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Get Connected. Get Help.™

Most people know dialing 911 connects you to emergency services if you're in need of the police, fire or an ambulance; however, do you know about dialing 211? Dialing 211 is an easy way to contact an information and referral service for help and assistance with basic human needs such as housing, utilities, food, health, clothing, or employment.

In 1997 The United Way of Greater Atlanta was the first organization to make information and referral services accessible using 211 dialing. In 2000, United Way, in partnership with the Alliance for Information and Referral Systems and other non-profit organizations operating helplines, lobbied the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to make 211 a dedicated number for people in need of local information and resources.

The FCC, with its general oversight and regulatory authority over communications and telephone number administration in the United States, officially designated 211 as the uniform abbreviated dialing code for community information and referral services in July 2000. This article provides information about 211 service in Missouri.

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**is also a resource for
volunteers to obtain information
on volunteer centers,
mentorship opportunities, and
locations to donate food,
clothing and other items.**

WHAT TYPES OF ASSISTANCE CAN BE OBTAINED BY DIALING 211?

Dialing 211 connects a caller to a local information and referral service for assistance with basic human needs such as:

- Supplemental Food and Nutrition Programs
- Housing and Utilities
- Clothing and Household Items
- Transportation
- Legal and Public Safety
- Education
- Health, Wellness and Dental
- Employment
- Income Support
- Individual and Family Support
- Mental Health and Addictions
- Environment, Arts and Recreation
- Disaster Services
- Consumer, Information and Municipal Services

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Get Connected. Get Answers.

HOW IS 211 SERVICE PROVIDED IN MISSOURI?

211 service is available from any landline or wireless phone. Kristen Womack, Director of 211 for United Way of Greater Kansas City, states in Missouri 211 calls are routed to United Way call centers in Kansas City, Missouri and St. Louis, Missouri¹. A caller's communications provider will automatically forward a 211 dialed call to one of these call centers based on the caller's location². The free service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. 211 dialing should be available using any landline or wireless communications provider.

WHAT SHOULD CALLERS EXPECT WHEN DIALING 211?

All calls will be answered by a live trained specialist. If a caller is faced with a long hold time then Missouri's United Way provides the option for the caller to hang up and receive a return call. Multi-lingual specialists are available. Callers can remain anonymous but a caller will be asked to provide their zip code to ensure any referrals are relevant to the caller's specific local area.

WHY IS 211 HELPFUL?

According to Regina Greer, Chief Impact Officer for United Way of Greater St. Louis, consumers who are attempting to find information on their own typically have to make multiple attempts to find information. United Way has trained specialists to answer calls and their resources are kept up-to-date to ensure callers, with one call, can quickly obtain reliable and validated information that can be trusted.

HOW MANY CALLS ARE MADE TO 211?

Every day thousands of people call 211 for information and support. Missouri handled 187,666 calls to 211 for the most recent 12 month time period. These numbers typically fluctuate and can be heavily influenced by natural disasters and recessions. The top reasons for calling 211 are to obtain housing assistance and utility payment assistance. 211 statistics showing call volumes, reason for calling, top zip codes for placing calls to 211 and so forth are publically available at www.211counts.org³. The data available on this website is updated on a daily basis.

ARE THERE OTHER WAYS TO ACCESS MISSOURI'S 211 SERVICE?

Yes. The website www.211.org enables an internet user to access 211. A user will need to provide their zip code or community in order to be forwarded to the specific 211 website of either United Way of Greater Kansas City or United Way of Greater St. Louis. These websites will allow a user to conduct their own search for information or alternatively participate in a web chat with a United Way specialist Monday through Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Another way to access Missouri's 211 service is to download the 211 app for Missouri. The app provides easy access to searching United Way's 211 resources for information on over 30,000 services or simply calling 211 for information.

WHAT FUTURE ENHANCEMENTS TO 211 SERVICE ARE BEING PURSUED BY UNITED WAY?

United Way is looking into the feasibility of adding texting capability for 211 service. For example, texting may be a convenient and easy way to provide information to a caller or group.

United Way is also looking into the use of artificial intelligence to predict consumer needs or providing quick answers to commonly asked questions. United Way is looking into expanding 211 partnership arrangements. For instance, United Way currently partners with Lyft to provide free transportation assistance and Airbnb for free temporary housing assistance in times of a disaster; however, additional partnerships for other purposes are being pursued with other companies.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE MISSOURI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION HAVE WITH 211 SERVICE?

The FCC has tasked state commissions with designating the entity to provide 211 service in a given area since only one entity can be the provider for an area. The Missouri Public Service Commission has designated two United Way agencies as Missouri's exclusive 211 providers. Other entities that are not affiliated with United Way could potentially be a 211 provider, although nationwide over 70% of 211 centers are operated or funded by United Way.

WHAT CHANGES, IF ANY, ARE BEING CONSIDERED BY THE FCC FOR ABBREVIATED DIALING ARRANGEMENTS?

The FCC periodically seeks comment about whether a particular N11 dialing arrangement should continue or change. This past year the FCC solicited feedback about developing a 3-digit code for a national suicide prevention hotline.

¹ Both call centers are accredited by the Alliance for Information and Referral Systems.

² United Way may forward calls placed after hours from their St. Louis call center to their Kansas City call center. (United Way's Kansas City call center is also used to handle 211 calls placed after hours for Kansas and Utah.)

³ This searchable dashboard website was developed by Washington University in St. Louis.