

Bolstering Connections to Community Services

Information and Referral (I&R) networks are essential systems that connect individuals with the services and resources they need to improve their lives, whether through local community programs or statewide resources. **2-1-1 Texas, the state's primary I&R system, is operated by Area Information Centers (AICs) managed by organizations such as Councils of Governments, Area Agencies on Aging, and local United Ways.** As a program of Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC), 2-1-1 Texas serves as the critical statewide platform for connecting Texans to vital services. Whether through 2-1-1 or local networks, these systems have the potential to work together to ensure that all individuals have access to the help they need, when they need it.

Key Challenges:

Despite the essential role 211 Texas Information and Referral Network (TIRN) plays in connecting Texans to critical services, the system faces significant challenges. **Funding for 211 has not returned to pre-2011 levels, and rising operational costs have made existing state funding insufficient to meet growing demand.** Additionally, 211 lacks basic communication functions like texting, forcing callers to manually write down information and preventing follow-up by call specialists. **Moreover, 211's resource database is isolated from other state programs and community partners, leading to duplicative and parallel information and referral efforts.** To address these challenges, it is essential to modernize 211, integrate it with other programs, and secure adequate funding to restore its capacity and improve connection to and coordination across services.

Recommendations:

We urge policymakers to strengthen the operational capacity and technological capabilities of our state's information and referral systems, including 211 that connect Texans to critical support and other services provided by nonprofits.

- Invest in Area Information Center (AIC) operations to support growing demand, ensure call centers can meet contract requirements, and to cover operational costs, including staff recruitment and retention.
- Fund 211 TIRN network modernization enabling the implementation of two-way texting, closed-loop referrals, and integration with other Information & Referral (I&R) systems, improving service delivery and efficiency.
- Implement improvements as outlined in HB 555 by Rep. Bucy relating to improvements to 211 Texas Information and Referral Network (TIRN).