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Immediate release

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2-1-1 Day is on 2/11: Calls reveal greatest need Volunteers fan out across R.I. to spread the word to 'Dial 2-1-1' for health, human and social service needs

Providence, RI – United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) announced today that calls to *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island*, an around-the-clock health and human services helpline staffed by information-referral professionals, totaled 122,218 in 2009. This is an increase of 20,113 from 2008.

2-1-1 continues to be one of the strongest barometers of need by individuals, families and the community in Rhode Island. The majority of the 2009 calls were requests for information on financial assistance to help pay rent or utilities (53,887), food assistance and information (34,429), housing (21,444), which includes foreclosure prevention advice, and homeless shelters (13,131).

“These numbers are significant and reveal the most need right now in our community -- financial assistance to pay every day bills; the housing crisis; food; and finding shelter,” said Anthony Maione, CEO and president of United Way of RI. “It’s important on National *2-1-1* Day to spread the word about the benefits of dialing *2-1-1* and getting connected to a specialist who offers free, confidential and local health and social services assistance.”

This year, the most number of individuals dialing *2-1-1* were in Providence (55,012). Calls originating from other communities were: Pawtucket (9,464), Warwick (7,215), West Warwick (3,046) Cranston (6,753), Woonsocket (3,702), Newport (3,667, Central Falls (4,781), and East Providence (2,990).

“Just as with 9-1-1 and 4-1-1, *2-1-1* is an easy-to-remember telephone number for people to call when they are looking for solutions for health and social services problems,” said Cristina

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Amedeo, director of *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island*. “Now, more than ever, it is vitally important that Rhode Islanders realize there is help out there. And 2-1-1 can be their guide.”

To usher in National 211 Day, volunteers and staff members from UWRI and *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island* will be at high-traffic locations on Thursday, Feb. 11, barnstorming the state informing Rhode Islanders about the vital service 2-1-1.

The following are real-life examples of the kind of calls received by 2-1-1 information referral specialists. (The service is free and local, and all calls are confidential.)

Caller No. 1

- A carpenter, 50, had exhausted his unemployment benefits. He said, he had worked for more than 30 years, and he had never taken a penny from the government. His unemployment officer suggested he dial 2-1-1. He called and an information referral specialist re-assured him that no one would be judging him. The specialist gave him the number of food pantries in his area. The specialist pointed out that if he could save money on food that would free up funds to pay other bills. About a month later, he dialed 2-1-1 again. This time it was to thank 2-1-1 and tell the specialist that he had returned to work.

Caller No. 2

- A family of four, with two children, were displaced from their house because of a fire. The Red Cross had paid for them to stay at a hotel, and now they only had one day left. The father called 2-1-1, and the specialist gave him a list of available apartments. Three days later, the family called back to thank 2-1-1 and report that they found an apartment from 2-1-1's list.

Caller No. 3

- Another family of four had been without electricity because of an electrical fire on Christmas Day. At 11 a.m., the mother called 2-1-1 (having heard about it at a convenience store) about not having electricity and having nowhere to go. She owned her own home and had insurance on the home, but could not get in touch with the insurance company. National Grid had told her, they could not restore the electricity until after the holiday. She called 2-1-1, and 2-1-1 connected her with the state insurance commissioner, her insurance company's main number and National Grid. By 4:30 p.m., the electricity and hot water had been turned on.

Caller No. 4



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- A teenager, 15, had been sleeping in her van with her family for two days. Her parents lost their jobs; their house had been foreclosed; and they were embarrassed to ask their extended family for help. The teenager told her teacher, who contacted 2-1-1. A 2-1-1 specialist helped find them shelter. One week later, with the assistance of 2-1-1, the family was living in an apartment in the teenager's school district.

2-1-1 information referral specialists and www.211ri.org have access to more than 4,000 R.I. agencies and organizations. 2-1-1 staff members meet regularly with agencies and organizations to learn more about how they can help Rhode Islanders who need assistance.

Dialing 2-1-1 or logging onto www.211ri.org is the fastest and easiest way to get health and human services information 24/7/365 in Rhode Island.

About United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island

On June 1, 2007, *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island* was launched as a telephone service to work similarly to 9-1-1 and 4-1-1. By dialing 2-1-1, you receive a 24/7/365 health and human services helpline staffed by information referral and state-health and insurance counseling specialists. The service is free, confidential and local, and in 175 languages and dialects. *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island* is headquartered at United Way of Rhode Island. It is funded by United Way of Rhode Island with support from Hasbro's Children Fund, State of Rhode Island and administered by Family Service of R.I. For more information, visit www.211ri.org.

About United Way of Rhode Island

United Way of Rhode Island has been working to improve the quality of life in Rhode Island communities for over 80 years. UWRI's mission is to mobilize the caring power of the community to improve the lives of people in need and address the issues Rhode Islanders care most about. United Way's goal is to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve the opportunity to have a better life, as when any one of us succeeds, we all succeed. At United Way, we refer to this as advancing the common good. For more information, visit www.LIVEUNITEDri.org.

