



Where would you go to find information on mental health, domestic violence, local doctors' offices or community activities? The phone book? Maybe. The internet? Perhaps. Or would you simply pick up the phone, dial an easy to remember three digit number and instantly be connected to specially trained professionals with knowledge regarding thousands of State, local and county programs and initiatives.

For those of you whose first thoughts were of frustrating internet searches or flipping endlessly through the Yellow Pages, there is great news, the State of New Jersey has instituted Dial 211 for social service help and for information regarding many other programs.

"For a person who is hungry or someone without permanent shelter, help is just three numbers away, " said Tom Toronto, Co-chair of the NJ 211 partnership during a presentation before the New Jersey Association of Counties Board of Directors.

"211 is capable of giving you where-to-go and how-to-apply information for a variety of programs."

Dial 211 was patterned after the 911 emergency and 411 information lines. New Jersey is now one of nine states to have established 24 hour service.

Currently, New Jersey has 10 call centers up and operational and the system is averaging 12,000 calls per month. However, the system is capable of handling over ten times that amount. Hopefully the system will not be underutilized much longer," said Toronto.

There is a very large problem in New Jersey in that many people use the 911 emergency number for non-emergency calls. 211 is now available to help take pressure off that system.

Eventually, the 211 number will provide information on everything from garbage and recycling schedules, library hours, reporting a pothole or finding out how and where to apply for senior and veteran programs.

Dial 211 is truly an all-in-one informational line regarding programs in our State.

It is a system that has the potential to benefit every single New Jersey Resident. "Over time, it is my hope that the 211 system will be as recognizable as 411 and 911," noted Toronto.

For more information, log onto www.nj211.org.