

Kevin T. Middleton, President
P.O. Box 4653
Louisville, Kentucky 40204
Direct: 502-292-5342 Mobile: 502-297-2965
kevin.middleton@uwky.org



VIA E-MAIL AND U.S. MAIL

December 22, 2024

Linda C. Bridwell
Executive Director
Kentucky Public Service Commission
P.O. Box 615
211 Sower Boulevard
Frankfort, KY 40602-0615

RECEIVED
DEC 23 2024
PUBLIC SERVICE
COMMISSION

RE: Annual Status Report regarding United Way 211 Implementation

Dear Ms. Bridwell:

Pursuant to the Administrative Case No. 343 dated August 17, 2004 designating United Way of Kentucky as lead agency for implementation of the 211 dialing code in Kentucky, enclosed please find our annual report on the progress of the United Way 211 initiative.

We appreciate the ongoing support for statewide 211 by the Commission.

If you have any questions about the report or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Middleton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kevin Middleton
President and 211 State Director
United Way of Kentucky

KENTUCKY 211

Status Report to the

Kentucky Public Service Commission

from

United Way of Kentucky

211 Statewide Implementation
Administrative Case No. 343

December 23, 2024

Introduction

In July 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserved the abbreviated 211 dialing code nationwide for accessing health and human service information and referral (I/R) services.

In 2001, following informal meetings convened by the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) to discuss the assignment of 211 within the Commonwealth, United Way of Kentucky (UWKY) submitted a petition to the PSC requesting the assignment of the 211 dialing code to UWKY and its affiliated organizations. UWKY proposed serving as the lead agency for the statewide implementation of 211 in Kentucky. The PSC granted UWKY provisional authority over the 211 dialing code for a three-year period to develop a pilot program and required UWKY to report on its progress at the end of that period.

In 2004, UWKY submitted its progress report to the PSC, which included a comprehensive business plan for Kentucky 211.

On August 17, 2004, the Kentucky Public Service Commission issued an order designating UWKY as the permanent lead agency for the statewide implementation of 211 in Kentucky. The Commission also mandated that UWKY provide annual progress reports on the 211 initiative.

Kentucky's 211 Service Delivery in 2023

United Way of Kentucky (UWKY) is dedicated to the continuous development, maintenance, and delivery of high-quality, standards-driven, statewide 211 services. By late 2020, the existing Kentucky 211 contact centers in Lexington, Louisville, and Northern Kentucky had expanded to cover additional regions and have since been providing information and referral services to residents across all 120 counties in the Commonwealth.

Background:

An original plan was submitted to the Commission in 2004 and restructured in 2009 to incorporate advancements in technology, updated pricing, and national expansion models. At this time 47% of the state's population was covered by three contact centers. This updated plan provided an opportunity to present new possibilities to the administration and legislators, reintroduce them to 211, and seek their support. While meetings with state leaders were well-received, funding was not available at that time.

Between 2018 and the summer of 2019, a planning committee comprising United Way of Kentucky (UWKY) staff, board members, and representatives from the now four 211 contact centers serving the state, following the launch of the final center in Bowling Green in 2016, collaborated with leadership of state government agencies, particularly within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS). These efforts focused on evaluating the system's capacity to provide contracted services to the Commonwealth in support of the CHFS Kynect Resources project.

In April 2020, UWKY entered into a contract with CHFS to facilitate the implementation of "closed-loop" referral services in Kentucky. This initiative leverages 211 resource data to offer residents, for the first

time, a seamless online platform where they can manage their health insurance, referral, and public benefits records. Simultaneously, agencies assisting these individuals gain the ability to create referrals and review referral data, ensuring the efficient and effective delivery of human services statewide.

In Summer 2021, a privately-funded four-part strategic planning series was held with Kentucky's 211 contact centers to address barriers to consistent service delivery, user experience, and data sharing. Discussions focused on national quality standards, delivery efficiency, and growing interest from state agencies and partners. The series facilitated collaboration among the centers, resulting in agreed strategies for shared systems to ensure a consistent user experience statewide.

