



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Information on Tax Assistance Programs Available at NJ 211 Residents Calling in Record Numbers

Paramus, NJ April 3, 2008 This year there's been a 600% increase in the number of tax-related calls to 2-1-1, the free, statewide service that puts people in need of assistance in touch with the government, social services and community resources that provide solutions. "I had sensed that we had a lot more calls related to tax preparation assistance and the Earned Income Tax Credit," said Barbara Gallagher, director of call center operations for the NJ 211 Partnership, "but I was astounded to see how substantial the increase really was."

Resource specialists have been assisting clients by providing them with information on tax credits that are available to families earning less than \$39,783, as well as tax assistance that was specifically designed to help military families and senior citizens. They have also been providing callers with Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site locations for free tax preparation.

Although New Jersey is the second wealthiest state in the nation, one-in-five residents fall below the poverty line, as cited in a recent joint study published by the Rutgers University Center of Women and Work and New Jersey Policy Perspective. This reflects a 16% increase over findings from a similar study in 2000.

"We're very mindful of how many people in our state are looking for ways to make ends meet," says Tom Toronto, chairman of the NJ211 Partnership. "The most frequently expressed needs by callers to 2-1-1 pertain to food and shelter, but it all comes back to a need for more income." By providing 2-1-1 clients with information about the Earned Income Tax Credit and giving them details about the VITA locations closest to them, 2-1-1 is equipping people with the tools they need to take advantage of state and federal resources that will ease their financial burden and encourage self-sufficiency.

A family earning less than \$39,783 could be eligible for a federal tax refund of as much as \$4,716 and a NJ state refund of \$943 thanks to the EITC program, but they must file a tax return. Eligible residents can call 2-1-1 or go to www.nj211.org to find out where the nearest VITA site is located. Sites are staffed with trained volunteers who will provide free assistance in the filing of tax returns.

H&R Block has also joined in the effort by offering discount coupons that eligible taxpayers can use if they choose to avail themselves of this service. Coupons can be downloaded at the 2-1-1 Web site and are available at any one of the 373 VITA sites throughout New Jersey, local public libraries and municipal boards of social service.

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About NJ 211

2-1-1 is a system of support, using inbound calls as well as a Web site (www.nj211.org) with Instant Messaging capability, that is intended to provide free, personal assistance to anyone trying to navigate their way through the vast network of health and human services, government assistance programs and local community resources in New Jersey. 2-1-1 is aimed at lessening the burden of callers by providing understanding and compassion along with the information that is needed to address the caller's concerns. This confidential service is supported by United Way in partnership with the State of New Jersey – Department of Human Services and the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.