



NJ 2-1-1 Partnership

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NJ 2-1-1 Participating in NJCounts 2018

(East Hanover, NJ) – With frigid weather gripping our state for days and weeks on end, staying warm is on everyone’s mind. This is especially true for those who can’t afford heat or those who rent apartments that are not properly managed; and even more true for our homeless population, citizens of all ages who are in peril and live with harsh realities. NJ 2-1-1, a statewide information and referral service, hears from people living in these circumstances every day and does what it can to find services and resources that can help in such times of need. As New Jersey’s Utility Assistance Hotline and serving in four counties as the homeless hotline, the organization plays an integral role in finding solutions because, as NJ 2-1-1 Executive Director, Melissa Acree, puts it, “No one deserves to be without a safe, warm place to rest his or her head.”

On January 24, 2018, when all New Jersey counties will participate in NJCounts 2018, a statewide Point-In-Time Count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people, NJ 2-1-1 will once again be there. Serving as the homeless hotline in the counties of Hudson, Middlesex, Morris and Passaic, does not stop the organization from helping those who are homeless in other counties throughout the state. “On January 24th,” explains Ms. Acree, “we’ll be actively involved in this effort to understand homelessness by counting and gathering data on every caller from anywhere in the state who self-identifies as being homeless.”

This annual census is conducted by networks of organizations, agencies and others that plan community events to end homelessness and is coordinated by Monarch Housing on the statewide level. In addition to the calls taken by NJ 2-1-1 staff, representatives involved in the count will tally the homeless populations in all of the shelters throughout the state, and will also walk the streets in areas where homelessness is prevalent to be sure that those living outside of shelters are included.

The value of this annual count is that it provides tangible evidence of the progress being made to end homelessness, just as it highlights the challenges still to be overcome. NJCounts 2017 found the following as reported by Monarch Housing:

- 8,532 homeless men, women and children were counted across the state of New Jersey on the night of the Point-in-Time Count. This was an overall decrease of 409 persons, or 4.6%, compared to the 2016 count.
- 1,092 persons, in 992 households, were identified as chronically homeless, an increase of 256 persons, or 30.6%, compared to the 2016 count.
- 1,415 persons were unsheltered; a decrease of 1.9% from the 1,442 persons counted in 2016.

The Count also puts a face to homelessness, portraying a population that may surprise those unfamiliar with this issue.

- 1,939 children under the age of 18 (22.7% of the homeless population) were homeless, 977 or 50.4% of whom were five years of age or younger.
- 583 were veterans (representing an increase of 4.3% from 2016.)
- 46.2% of those counted reported having some type of disability.

And, it tells a story as to how people find themselves in such circumstances. In the 2017 Count it was found that:

- 38.7% of homeless households had no source of income.
- 17.9% were staying with family or friends prior to becoming homeless.
- 20.6% were asked to leave a shared residence; 13.8% were evicted and 12.8% reported a loss or reduction of job income or benefits as a contributing factor to their homelessness.

Homelessness and the underlying contributing factors are evident in the data that NJ 2-1-1 continually collects from callers and web visitors looking for assistance. The organization works round-the-clock connecting people in need, with services that may help. In 2017 it responded to 35,514 callers who were looking for assistance with a housing-related issue; over 25,847 of those calling were looking for shelter or emergency housing. An additional 195,000 searches occurred on the NJ 2-1-1 resource database last year using one of the following terms: Housing; Shelter; Homeless.

Where NJ 2-1-1 serves as the homeless hotline, the organization provides a coordinated entry into each county's system designed to ultimately eradicate homelessness. In this capacity, the resource specialists spend time assessing each individual's situation and connecting the caller with the shelter (if they are eligible) or other resources that will best address the situation. Once the caller gives the organization permission to do so, the personal information obtained during the conversation is shared with county professionals who then work directly with the homeless individual or family in an effort to address the underlying cause of their current situation and help them to find a sustainable solution.

NJ 2-1-1 helps people in all 21 counties find solutions for basic needs. "In addition to the individual assessments that are performed for those who call our homeless hotlines, our staff is trained to hear the needs expressed by callers as well as to listen for other ways they can be of assistance," Ms. Acree explains. "We have thousands of resources in our database and information on many assistance programs," she continues. "If a caller is not eligible for assistance in one area, they may be able to get help in another. Our community resource specialists know that and do all they can to connect callers with agencies and organizations that can provide critical services."

The very same resource database that call specialists use is available to the public on the organization's [website \(www.nj211.org\)](http://www.nj211.org). Searches can be based on a need (like "shelter") or an agency's name, and results can be limited by county or zip code to find nearby resources. The site also offers topical resource pages that have been written to provide the public with information about programs and services in the state. A search for "affordable housing" results in a broad list of resource categories to choose from, including such topics as Housing/Shelter, Housing Counseling, Low Cost Home Rental Listings, Veteran Homes, Low Income Home Loans, and much more. To the right of that listing is a listing of related web pages and PDFs that often provides snap-shot information on federal, state and local programs, eligibility requirements, application links and contact numbers. Amongst the suggested pages

for “affordable housing,” is a page entitled [Homeless in New Jersey](https://www.nj211.org/homeless-in-new-jersey) (<https://www.nj211.org/homeless-in-new-jersey>) with specific information on how to find help.

“While it is true that many individuals and families are struggling in our state, they should know that they are not alone,” insists Ms. Acree. “When they don’t know where to turn, I hope they will turn to us so that we can help them find the resources that may make a difference.” NJ 2-1-1 is a free, confidential and multilingual statewide information and referral service that is always open. People in need of help with life’s basic needs can dial 2-1-1 or text their zip code to 898-211 to get connected.

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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/>.