

## Practical Tools for Addressing Social Determinant of Health

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**I**t's hard to ask people about their situation at home when you don't have something to offer them. That's what we heard from more than one health care professional when, at the NJAFP Diabetes Summit, we introduced NJ 2-1-1, a statewide information and referral service that connects people to community resources that help with basic needs.

NJ 2-1-1 is a nationally-accredited organization that initially got its start in 2002. The United Ways of New Jersey spearheaded efforts to give those 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. In doing so, it became possible for anyone in the state to connect with a specialist knowledgeable about community resources.

While statewide coverage began in 2005, the organization's infrastructure and resource database has grown tremendously since that time, transforming itself again and again to keep pace with technology, ever-changing community resources and the needs expressed by callers. In 2017, NJ 2-1-1 connected more than 455,000 people to the help they were seeking.

### Finding help is easier than you think.

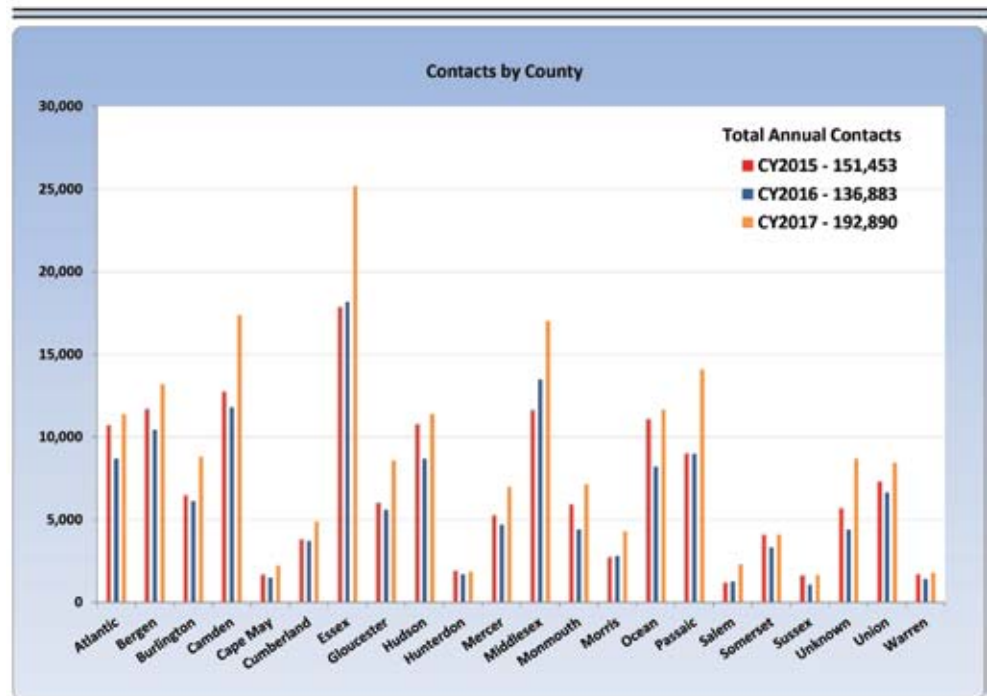
When people dial 2-1-1 from anywhere in New Jersey, any time of the day or night, the call is answered by a community resource specialist who has been trained to carefully listen

so that the most appropriate resource can be identified. There are many to choose from. The NJ 2-1-1 database has over 3,000 government and non-profit organizations listed with more than 10,000 services. Listings include information about program eligibility guidelines, business hours, contact details and more.

However, even with a database of this size, there are times when an individual's expressed need simply can't be met. That is when the value of speaking with a live person cannot

