

PA 2-1-1 HELPS RESIDENTS OF 33 COUNTIES

# Connect to Home

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## THE VISION IMPLEMENTED

On January 24, 2018, the Eastern Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (CoC) implemented its vision for a coordinated entry system throughout its thirty-three county service area. More than 6,000 people have contacted Coordinated Entry since that date, over half of whom (3,333) were assessed for literal homelessness and placed on a prioritization list for housing interventions. As a result of using a single “front door” for people in crisis to access housing and services, the system now has better data to prioritize scarce resources and target services where they are needed the most.

The system has also identified that the majority of people experiencing homelessness have a self-reported mental health diagnosis. Unfortunately, the majority of the people waiting for housing supports cannot be enrolled into a supportive housing program because of the affordable housing crisis throughout the region.

Housing and homelessness system partners in these counties, which encompass much of the north central and south central, as well as northeastern part of Pennsylvania, joined together to develop a coordinated entry system in response to HUD funding requirements. The continuum adopted common assessment tools across the thirty-three counties. And then the governing board looked for a partner which would serve as the phone entry point for all individuals who are homeless or immediately at risk of being homeless.

An elderly woman experiencing homelessness had been living in her car for two years before the development of Coordinated Entry.

When Coordinated Entry started, a Cumberland County

Housing Authority staff member reached out to the woman and encouraged her to call 211 to complete the intake process to be placed on a list for subsidized housing based on her vulnerability. Within a matter of days, a case manager used this list, called the Community Queue, to enroll the woman into a program called Rapid Re-Housing. **Sixty days later, the woman moved into her own apartment in Carlisle and is no longer homeless.**



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## ACCESS

The Eastern Region continuum wanted one phone access point where clients would receive assessments during normal business hours. But they also sought a partner who could provide 24 hour per day access to emergency and triage services for people experiencing homelessness in the 33 county region. PA 2-1-1 emerged as the partner of choice from a competitive RFP process, and the CoC is beginning its second year of a successful partnership with PA 2-1-1.

2-1-1 offers an easy to remember, toll-free call option for people experiencing a housing crisis, with a live voice response 24 hours per day, seven days a week. 2-1-1 also offers a free texting option for people in housing crisis, which is of benefit to people who may be out of minutes on their phone but can text with a 2-1-1 resource navigator using a free public Wi-Fi connection. In addition to dialing 2-1-1, clients have the option to walk-in to local access sites during business hours in order to be assessed for services.

## PA 2-1-1-STAFF

PA 2-1-1 has a team of housing specialists who are trained in Coordinated Entry assessments. They all use a common, statewide database and housing intake tools. The 2-1-1 housing specialists are located at three PA 2-1-1 centers and answer calls from all 33 counties in the Eastern Continuum. Staff at the 2-1-1 centers work with the regional queue managers and attend local housing meetings to stay abreast of housing needs and to work collectively to make the system as responsive as possible. When an individual calls 2-1-1 during Coordinated Entry

intake hours (9-4, weekdays), the call is answered by a housing specialist in one of the three regions. Using a cloud-based phone system, 2-1-1 is able to route the call to the first available housing specialist to reduce waiting time.

The Coordinated Entry work that 2-1-1 is doing dovetails with the work that 2-1-1 has always done, every day to answer calls and texts from individuals and families who need help with basic needs, whether that be finding shelter, or paying rent or a utility bill. The issues related to housing have long been a major focus of the work done by 2-1-1 staff: 75 percent of the calls to 2-1-1 are related to basic needs.

“Now we are able to promptly assess the immediate housing needs of the caller and to place them on the Community Queue so that the housing agencies can work with them to resolve their housing needs. It saves time for the person who needs immediate help when they are literally homeless and do not know where to turn. Any time we can make the process easier for people we increase the likelihood that they will stay engaged and get the help that they need,” says Anne Fogoros, PA 2-1-1 Statewide Operations Director.

## ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITIZATION

For HUD-funded services, the days of agency-specific assessments and individual agency waiting lists are gone. Now, whether the individual presents by phone or text to 2-1-1, or in person at one of 17 access sites located across the geographic territory of the Eastern Continuum, he or she will be assessed using the same tools. The client first receives a pre-screen to determine if they are eligible



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# 211

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for HUD-funded services, and if they are, they receive a second in-depth assessment called the VI-SPDAT. The VI-SPDAT measures vulnerability and determines types of services that will meet the needs of the client.

Since every client is scored using the same tool, individuals can be placed on the community queue and prioritized for placement in service relative to the urgency of their circumstances. Five dedicated regional coordinated entry managers staffed by agencies throughout the CoC are instrumental in connecting people to housing agencies which can serve them when they have available capacity. These regional coordinated entry managers also help to assure that coordinated entry policies are applied consistently, and they help to outreach and build relationships necessary for the Coordinated Entry System of Eastern PA.

## REFERRALS

In the 33 county continuum, as is the case across Pennsylvania, there are currently not enough housing services to meet the need that exists, but coordinated entry systems are an effort to connect people to the right solutions as quickly and effectively as possible. But as a result of coordinated entry and the 2-1-1 partnership, more data is available to drive decisions, planning, resource allocation and performance evaluation. The community knows all people experiencing homelessness by name. And 2-1-1 can refer people to homeless prevention services

or emergency shelter or other emergency services as they are available.

Every day, 2-1-1 collects real-time data that measures the needs of the community, including those which cannot be met through existing community resources. Through the first year of the Connect To Home project, the continuum's various partners rapidly identified that the region needs more diversion services for individuals experiencing a housing crisis. As a result, United Way of PA has stepped up to partner with the Continuum on a diversion project which will assist households and individuals seeking to avoid homelessness by maintaining their current housing situation or being diverted to an alternative option that is not an emergency shelter.

## THE RIGHT SPACE FOR 2-1-1

Jeffrey E. Rich, President of the Eastern PA Continuum of Care, says, "Partnering with the United Way of PA and PA 2-1-1 enables the Eastern PA Continuum of Care to provide an effective, efficient, and consistent link to services throughout a very large and diverse geographic region. PA 2-1-1 provides the triage necessary to connect those in housing crisis to the correct service providers in their area. In turn, this allows those agencies to focus on delivery of program services instead of intake and initial assessment; saving valuable program dollars and allowing service providers to help a greater number of clients."

PA 2-1-1 and United Way believe that the future of 2-1-1 includes partnering with state and county government to offer residents of our communities a better way to access help whenever they need it. United Way of PA is committed to increasing the quality and consistency of the 2-1-1 service on a statewide basis. Ninety-seven percent of PA residents can now pick up the phone to call 2-1-1 and find out what local resources are available in their area.

The vision for 2-1-1 has always been as the place to turn for help with any health or human services need regardless of the hour of the day. 2-1-1 is working to build omnichannel access in order to meet customers where they are. 2-1-1 is there for the single working mom who prefers to privately text for help with her

utilities from her cubicle at work (where a phone conversation would be overheard), and to receive her referrals by text to follow up at her own convenience. A Millennial or a Gen Xer who is accustomed to self-serve information on demand through powerful smart phones is our customer who wants to easily search a public resource database from his or her phone. A stressed out baby boomer may prefer to call and speak to someone when trying to find resources to support their aging parent in their home.

United Way is looking for more partners who want to leverage the 24/7/365 power of 2-1-1 across all communication channels while increasing the effectiveness of public investments in human services. 📱

**Connect To Home: Coordinated Entry System of Eastern PA (CES)** coordinates and manages access, assessment, prioritization and referral to housing and services for any person(s) experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness in the following counties: Adams, Bedford, Blair, Bradford, Cambria, Carbon, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lebanon, Lehigh, Lycoming, Mifflin, Monroe, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Perry, Pike, Schuylkill, Somerset, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne and Wyoming.

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