

PRESS RELEASE

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United Way Data Release

Calls to 2-1-1 for Help with Housing, Food, and Health Information Rose in 2019

Providence, R.I. (February 11, 2020) New data released today by United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) shows requests to its 2-1-1 call center for help with primary basic needs increased in 2019 compared to the previous year. The highest needs among Rhode Islanders who turned to 2-1-1 were housing, food, and health information.

“This report echoes what we heard during our recent community conversations with hundreds of Rhode Islanders; people are struggling with their basic needs,” said Cortney Nicolato, President and CEO, UWRI. “In particular, the jumps we’re seeing around housing are especially alarming – we have a housing crisis in our state that impacts nearly every aspect of our neighbors’ lives, our economy, and overall well-being.”

UWRI used February 11 to bring attention to 2-1-1 locally, the need to create the systems that give all Rhode Islanders the opportunity to succeed, and to release the call center’s latest report. Across the country, Feb. 11 is recognized at *National 2-1-1 Day*. UWRI brought the program to Rhode Island in 2007.

In 2019, Rhode Island 2-1-1 received a total of 170,860 calls – an average of 468 per day – with trained specialists uncovering multiple needs among each individual or family during calls. Specialists logged 87,187 requests related to housing, up 17 percent over last year. Needs of callers included seeking help and information on shelters, foreclosure prevention, rental assistance, accessing affordable housing, and more. Comparatively, 2-1-1 also made some 7,258 more referrals for help with food over 2018.

With regard to requests for referrals and information related to health care and health services, 2-1-1 saw its largest increase, jumping from 54,957 in 2018 to 94,813 last year. While a portion of the increase is attributed to 2-1-1 assisting a growing number of Rhode Islanders enroll in their annual Medicare plans, specialists also saw a rise in calls for help with prescriptions, elder care, and mental health supports.

Added Nicolato, “We can look at our data and the upward movement of calls for help with basic needs and say with confidence, that without significant change, the data points will only rise.”

Since its local inception, 2-1-1 has handled nearly 2 million calls, effectively changing the way Rhode Islanders access help by offering a direct human connection, 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, and in a wide range of languages. Seen as a national model, Rhode Island’s 2-1-1 has evolved to offer walk-in services, text and online chat capabilities, and became the first in the country to provide mobile, on-location services through a 2-1-1 outreach van. The service also plays an important, statewide role during storms and times of emergency through a partnership established with Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency.

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United Way of Rhode Island is changing lives and strengthening our communities by investing in proven programs that work over the short-term, and are scalable over the long-term. For more information, visit www.LIVEUNITEDri.org.