Building on this effort, UWKY submitted a proposal in October 2021 to support expanded outreach and onboarding for the CHFS/Kynect Resources project. The proposal emphasized enhanced data-sharing, technology, and personnel supports to better serve Kentucky residents.

Subsequent contracts have renewed and expanded the partnership through FY 2026. UWKY invested in the expansion of 211 information and referral services to the final 62 "uncovered" counties, and now features 13 FTEs for resource specialist positions covering that expansion and performing both inbound call management and outbound follow up, supported awareness initiatives. In 2023, we launched an incentive program in partnership with CHFS to support community partner engagement. The partnership has also funded the creation of a statewide interactive, multi-language voice response (IVR) platform to ensure that 211 can be quickly activated for additional statewide call center needs, such as eligibility and enrollment supports for public benefits programs, disaster response, and more. Finally, UWKY also invests in a statewide Director of 211 Initiatives, Andrea Brown, to increase our internal capacity to continue our work in support of Kentucky communities.

In summary, through this partnership, one hundred percent of Kentucky residents have ready access 24/7, 365 days a year, to the largest electronic health and human resources information and referral database (collectively) in the Commonwealth through full 211 service by phone, chat, text, email, web search, and closed loop partner referral platform.

UWKY will continue its work with our 211 contact centers to support the provision of services through sustainable funding sourced through contract services, legislative avenues, and grant opportunities, and to seek additional public/private partnerships.

Usage Volume

In 2023, call volume in Kentucky was 55,683, an increase from 2022. Figure 1 below shows statewide call volume. In 2023, for those reporting individualized totals, calls for basic needs, such as housing, utilities, and food made up over 72.5% of all calls for services (see Figure 2 below).

FIGURE 1

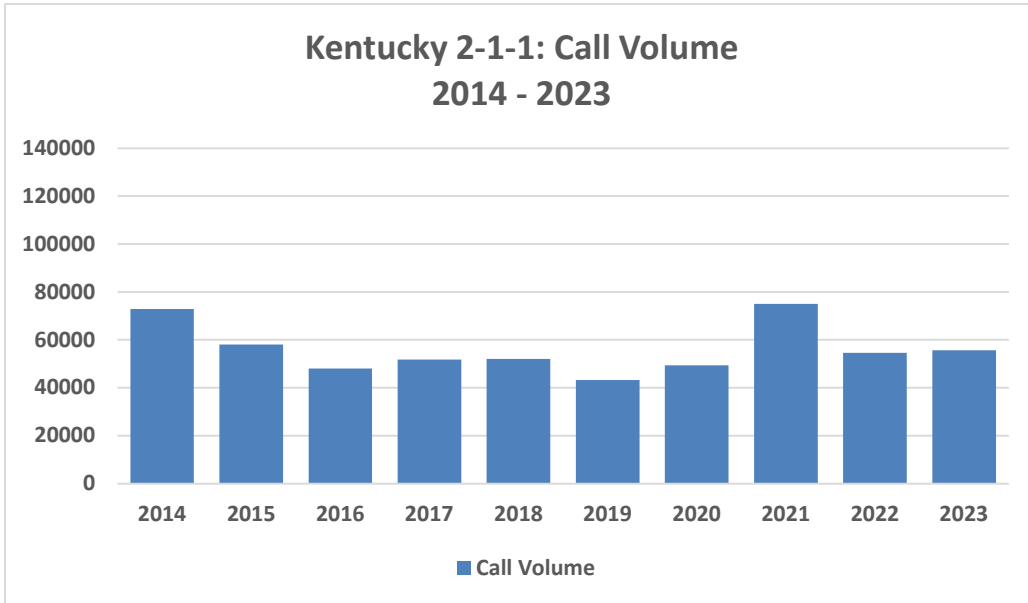
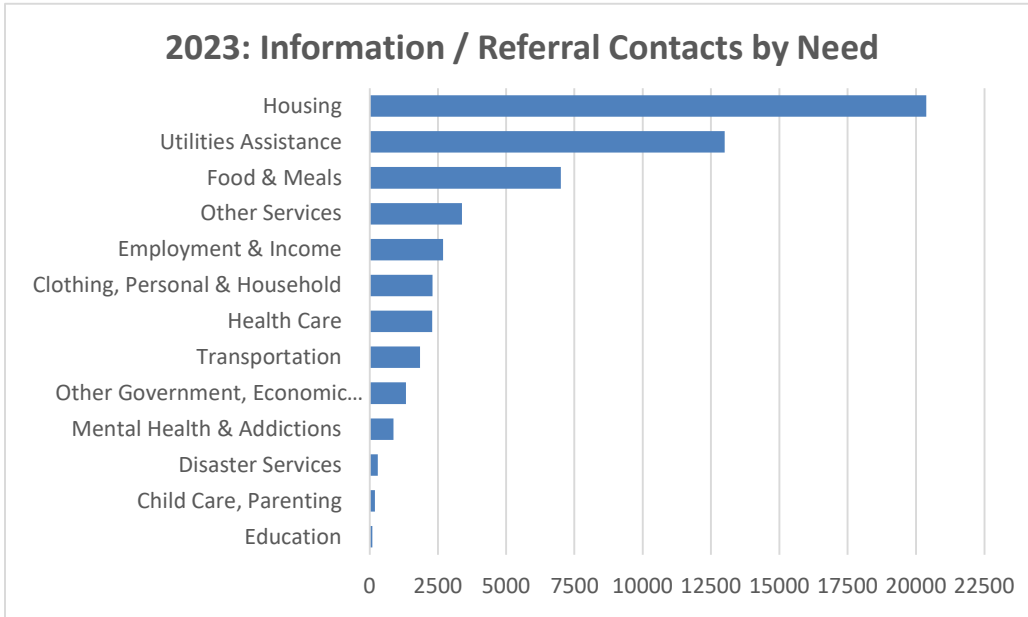


