

FAQs

1. What is 211?

211 is a free, confidential information and referral system for thousands of community and social services available across the province. Now, 211 is available in Central Alberta, Calgary, Edmonton, and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – by searching the easy-to-use online database at www.ab.211.ca.

2. Who can use 211?

211 is for people from all walks of life, seeking information about community and social services in their community or in the province, either for themselves or for someone else. For example, it could be used by a senior looking for a local senior's centre, a teenager looking for shelter, or someone fleeing family violence.

3. How does 211 work?

211 has collected thousands of records on community and social service programs delivered throughout the province by local community groups, non-profit agencies and government departments. The information at 211 is organized by "need" – not by who delivers the service – this makes it easier to search. Importantly, 211 is dedicated to working every day to expand the list of services and to ensure it is always accurate.

4. Why is 211 useful?

When a difficult situation is being faced for the first time, the path to overcoming it might not seem obvious. Finding a local food bank, or summer camp may be problematic. That's where 211 comes in. The team at 211 has solutions that are just a "click" away. Even problems that seem trivial, like coping with loneliness or adjusting to a new part of life in Central Alberta, 211 is there to help.

5. What are the benefits of the 211 service?

211 helps identify service gaps, duplication, and emerging trends to help policy decision makers direct the right resources and services to where they are needed most. 211 helps people reach the programs and services they need in many areas of the province

6. How will 211 help the people of Central Alberta use our current resources more cost effectively?

There are hundreds of not for profit organizations in Central Alberta, in addition to scores of government agencies. When individuals go without help because they are unaware of the services available to them, our communities waste valuable resources and people fail to get the support they need. With 211, communities can address the diverse needs of their residents and ensure increased coordination among services, identify gaps and overlaps in services by geographic mapping, and track human service usage. By providing a centralized point of information, 211 will help ensure the most efficient use of community resources.

7. Will other service providers see benefits from 211 as well?

One of the significant value-added elements of 211 is its online database that provides easy-to-use and easy-to-search information on every social service and program in the province. With this new and very powerful tool at their fingertips, Central Alberta's many service providers will be able to quickly direct people to services outside of their organization's scope or area of expertise. It will also allow them to discover and connect with other service providers whose goals and mandates complement their own, building stronger community networks.

8. Can't people just look in the phone book for services?

Telephone books are helpful but don't tell the full story. Many organizations provide multiple services and providers are not listed by each service, nor are the services always reflected in the organization's name. 211 maintains an extensive database of services that include information on how to access the service.

9. Why a regional service?

211 service will ensure that all people, regardless of where they live, will have equal access to information. For example, this would allow a resident in Stettler to easily identify home support options for their father living in Sylvan Lake, or assist an immigrant in finding services once they move to Red Deer. Both costs and benefits are optimized with a regional approach. Furthermore, the overall goal is to eventually have 211 services across Canada. By having a regional service, it is much easier to plug into a national network, providing rapid and effective service for all Canadians.

10. Who is paying for this?

The United Way of Central Alberta is funding the database for 211 Central Alberta for the foreseeable future. Funding for the phone part of the system will need to be secured before the phone system can be set up.

11. Has this been done before?

With the launch of the 211 service in Central Alberta over 60% of Canadians will have access to 211 information. 211 centers are located in Saskatchewan, Ontario, British Columbia, Edmonton, Calgary and Quebec City. In the United States, 211 serves over 80% of the population in 48 states.

12. Has any research been done regarding the value of 211?

Comprehensive research on the costs and benefits of 211 systems have been conducted in both the US and Canada. United Ways in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia and Ontario have worked with a number of organizations including Deloitte, to develop specific business cases and identify the potential of a 211 service. These studies including one done in Saskatchewan confirm the strength of the 211 business cases and the inherent value of the service. Each of the studies concluded that the measurable benefits of a national system outweigh the costs by a significant margin. Everyone – public, governments and service providers – stand to realize substantial benefits from the time and cost savings that 211 can provide.

13. How does 211 deal with privacy concerns?

All contact with 211 whether by email or online query is confidential. No names or other personal information is collected.

14. How will 211 help those in communities with few services?

Given the rural nature of areas of Central Alberta, locating services so that they are accessible to everyone is often a challenge. If 211 does not have information within a citizen's community, 211 will help find those services closest to where they live. Also, 211 collects important information on needs that are not being met either because services are not available or because demands are greater than can be met by existing service. 211 provides vital information to planners who are then able to use it to better understand where the needs are and how service delivery can be improved to meet those needs.

15. Where can a person get more information on 211?

To learn more about 211 online visit the website www.ab.211.ca