



NJ 2-1-1 Partnership

## NJ 2-1-1 Partnership and Hurricane Sandy: Preparedness, Response, Recovery

In late October Hurricane Sandy literally washed disaster over New Jersey and the region. Thankfully, the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership had protocols in place and the experience to serve our State in addressing the vital human needs created by the storm - from preparedness, through response and into recovery.

NJ 2-1-1's primary mission is to reduce the confusion and frustration of finding resources by providing the best real-time information. Such need was severely heightened due to the storm – and NJ 2-1-1 has met that goal for nearly 100% of callers and web-users. In partnership with State government – particularly, the Department of Human Services, the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness and the Missing Persons Unit of the New Jersey State Police, along with the Office of Information Technology -- NJ 2-1-1 enabled the State and local agencies to effectively deliver vital services to New Jersey's citizens and businesses.

In the one-month period immediately following the storm, NJ 2-1-1 handled over 90,000 calls, *nearly ten times typical levels*. Staff attracted and trained a team of AmeriCorps volunteers to meet the peak need in connecting callers to shelters, food, government resources, and, if needed, a mental health counselor.

The critical service provided by NJ 2-1-1 has allowed others to do their jobs more effectively. In addition, every aspect of disaster recovery has leveraged the 2-1-1 portal. In the one-month period from October 28 to November 26, NJ 2-1-1 assisted callers with the following top service needs, relating to the storm and other human service needs:

- **Disaster Services Problems** **41,111 calls**
  - DSNAAP (food stamps) 33,110 calls
  - Disaster Relief Services 5,340 calls
  - Disaster Preparedness Information 1,176 calls
- **Temporary Financial Problems** **6,156 calls**
  - Financial Aid, Utilities 5,023 calls
  - Financial Aid, Housing 879 calls
- **Food Problems** **2,422 calls**
  - Emergency Food 1,508 calls
- **Housing Problems** **1,542 calls**
  - Shelter/Emergency Housing 1,242 calls

On average, calls have remained steady, although the data portrait of need has been changing as the Sandy response has moved into recovery phase.

In addition to helping New Jersey residents as they clean up their homes and businesses after Hurricane Sandy, the Department of Health has made public health experts available through the state's 2-1-1 system to answer questions about food and water safety and mold removal.

Public Health officials continue to be available to take calls 8 am to 8 pm on weekdays and 10 am to 5 pm on weekends, although the 2-1-1 human services hotline is open 24/7.

The 2-1-1 system permits uniform messaging to the community. In one instance, 2-1-1 operators provided “rumor control” to quiet misinformation in the community about FEMA food vouchers. Also, 2-1-1 operators effectively allowed the diversion of those 90,000 calls from the 9-1-1 emergency lines, allowing those operators to attend to matters of life or death. Through partnership with the Missing Persons Unit at the Office of Emergency Management, NJ 2-1-1 was able to connect people in Kenya, Germany, Italy and Spain – among others – with their elderly or otherwise vulnerable loved ones with whom they had lost contact due to the storm outages.

NJ 2-1-1 also provides on-going data about trends in caller/web-user needs, which provides critical planning information as the State addresses the on-going issues. The Christie Administration had such data in hand as Governors Christie and Cuomo negotiated with President Obama on federal aid to meet the costs of recovery. As a critical partner in disaster response, NJ 2-1-1 has been requested to participate in the After Action Reports due to the Governor from his cabinet officials as part of the post-event debrief. These reports help officials learn what did and did not work, in order to more effectively respond in the future.

Based on the needs identified – by individuals and small businesses, alike -- NJ 2-1-1 has produced the **Hurricane Sandy Response and Recovery Guide**, created through an active working partnership with the New Jersey State Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) and United Ways of New Jersey. The document available online at [www.nj211.org](http://www.nj211.org) is continuously being updated. NJ 2-1-1 relies upon information provided by community partners. *Please contact 2-1-1 at [info@nj211.org](mailto:info@nj211.org) if there is additional resource information that you would like to have included in the Guide.*