from dependence to independence.

When people call 211, a trained information & referral specialist works with them to fully understand their problems or needs and recommend the best available local services.

**For more information:**

- Dial 2-1-1
- Visit [www.211calgary.ca](http://www.211calgary.ca)
- Direct media inquiries to: (403) 836-0162

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