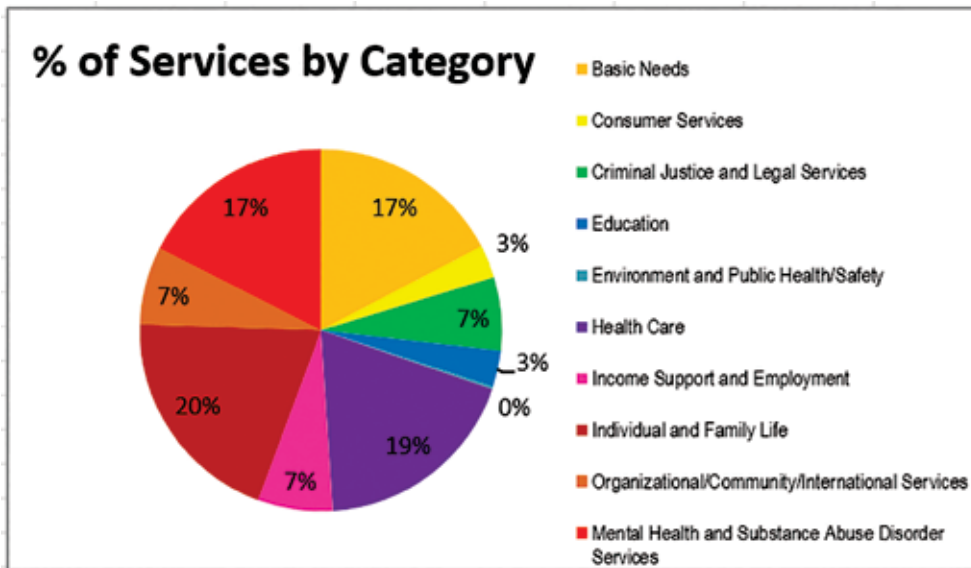
be overstated. When a caller is not eligible for certain programs, or services aren't available in their community, our specialists are trained to look for other ways to ease an individual's burdens. When speaking with callers who are eligible for services they may be unaware of, community resource specialists provide guidance and education to hopefully make life a little more manageable. We know that assistance in one area can help free-up funds for another need that must be addressed.

**NJ 2-1-1 Contacts  
Three Year Comparison**



This graph reflects telephone calls received from each county in the state from 2015-2017. In 2017 an additional 245,000 people searched for resources on the NJ 2-1-1 website.

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The NJ 2-1-1 Resource Database includes over 10,000 services.

A perfect example of this is reflected in a conversation with Roberta, a grandmother who called us after searching the internet for “affordable housing.” The conversation began as it always does... “Thank you for calling 2-1-1, how may I help you?” Roberta had never heard of 2-1-1 previously, but she quickly learned about the free and confidential services available. As the conversation continued, Roberta shared information about the situation she was facing. “I am trying to find a cheaper apartment.

My granddaughter is living with me now and I can’t afford to stay here anymore. I have expenses now that I just didn’t have before,” she explained.

We were able to connect Roberta with affordable housing resources, but that was just the beginning of the help we provided that day. Upon learning that Roberta was raising her granddaughter, the NJ 2-1-1 call specialist shared information about the Kinship Navigator Program which is specifically designed to provide help and support for those caring for a relative’s

child. The call specialist also provided information about utility assistance programs that could ease some of the financial burdens facing Roberta.

Assistance like this offers support during a critical juncture in a family’s life. Many times, it is the thing that sustains them, making it possible for the household to remain independent and stable. This kind of help also offers hope. Roberta was so touched by the assistance she received from NJ 2-1-1 that she called back to say thank you. She explained, “I was at my wit’s end that day. 2-1-1 changed all that for me.”

While health care professionals know that addressing these social determinants of health improves health outcomes in a significant way, they can’t possibly be expected to know every health and human service program that exists, nor do they often have the time or the support staff to investigate further. That is where 2-1-1 comes in.

2-1-1 is the answer for physicians whose patients are struggling to handle basic needs and we are determined to do our best to spread the word. Our outreach efforts to the medical community began in earnest this past July and we’ve travelled across the state with our message.

When a person’s basic needs go unmet, their health suffers. That’s the opening line for a short video that NJ 2-1-1 recently produced. Dr. Rajput, a family physician in South Jersey who stars in the video, said it succinctly when she appealed to her colleagues, “My fellow physicians, when you see a patient in your office or their family member who is in need, have them call 2-1-1.”

There are many in our communities who are hurting and don’t know where to turn for the help they need. Put NJ 2-1-1 on your medical team to address these basic needs and improve health outcomes. The next time you are speaking with a patient who tells you they are struggling to meet their basic needs, tell them to dial 2-1-1. We are free, confidential, multilingual and always open. Need help? Start here.

NJ 2-1-1 can be reached by dialing 2-1-1; texting your zip code to 898-211; or chatting online at [www.nj211.org](http://www.nj211.org). ▲



NJ 2-1-1’s message to health care providers – improving health outcomes takes teamwork. When your patients need help with basic needs, tell them to dial 2-1-1.