

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: NATIONAL THREE DIGIT TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR THE PUBLIC TO
ACCESS INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Council write to the CRTC requesting reservation of a national three digit telephone number for the public to access information and referral services.
2. THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to Jenny Cleathero, United Way of the Lower Mainland.

REPORT

The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee at its meeting held on 2000 May 24, received a delegation from the Burnaby Information and Community Services Society who provided information on a model for community information and referral services by way of using a 3 digit telephone access number such as 211. The service has been seen initially as a pilot program in Toronto and it is hoped that ultimately it will become a nationally recognized service available across Canada. United Way of the Lower Mainland has been asked to coordinate the gathering of local support for this 211 application to the CRTC.

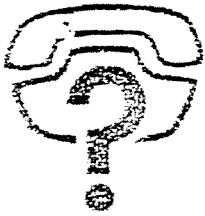
The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee is in support of the application to assign an 211 Code for use across Canada in accessing community, social, health and government information and referral and therefore request Council's support of the application to the CRTC.

Attached for Council's information, is a copy of a 211-fact sheet as well as a draft letter of support to the CRTC.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Johnston
Chair

Councillor N. Harris
Vice Chair



Burnaby Information & Community Services Society

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April 24, 2000

Mr. John Foster, Senior Social Planner
City of Burnaby Planning and Building Department
4949 Canada Way
Burnaby, V5G 1M2

Dear John

In May of this year United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada, InformCanada, United Way of Greater Toronto and Community Information Toronto will make an application to the CRTC requesting that a three digit telephone number, such as 211, be set aside nationally for the public to access information and referral services.

Seen initially as a pilot program in Toronto, it is hoped that ultimately this will become a nationally recognized service available across much of Canada. United Way of the Lower Mainland has therefore been asked to coordinate the gathering of local support for this 211 application to the CRTC.

With this in mind I/we have enclosed a 211-fact sheet on the service as well as a draft letter of support. It is hoped that these letters, which will be attached to the CRTC application, will demonstrate a broad cross-section of national interest and endorsement for the request.

Since the deadline for receipt of these letters in Toronto is May 12, 2000 we are asking for your prompt attention to this request. Letters should be printed on the supporting organization's letterhead and addressed to:

**Ms Ursula Menke, Secretary General,
Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission,
Les Terrasses de la Chaudiere,
Central Building, 1 Promenade du Portage,
Hull, Quebec J8X 4B1.**

The ORIGINAL letter must accompany the CRTC application so please send your original to:

**Jonquil Eyre, 211 Project Manager,
United Way of Greater Toronto,
26 Wellington St. East, 11th floor,
Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1W9**

In order that we at the local level are informed of the extent of the support for this initiative, please fax a copy of your letter of support to Jenny Cleathero at United Way of the Lower Mainland (293-0010). Thank you for your prompt attention.

Kindest regards

Muriel Ferrari, Executive Director



DRAFT LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR 211

This will be attached to the CRTC application and should be printed on the supporting organization's letterhead. The original should be sent to

Jonquil Eyre, 211 Project Manager,
United Way of Greater Toronto,
26 Wellington St. East, 11th floor,
Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1W9

Ms Ursula Menke, Secretary General,
Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission,
Les Terrasses de la Chaudiere,
Central Building, 1 Promenade du Portage,
Hull, Quebec J8X 4B1.

Dear Ms Menke,

This letter is sent in support of the application to assign an N11 Code for use across Canada in accessing community, social, health and government information and referral. This request is being filed by and on behalf of the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada, InformCanada, United Way of Greater Toronto and Community Information Toronto. To maintain broad consistency with the US, this number should be 211.

This public information service will help all people to access the full range of information and referral services more efficiently through a single, highly visible and easily remembered number. A centralized system has the ability to respond to the changing community needs through multicultural and culturally sensitive services and is especially useful for people who face barriers to access such as older adults or people who live with disabilities. As well it supports the underlying value of accurate up to date information delivered by trained professionals about the services available in the local community. Organized data collection on calls and referrals will provide useful information for community service planning and the formulation of public policy.

