



United Way of Anchorage

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Contact: Jason Grenn
Senior Director, Communications and Marketing
907-263-3823 o, 907-301-3046 c

On 2-11, we mark the work of Alaska 2-1-1

With access to hundreds of partners, we've answered thousands of calls for help in the pandemic

Anchorage AK – Every year on Feb. 11, we mark the service of Alaska 2-1-1, United Way's unmatched, statewide information and referral service.

Never more than this Feb. 11, because Alaska 2-1-1's vital role has never been clearer than over the past year of pandemic.

When the enormity of the threat of COVID-19 forced us to “hunker down” in March 2020, both the Municipality of Anchorage and the State of Alaska commissioned Alaska 2-1-1 as the official go-to source for information and referrals for help dealing with both the virus and the brutal economic shutdown that came with it. Overnight, call volume went off the charts.

In 2019, Alaska 2-1-1 logged 19,333 calls for help. In 2020, that number was 70,436 – a nearly 300 percent increase.

Alaska 2-1-1 responded by becoming the portal to access millions of dollars in rent, mortgage and utility relief; help with childcare assistance, the new round of open enrollment for the Affordable Care Act that begins Feb. 15 and access to Free Tax Prep, where volunteers help low- and moderate-income Anchorage families gain millions in tax credits and refunds. Alaska 2-1-1 also wrangled the tsunami of applicants for mortgage and rental assistance into a manageable wave, and provided a continuous, real time measure of community needs.

Further, a 2-1-1 texting feature to connect families to Denali KidCare for health insurance that began a few months before the pandemic has been a gift of partnership and timing. Funded by the Alaska Children's Trust, the texting capability has been a swift link for families who have lost employer-provided health coverage, or had no coverage at all, to provide health care for children and pregnant moms.

The collaboration with Alaska Children's Trust is a prime example of the potential of extending Alaska 2-1-1's reach to benefit more Alaskans with effective and efficient paths to the help and services they need. And the range of Alaska 2-1-1's referral partners -- who number about 1,000 -- gives call specialists a natural role in connecting social service to health care providers to get people all of the help they need for education, health and financial stability. That full range is the goal of pending federal legislation sponsored by Alaska Sen. Dan Sullivan and Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy that would provide grants for private-public partnerships like Alaska 2-1-1.

"Our goal is to bring clarity to a situation," said Sue Brogan, United Way of Anchorage chief operating officer and 2-1-1 director. 2-1-1 provides a comprehensive search engine with a human touch – listening, leading to clarity and from there to solutions.

"United Way of Anchorage operates 2-1-1," Brogan said. "But 2-1-1 really belongs to Alaskans. It's there for you to use."

About United Way of Anchorage

United Way of Anchorage is a community of donors, advocates, volunteers, and partners working together to improve the health, education, and financial stability of every person in our community. LIVE UNITED.

www.liveunitedanc.org