

WHAT IS 2-1-1?

Will It Survive In Santa Barbara County?

SUMMARY

In spite of funding and management obstacles, the 2-1-1 Helpline Program has proven itself to be a vital community resource for Santa Barbara County. 2-1-1 is an easy telephone number to remember that connects people with important services and volunteer opportunities.

The future of the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline is now in question. To continue operating, the program requires a lead organization to assume the responsibilities of administration, management, and development of additional funding. The program database is not current and must be updated. The County of Santa Barbara, several non-profit organizations, and two of eight cities in the county have contributed money to the 2-1-1 program to help keep it running. The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors will consider a proposal to provide one-time funding to complete the database update. The 2013-14 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the funding to update this critical database.

BACKGROUND

The 2-1-1 Program originated in Atlanta, Georgia in 1997 and it has become a significant referral program in communities across the United States and Canada. In 2012, 2-1-1 services in the United States answered more than 15.8 million calls. Currently, ninety-two percent of California's population has access to 2-1-1.¹

Every hour of every day, hundreds of people need essential human services - they are looking for training, employment, food pantries, help for an aging parent, addiction prevention programs for their teenage children, affordable housing options, support groups and ways of becoming part of their community. 2-1-1 allows people to give help and to get help.²

From early 2005 until March 31, 2013 the 2-1-1 Helpline Program in Santa Barbara County was managed by the Family Service Agency (FSA) of Santa Barbara. According to FSA statistics in 2011, there were 15,000 telephone calls to 2-1-1 and 45,000 hits to the 2-1-1 website.

Due to a lack of funding, FSA ceased the administration of 2-1-1 on March 31, 2013. The Santa Barbara County Executive Office then assumed management of the program on an interim basis.

¹ <http://www.211us.org/> (last visited February 6, 2014)

² Ibid

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Santa Barbara County's 2-1-1 calls have been continuously handled, under a contract, by a call center operated by Interface Children and Family Services (Interface), a non-profit organization located in Ventura County. Interface administers and operates the 2-1-1 for Ventura County and contracts with several counties throughout California to provide the 2-1-1 call center service. Interface is willing to continue to operate the call center as a contractor of services; however, they will not take on the full operation for Santa Barbara County.

One of the most significant problems facing the Santa Barbara County program is that the database, which needs to provide current resources for callers, is several years out-of-date.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury obtained information through interviews, written and digital communications with the FSA, Interface, the Santa Barbara County Executive Office, Board of Supervisors staff, and the internet.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The 2-1-1 Helpline Program serves the residents of Santa Barbara County by providing referrals to necessary human services and resources. The majority of calls to 2-1-1 from July 2012 to February 2013 were from the cities of Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, Lompoc, and Goleta. Services requested were primarily for food, shelter, and mental health. Additional calls concerned income support, family life, health care, and criminal justice needs.

The 2-1-1 program must have a local organization to assume administration and management in order to be effective. The program needs not only a local lead agency, but also a full-time program director to manage the database, promote program awareness through public outreach, and conduct fund raising. The total budget for operating the service is \$189,714 for the current fiscal year.³

Funds for the 2-1-1 Helpline Program are provided by Santa Barbara County Human Services, City of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara County Alcohol and Drug Program, Info Line of San Diego County, United Way of Santa Barbara, First 5 of Santa Barbara County, a CalFresh grant, and the City of Lompoc.

One of the most significant problems facing the Santa Barbara County program is the out-of-date database. On March 4, 2014, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to consider one-time additional funding of \$30,000 for the database upgrade in order to maintain the viability of this critical program.

The 2-1-1 Helpline Program also works with the Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during emergencies and disasters. The EOC coordinates with 2-1-1 to provide

³ Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors agenda item 13-00883 December 3, 2013
<https://santabarbara.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=2898807&GUID=82C4BC09-BAEF-4730-BB65-34DD3FED3016> (last visited February 6, 2014)

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information to the public regarding exit routes, shelter areas, and other useful information. For example, the EOC and 2-1-1 worked together during the Tea Fire and the Jesusita Fire to assist in providing information to the public.

CONCLUSION

Maintaining the 2-1-1 Helpline Program will preserve a valuable resource for all residents of Santa Barbara County. The beneficiaries of the services from the 2-1-1 Helpline Program are the residents of every city and every area of the county. The 2013-14 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury urges the six cities in the county that do not contribute to join with the county, and the Cities of Santa Barbara and Lompoc in contributing financially to make the 2-1-1 program work. Furthermore, the Grand Jury encourages the Board of Supervisors to fund the database update so that the citizens of Santa Barbara County will not be deprived of this vital resource.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

The Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline is a program that provides a valuable service to the residents of the county.

Finding 2

The Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline Program database of community resources is out-of-date and in critical need of updating.

Finding 3

There is insufficient funding to continue operating the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline Program.

Finding 4

The cities of Santa Maria, Solvang, Buellton, Goleta, Carpinteria, and Guadalupe do not contribute financially to the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline Program.

Finding 5

The County of Santa Barbara is only temporarily administering the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Program.

Recommendation 1

That the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors allocate the requested funds to update the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline Program resource database.

Recommendation 2

That the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors identifies a local agency or organization qualified to assume the administrative and managerial responsibilities of the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline Program.

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Recommendation 3

That the county, the cities, and other entities benefitting from the services provided by the Santa Barbara County 2-1-1 Helpline Program contribute funding in proportionate amounts as proposed by county staff in its December 2013 recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Recommendation 4

That the County of Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors annually review the performance of the 2-1-1 Helpline Program to justify its continued funding.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933 and 933.05, the Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated findings and recommendations within the specified statutory time limit:

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors – 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3, and 5

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4

City of Santa Maria – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

City of Solvang – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

City of Buellton – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

City of Goleta – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

City of Carpinteria - 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

City of Santa Barbara – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

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City of Lompoc – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3

City of Guadalupe – 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, and 4

Recommendation 3