A 211 service would also benefit the police department (911) by reducing the number of inappropriate non-emergency calls and providing a highly visible alternative for situations that are neither life threatening nor involve crime.

In anticipation of the number being assigned by the CRTC, a process of consultation and education has begun with various partners and stakeholders in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia. With this in mind, we urge timely and careful consideration by the CRTC so that the interest and momentum that exists to deliver the 211 service can be built upon.

Yours sincerely

211 Fact Sheet

WHAT IS UNITED WAY 211?

- A simple, visible and easy to recall telephone number for information about community social services
- A model for community information and referral services that will provide access to community information to help anyone find the help they need using a 3 digit access number
- A call to 211 would provide direct access to trained specialists who assess the situation and provide referrals to the full range of community services designed to address the underlying cause of the problem
- A model that has a national identity but is locally based and delivered and supported by United Way
- A system that would provide services to a broad community on a 24 hour 7 days per week basis.

BACKGROUND:

- The initiative has been under discussion for some time to provide a system in North America for quick and simple access to information and referral.
- The first United Way 211 in operation began in Atlanta in 1997, serving the city and the surrounding county. A similar system is in place for the State of Connecticut.
- Both examples are operated by United Way.
- Several United Ways in the United States currently have a submission before Federal Communication Commission in U.S. for the national use of 211 for information and referral.
- A similar submission is being prepared in Canada by Inform Canada, Community Information Toronto and United Way of Canada-Centraide and United Way of Metropolitan Toronto to be sent to the CRTC for approval in May 2000.
- Extensive consultations with telecommunications carriers, information and referral agencies, United Ways/Centraides and legal and technical experts were carried out in the fall of 1999, in Ontario, to enable an application to the CRTC to be prepared.
- Significant effort has been put into building national awareness and support for the 211 proposal. At this time, 53 organizations consisting of United Ways and information and referral organizations across Canada are collaborating on 211.
- Letters of support are being gathered from local stakeholders to include with the Ontario submission as an indication of national support for the initiative.
- United Way of the Lower Mainland has been asked to be the contact for B.C. and the Lower Mainland for information with other 211 initiatives across the country.
- Support is being developed for the initiative in the Lower Mainland through information packages and consultations with partners and stakeholders

CURRENT SITUATION IN THE LOWER MAINLAND:

- There are currently 10 providers of information and referral services in the Lower Mainland and several others providing specialized services.
- Each provider has a different system for acquiring and storing data.
- Services are provided by both trained paid staff and volunteers.
- There is no consistency in the way that information and referral services are provided in the various Lower Mainland communities
- 7 different community based directories are produced.
- There are several sources of specialized information available in addition to those of a general nature.
- United Way currently provides funding directly to 4 Information and Referral Centres. The remaining services are provided to their local community as part of the operations of Multi- Service organizations.
- Municipalities and the Ministry of Children and Families are the other major sources of funding for general information and referral services.

BENEFITS OF A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM

- Supports the underlying value of accurate, organized and up to date information about the services available in the community.
- Provides simple, quick and convenient access through an easily recognized and remembered number.
- Provides a central access point for information.
- Has the ability to respond to the changing local community needs through multi-lingual and culturally sensitive services.
- Is based on a model that has a national identity but is locally based.
- Reduces the confusion caused by an overwhelming list of assistance numbers.
- Complements existing 911 system.
- Builds and supports increased standards in the field.
- Fosters and supports collaboration among service providers.
- Continues to support localized and specialized services.
- Provides consistent services delivered by skilled and trained staff.
- Would be eligible for accreditation and certification.
- Could be connected to a national system through the use of a common database and software that could be accessed through a variety of means.
- Organized data collection on calls and referrals provides the basis for community and program planning.
- Each referral by a skilled and trained agent using accurate and up to date information enhances the ability of people to be able to help themselves
- Provides an important service that is simple and easy to remember especially for those populations facing barriers accessing information.
- Service delivery standards will be in place.

