
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

**Report on 211 Services and Funding
In Accordance with Miscellaneous Fiscal Year 2024 One-Time Appropriation**

Submitted to: Joint Fiscal Committee

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Overview

This report is being submitted in accordance with the Miscellaneous Fiscal Year 2024 One-Time Appropriation requirement for the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to provide an update on the service provided by Vermont 211 and the funding to support those services.

Vermont 211 is a free, confidential information and referral program of the United Ways of Vermont, helping to connect Vermonters with a wide range of community, health, and human services resources.

The contract between the DCF Economic Services Division and Vermont 211 has two main components, Information and Referral Services and After-Hours Housing. For Information and Referral services, 211 maintains a resource database that can be accessed through the 211 website or by calling 211 between 8am and 5pm, Monday through Friday. Support for After-Hours housing is provided by calling the 211-call center between 5pm and 11pm, 7-days a week (8am to 5pm weekends and holidays).

Information and Referral Services

Vermont 211 maintains a comprehensive database of health and human service resources available across the state. Information is available on a wide variety of topics, including, but not limited to: housing/shelter, utility assistance, food resources, transportation, disability services, employment, legal services, human trafficking, dental services, doctors/health care, child/elder care, support groups, mental health and substance abuse resources, money management, tax assistance, and environmental safety. 211 can also provide critical public information during emergencies such as flooding or other natural disasters.

The types and volume of calls made to 211 vary by the time of year. For example, calls on tax support are higher in March and April. Through an analysis of the number and types of calls placed to 211 during October 2022, December 2022 and April 2023, it was identified that, on average, 49.8% of calls were related to DCF programs (including emergency housing calls), 19.6% were related to an Agency of Human Services (non-DCF) program and 30.6% were related to non-AHS programs.

After Hours Housing

The Economic Services Division (ESD) contracts with Vermont 211 to answer housing calls during evenings, weekends, and holidays. 211 will determine eligibility for the emergency housing program and locate a hotel room for unhoused individuals who contact them. Housing is approved on a short-term basis, typically for one night, until the client can contact ESD for a more in-depth eligibility screening.

Prior to July 1, 2023, 211 offered 24/7 support for emergency housing, however they did not always have on-duty staff to answer the phone; someone calling would have to leave a message and wait for a return call particularly in the early morning hours. At those times, calls were transferred to the New England Call Center. On July 1, 2023, the 211 contract was updated to end operational hours at 11pm. A main reason for this decision was the cost of the contract price doubling over the course of the pandemic. While trying to stay within the allocated budget, ESD examined the actual need for evening

hours for housing calls and determined that because hotels and homeless shelters will not accept a new placement after 11pm, contracting with 211 to cover hours when there are no shelter resources to refer Vermonters to was not useful to individuals in need, nor was it fiscally responsible.

Emergency Response

Recent statewide emergencies including the pandemic and recent flooding event have made the need for a scalable emergency response, communication, and information system clear. As the State continues to identify the scope of that need, the state's Disaster Recovery Office is coordinating with Vermont Emergency Management on a contingency contracting arrangement with 211 that would be separate from DCF's contract.

Next Steps

VT 211 is a well-known resource for Vermonters and is an important and valued partner to the State. The network supports many programs, services, and referrals directly and indirectly and is the State's emergency response conduit for information. The State appreciates that VT 211's expenses have increased. While 211's scope of work for referrals to state government services is often outside of DCF's scope of programs (as noted above, DCF calls—including housing/shelter calls—make up 49.6% of all 211 calls), these non-emergency response needs were included in DCF's recent analysis of 211's ongoing funding requirements and will be considered as the basis for future contracts. To ensure that 211 is funded at the level it needs to run its business solvently, it will be important that any new, non-emergency response work taken on by 211 on behalf of other agencies or partners is communicated to DCF both at the time the work is requested by others and annually during the normal course of its contract renewal process.