



NJ 2-1-1 Partnership

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NJ 2-1-1 Connects Tax Payers to Free Tax Assistance Locations *Many Residents Qualify for Earned Income Tax Credit – Must File Annually*

(East Hanover, NJ) – Tax-related calls to NJ 2-1-1 are on the rise with less than a month to go before tax returns are due to be filed. The state’s information and referral service for health and human service programs, NJ 2-1-1, offers a comprehensive listing of free tax assistance locations in our state. “Ever since we opened our doors in 2005, we have been working closely with our United Way partners compiling our list of VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites each year,” NJ 2-1-1 Executive Director Melissa Acree explains. “By offering local connections to free tax filing services, we are helping hard-working residents save precious funds in multiple ways.”

For one, there are VITA sites throughout the state where volunteers help file state and local simple tax forms at no charge for qualifying members of the community. Second is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) that VITA filers are eligible for quite often. A working family making less than \$53,930 in 2017 may qualify and could get a refund of up to \$6,318 simply by applying for this tax credit. A refund is also available on state tax returns. According to the IRS, nationwide during 2017, 27 million eligible workers and families received about \$65 billion in EITC. The average EITC refund received was about \$2,445.

“We are talking with callers everyday who are struggling to make ends meet. This kind of refund is critically important for low- to moderate-income earners in our state, who, despite all of their hard work, often don’t make enough money to meet their living expenses,” says Ms. Acree. Statistics gathered by the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership in 2017 substantiate her claim, showing “financial assistance” as the top need, expressed by 54% of all callers. The second highest need was for housing assistance.

The Earned Income Tax Credit has long been seen as a valuable anti-poverty program. It is available to individuals and families. Wage earners working part-time or full-time and even those who are self-employed may qualify. EITC refunds do not count as income when people apply for or renew benefits like SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), SSI, Medicaid, cash assistance or public housing. In the first two months of this year NJ 2-1-1 has responded to close to 4,500 calls for tax assistance. Their web listing has been accessed over 7,000 times this year.

There is still time to find a VITA site near you. NJ 2-1-1 is always open. Its services are free, confidential and multilingual. For assistance, connect with a resource specialist by dialing 2-1-1; text your zip-code to 898-211; or chat online at www.nj211.org. The complete VITA listing is organized by county and can be accessed at <http://www.nj211.org/nj-vita-centers>. Here you will find information about hours of

operation and whether you need an appointment or you can just walk in. Some locations also have an appointment link in the entry, enabling taxpayers to make an appointment online.

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About NJ 2-1-1

The statewide information and referral service began in 2002 when the United Ways of New Jersey spearheaded efforts to give people-in-need an easy way to find health and human services by encouraging the Board of Public Utilities to designate the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership as the sole administrator of the three digit dialing code. Statewide coverage began in 2005. **In 2017 alone, the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership provided resource assistance to over 455,000 people who called 2-1-1 or visited our website.** With roughly 3,000 agencies in the organization's resource database and over 10,000 programs and services listed, NJ 2-1-1 provides the public with front door access to non-profit, government and faith-based services, as well as disaster response information. Follow us on Twitter @NJ211 and FB <https://www.facebook.com/nj211partnership/>.