2-1-1 Frequently Asked Questions

How was 2-1-1 established?
United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta created the first 2-1-1 call center in 1997. As the 2-1-1 movement began to grow, United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to assign 2-1-1 for the purpose of community, volunteer, and human service information and referral. The FCC awarded this assignment July 31, 2000.

What does the Calling for 2-1-1 Act do?
The bill authorizes $150 million for years one and two, and $100 million for years three through five through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to help implement and sustain 2-1-1 nationwide. States would designate, if they have not already, a lead entity for 2-1-1 which would develop a statewide plan for implementation and administration of the funds. States would be required to provide a 50% programmatic match in order to draw down the federal dollars.

The bill number for The Calling for 2-1-1 Act in the Senate is S.211. The House bill number is H.R.211. To find the latest information on The Calling for 2-1-1 Act, please visit the following Library of Congress’ links for status updates and a list of current co-sponsors: [S.211](http://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/senate-bill/211) or [H.R.211](http://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/211).

Why $150 million in federal funding?
The University of Texas at Austin's cost/benefit analysis estimates that operating a decentralized nationwide 2-1-1 system (the model that describes the current system) costs approximately $285 million. These operating expenses do not include costs to launch 2-1-1 centers, which are estimated at $50 million for the next two years. Over time, we hope to move the nationwide 2-1-1 system to a hybrid model, which would significantly reduce operating costs.

Why is a 50% match required?
2-1-1 is most effective when built on solid public/private partnerships and with a diverse and sustainable funding base. The federal investment will be leveraged in states with a minimum of 50% of program funding from state and local government and private sources such as corporate, foundation, and United Way dollars. This is a 1:1, dollar-for-dollar match.

Why is 2-1-1 currently funded?
Currently, 2-1-1 is funded through local and state sources including local United Ways and other nonprofits, foundations, businesses, and state and local government. The federal funding authorized in the Calling for 2-1-1 Act will supplement, not replace those funding streams.

Are there financial benefits to 2-1-1?
A national cost benefit analysis conducted by the University of Texas estimates a net value to society of a national 2–1–1 system approaching $130 million in the first year alone and a conservative estimate of $1.1 billion over ten years. Savings include time saved, tax assistance and recovery, volunteer recruitment, 24/7 service, a reduction in the number of 1-800 numbers, and a reduction in non-emergency calls to 9-1-1.

Why will funding be administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services?
HHS has years of experience in administering information and referral services for human needs. There are over 964,000 nonprofit organizations in the United States plus scores of government agencies. People looking for assistance have trouble navigating a complicated web of health and human service programs.

In a report following the events of September 11th, the General Accounting Office highlights the need a more efficient service delivery system:

For more information visit [www.211us.org](http://www.211us.org) or send an email to [info@211us.org](mailto:info@211us.org) with your request.
While charitable organizations took immediate steps to get aid to those in need, families and victims generally believed that they had to navigate a maze of service providers and confusion existed about the range of services available to people, particularly those facing job or housing losses. (GAO-03-259 Report)

Who will administer the funds at the local level?
If no state or public utility commission-designated entity for 2-1-1 exists, the state will establish a collaborative of existing 2-1-1 planning bodies, community and faith-based organizations, information and referral providers, foundations, and businesses to create a statewide plan and to administer the funds. If the state or public utility commission has already assigned a lead for 2-1-1, that will become the lead entity, but will have to work collaboratively with the groups listed above.

Are there standards for being a 2-1-1 call center?
Grant recipients must abide by the Key Standards for 2-1-1 Centers, as established by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). The standards are available online. A summary of the standards is included in the press packet.

Why is a statewide plan necessary?
A statewide plan will ensure that 2-1-1 is implemented in each state in a coordinated and cost-effective manner and that there is equitable geographic distribution of the funds and coverage of rural areas.

What can the federal funding be used for?
The federal funding can be used for a variety of 2-1-1 related purposes, including but not limited to planning for and implementing 2-1-1, operating costs, technology upgrades, public awareness, training, and evaluation.