FIGURE 2



Community Partnerships and Special Projects

Beyond its day-to-day information and referral services, United Way 211 has demonstrated its value through its contributions to various community partnerships and special projects.

Kynect Resources - Kynect Resources makes it easier than ever to not only connect people with available resources, but track outcomes and collaborate with community partners. UWKY, in coordination with our contact centers across Kentucky, has partnered with the Commonwealth to populate the resource data that underpins the service. This partnership has allowed for the expansion of 211 to 120 counties. Every Kentuckian can now dial 211 or text their zip code to 898-211 to access services 24/7/365. Since 2022, UWKY has also provided 211 centers with dedicated resource associates to further develop and maintain a robust database of resources and expand usage of Kynect. Through community partner site visits, regional workgroups, community events, and survey outreach, these associates collect new and revised resource information and updates for the resource database. The associates also actively collaborate with CHFS Kynect Resources project managers and the 211-database software teams to improve the data transfer between Kynect and the 211 data platforms. These associates, trained by CHFS, act as referral specialists for Kynect Resources, monitoring requests in the Kynect Resources portal from community organizations, to claim their sites, and are providing training and support as partners onboard and receive referrals within Kynect, as well as managing outstanding referral closures. Since engaging in this way, in the last quarterly report, 97% of referrals created in the Kynect platform in that quarter were closed, either by a 211 Kynect specialist who performed outreach to the referred resident, or by a community agency user of Kynect who was working with that resident.

Disaster – 211 has played a vital role in disaster response in recent years, connecting affected individuals with critical resources, coordinating with community partners, and supporting recovery efforts to help stabilize communities, such as serving as the Crisis Cleanup hotline in the later months following the 2021 tornado disaster. We continue to support our state network to ensure appropriate engagement in helping affected families with up-to-date resources, participate as a key member of KYVOAD and in the Louisville Mass Casualty Incident planning team.

