



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Half a million Ontarians found help in 2009 by calling 211

March 23, 2010 - Ottawa - 211, the phone and web database to find help in the social and human service sectors, connected half a million Ontarians to basic human services help in 2009. By calling its three-digit phone number, 2-1-1, 494,586 people found information and were referred to thousands of organizations and programs to help with their most pressing challenges.

The top ten reasons for calling 211 were with questions related to health issues; income and financial assistance; community services; housing help; food and meals; legal and public safety; municipal government services; mental health and addiction services; consumer and commercial questions; and, federal government services. The top ten requests represent 73 per cent of the reasons people called 211. "The reason for calling 211 vary slightly by location but in Ottawa the top 5 reasons for calling 211 are community services, seasonal needs, health, individual and family services and transportation. The top calls in Ottawa, and within Ontario reveal that in 2009 Ontarians needed basic human service help such as health issues, food, shelter, employment help, housing support, mental health and financial help. These are the issues that were inquired about most" says Marie-Andrée Carrière, Executive Director of 211 Ottawa.

"Many people are unaware of the personalized services offered by 211" says Marie-Andrée Carrière, "Our information and referral counselors are specifically trained to not only listen to the callers, but to ask the right probing questions as well. This is important as the counselors often discover that callers have complicated and multiple needs. By asking probing questions it ensures that callers are receiving all of the information they need and that all of their needs are being met."

One of our greatest success stories of 2009 comes from an individual trying to get help for a friend. A woman called on behalf of a colleague who had been laid off from the advertising industry two years ago. The 211 Specialist encouraged her to get her friend to call 211 themselves to explain the situation. The woman did call 211 and explained she was 50 years old and had many years experience. She thought she'd presented well in the interviews she'd had. She had had only occasional small contracts and part-time work since; hence, she did not qualify for employment insurance. She'd had no work for three months and her savings were down to \$100. She was worried about eviction and too embarrassed to tell anyone she had not been able to buy any food. The 211 Specialist explained how to apply for financial assistance but it wouldn't cover her whole rent. She was also told about a local housing help centre to assist in the search for more affordable housing and about several food banks and community services to help with food, counselling and programs designed for experienced workers and women. The caller was grateful for the specialist for directing her to so many services and felt much better about her situation.

"People usually call because someone has told them 211 is an information line but they don't really know the depth of help available or how to qualify for it," said Bill Morris, Executive Director of 211 Ontario. "When we probe their situation to really understand their needs and give them some options, they say 211 is a wonderful service. Most callers are relieved how quickly their call is answered, and that they can speak to a real person, not a machine."

211 is an information and referral service provided by the Community Information Centre of Ottawa. 211 is an easy-to-remember, three-digit, non-emergency telephone number that connects callers to a full range of community, social, government and health service information in Ottawa. Bilingual information and referral specialists answer 211 calls seven days a week. 211 is free, confidential and multilingual (150 languages).

Currently 55 per cent of Ontario's population can call 2-1-1 for information. These areas are Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Bruce, Grey, Simcoe, Muskoka, Haliburton, Peterborough, Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland, Toronto, Halton, Peel, Niagara, Windsor-Essex and of course, Ottawa. In late 2010, 211's phone service will expand to reach over 80 per cent of Ontario's population.

The Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada and the United Way of Canada-Centraide, United Ways of Ontario and several municipalities support 211 in Ontario.

Media Contact Information:

Lindsay Lalonde

211 Communications and Liaison Officer

Phone: 2-1-1 or 613-241-4636

E-mail: lindsay.lalonde@cominfo-ottawa.org