

# PRESS RELEASE

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United Way of Rhode Island

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## **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island Commit \$1.5 Million to Expand Impact of 211, Improve Social Determinants of Health**

*Integration of new platform among the ways 211 is connecting health and social care providers to improve overall health and wellbeing of Rhode Islanders in need*

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND (Dec. 13, 2022) — As part of an effort to improve the health of all Rhode Islanders, United Way of Rhode Island has upgraded the capabilities of its 211 service with a focus on linking health and social care providers around individuals with complex needs. In support of this work to expand the statewide role and impact of 211, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) has committed \$1.5 million in funding.

“While access to medical services is vital to the wellbeing of our neighbors, we know that an overwhelming majority of a person’s overall health is driven by social, economic, and environmental factors,” said Larry Warner, Dr.P.H., MPH, chief impact and equity officer for United Way. “Just as much as quality healthcare, we need to ensure Rhode Islanders have safe and affordable housing, nutritious food, and that we’re able to measure the change these have on peoples’ lives. We are beyond thankful to BCBSRI for not only sharing this vision, but also for their generous support of the work to get there.”

A major enhancement to 211 is the addition of a specialized technology platform called Unite Us that interconnects a network of health and social care providers. Now, when someone calls 211 for help or lets a healthcare provider know they are in need of food, housing, or other assistance, their information is entered into the platform and an electronic referral is made for the services they need. The referrals are tracked within the system and 211 staff ensure that individuals’ needs are being responded to in a timely fashion.

Currently, when healthcare organizations refer patients to community-based organizations to address social care needs, there is rarely a mechanism for the healthcare organization to know the outcome of the referral. This prevents effective follow-up and outcome measurement.

With social factors being such a significant driver of a person’s overall health, knowing the outcome of these referrals is foundational to providers’ ability to effectively meet their patients’ unique needs and manage whole-person health.

Powered by the Unite Us platform and 211 staff, health providers across the network can securely refer and track every person’s total health journey with their community partners. At the same time, it allows providers to report on all tangible outcomes across a range of services in a centralized, cohesive, and collaborative ecosystem. 211 plays the role of the coordination center in the network, ensuring clients are connected to the best program to address their needs, providers are closing the loop on clients’ needs, and that all providers are meeting network standards and performance measures.

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“Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Rhode Islanders by leading access to high-quality, affordable, and equitable care. Directly addressing areas outside of the traditional health system that have a significant impact on health — like access to safe and affordable housing, nutritious food, and other basic needs — enables us to better address health inequities within our state,” said Michele Lederberg, BCBSRI executive vice president, chief administrative officer and chief legal officer, who leads the company’s health equity initiatives. “We’re honored to partner with United Way of Rhode Island to help them take 211 to the next level.”

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United Way of Rhode Island is uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. A member of the world’s largest nonprofit network, we bring together individuals, businesses, nonprofits, community leaders, and government to tackle the root causes of inequity and achieve specific, measurable goals. Our programs include 211, the statewide front door connecting Rhode Islanders with social services, resources, and vital programs. Both directly and through grants to nonprofits, we are investing to build economic opportunity, advance childhood learning, expand philanthropy, and drive policy and participation. To learn more, visit [unitedwayri.org](https://unitedwayri.org), or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Twitter](#).