



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2007-30
May 1, 2007

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: The Mass 2-1-1 Program: Changing the Way to Find Help

Overview

This informational memo alerts all staff to the new phone communication system that is now operational in Massachusetts called *Mass 2-1-1*.

The Federal Communications Commission established the 2-1-1 phone number as a nationwide number to call for non-emergency information and referral services. This number was created to reduce the number of inappropriate non-emergency calls that are made to 9-1-1. *Mass 2-1-1* is mirrored after the 9-1-1 system, which is used for emergency calls and the 4-1-1 system, which is used for telephone information.

Mass 2-1-1 was created by the Council of Massachusetts United Ways (COMUW) serving every community in the Commonwealth and the Massachusetts Association of Information & Referral Specialists (MAIRS).

Massachusetts has become the 17th state to create and fund a 2-1-1 program. The *Calling for 2-1-1 Act*, which seeks federal funding for the program, is still before Congress.

Mass 2-1-1

Call Center

Mass 2-1-1 is a call center staffed by trained specialists who quickly assess the callers' needs and refer the callers to the help they seek. The call center, located in Boston, is currently staffed by eight full-time trained employees and six part-time trained employees. Its purpose is to provide statewide non-emergency information and referral services.

Currently, the *Mass 2-1-1* call center operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The *Mass 2-1-1* call center:

- is accessible to everyone, including DTA staff, applicants, recipients, etc., by dialing 2-1-1;
- is available with multilingual specialists;
- is available at no cost to the caller; and
- can be reached via landlines or wireless carrier.

Note: The *Mass 2-1-1* TTY number is 617-536-5872.

A teletypewriter (TTY) is an input device for hearing impaired individuals to make and receive phone calls.

What Kind of
Information

Mass 2-1-1 offers information on a broad range of services such as but not limited to: elder care, child care, after-school programs, health resources, food banks, rental assistance, job training programs, financial literacy, and post-disaster services (i.e., who to call for a flooded cellar, is the water safe to drink).

DTA staff is encouraged to share the information about *Mass 2-1-1* with all applicants, recipients, family and friends.

2-1-1 Database

Mass 2-1-1 and EOHHS have worked together on the "resource locator" database for the past five years. This statewide database is used by the *Mass 2-1-1* call center, providing information at a community level and beyond when necessary.

Mass 2-1-1 was introduced on April 3, 2007. If callers experience any problems they should be reported to the United Way of Tri-County at 888-811-3291.

The call data gathered from the call center will track the needs of the communities and assist communities in addressing local issues. The call data provides the information needed by community leaders to make the human services delivery system work better.

Comparing Old Way and the 2-1-1 Way

| Old Way | New 2-1-1 Way |
|--|--|
| <p>Calling multiple state agencies for help, calling neighborhood outreach programs, calling churches for help, calling the housing authority for help, calling health resource hotline for help....</p> | <p>Dial 2-1-1 A single call to 2-1-1 connects the person with a trained information and referral specialist, who directs the person to an agency that can help.</p> |
| <p>Calling hotline after hotline, calling elected officials for help, guessing what resources you think you need, getting transferred again and again letting a small problem turn into a much bigger one</p> | <p>Dial 2-1-1 A single call to 2-1-1 connects the person with a trained information and referral specialist, who directs the person to an agency that can help.</p> |
| <p>Waiting in long lines, multiple hotlines, misinformation and miscommunication, emotional drain, lots of red tape</p> | <p>Dial 2-1-1 A single call that cuts through the red tape.</p> |

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.