Veterans – In addition to our support in 2021 and 2022 for initiatives like the Veterans Experience Action Center, 211 continues to connect veterans and their families with essential resources, including benefits assistance, healthcare enrollment, education and employment opportunities, and community-based programs.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) – United Way 211 connects low-income individuals and families with information about free tax assistance sites across the Commonwealth. Partnering with organizations like the Louisville Asset Building Coalition (LABC) and Louisville Metro Government, MUW 211 works to increase awareness of and access to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). At a time when many families face financial challenges, EITC refunds can help reduce debt and improve stability. MUW 211 refers callers to Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, where trained volunteers offer free tax preparation and ensure filers receive all eligible credits. By dialing 211, callers can learn about VITA locations, schedules, and eligibility criteria.

In greater Lexington, UWBG promotes financial stability by helping families and individuals access the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which provides an average tax credit of over \$2,000 for families with children. This credit supports needs like savings, home repairs, education, and bills. Through coordination with 211, VITA sites prepare taxes for eligible individuals at no cost, with trained volunteers ensuring maximum credits.

In Northern Kentucky, United Way of Greater Cincinnati provides resources on free tax preparation services through United Way, and uses 211 and a dedicated email to offer personalized support. Similarly, United Way of Southern Kentucky 211 promotes VITA services and local tax assistance programs in its region.

Housing and Homelessness – United Way 211 has provided support to homeless programs like Louisville’s Coordinated Shelter Access through the Coalition for the Homeless, which tracks open shelter bed space, and has historically supported the point in time count to ensure adequate services can be provided to this at-risk population.

Federal Legislative Initiatives

Although the "Human-services Emergency Logistics Program Act of 2023" (HELP Act) was not advanced during the 118th Congress, there is hope for renewed momentum in the 119th Congress. Introduced on May 18, 2023, by Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) alongside Representatives Brian Higgins (D-NY-26), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1), and later, Morgan McGarvey (D-KY-3), the HELP Act represents a bipartisan and bicameral effort to improve nationwide coordination of 211 and 988 services for mental health emergencies, homelessness, and other human service needs.

The legislation, endorsed by United Way Worldwide, seeks to divert non-criminal, non-medical emergency calls from 911 systems to 211 and 988, providing funding to states to expand these networks. This would ensure access to both immediate and long-term resources, such as food assistance, childcare, and mental health services, while reducing strain on local law enforcement. Additionally, the act proposes an oversight system with annual evaluations to improve service quality and ensure accountability, with a focus on diverse community representation. As the 119th Congress approaches, we remain optimistic about seeing this critical legislation advance.

National View and Summary

In 2023, the 211 network in the United States was the 24/7 go-to resource that connected millions with locally available help. Like in our Commonwealth, expert, caring call center operators supported 99% of the U.S. population. In 2023, the *national* 211 network:

- Responded to more than 15.3 million phone calls, texts, web chats, emails, and in-person requests for help.
- Made more than 19 million total referrals to help.

Top Needs

Local 211 specialists helped with virtually every need facing families, but the majority of requests that 211s received at the national level mimicked what we saw in Kentucky – they were for essential needs like food and shelter. In 2023, nationally, 211 specialists made:

- 5.3 million connections to help to reduce and prevent housing insecurity and homelessness.
- 2.4 million connections to help to reduce hunger and food insecurity.
- 2.8 million connections to utilities assistance.

In a Crisis

In 2023, 211 specialists nationally:

- Provided support for more than 1 million callers experiencing suicidal ideation or another mental health crisis, or worried about someone else who was.
- Helped more than 136,000 people get assistance related to sexual assault, domestic violence, or human trafficking.
- Made more than 895,000 referrals for financial assistance.
- Addressed food insecurity with 14.4 million meals delivered through Ride United Last Mile Delivery.

In the 24 years since the FCC assigned the 211 number for health and human services information and referral, it has repeatedly proven its impact and value. In Kentucky, United Way 211 remains steadfast in upholding the highest standards in the industry while fulfilling its mission to ensure 211 is accessible to every Kentuckian. Our commitment to connecting individuals with vital resources continues to strengthen communities and transform lives across the Commonwealth.