

Case Study #8 – TORONTO 211 (and 211 ONTARIO)

1. Background

211 Toronto, Canada's first 211 call centre service, was introduced in the City of Toronto on June 13, 2002. It was officially launched by the United Way of Greater Toronto, the City of Toronto, Findhelp Information Services, the Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, and Human Resources Development Canada. 211 Toronto was a response to the problem that residents had to navigate through a large number of help lines, directories and voicemail systems to get the human services they needed from government and community organizations. The 211 service also helps to free up the 911 call centres from non-emergency calls.

The Toronto service, together with Halton Region, Niagara Region, Simcoe County and the City of Windsor, form the beginnings of an integrated 211 system. (A province-wide Ontario 211 initiative is described at the end of this case study.) Findhelp's call centre serves as a hub, providing extended hours service for Halton, Niagara, Simcoe and Windsor during non-business hours through formal agreements, and affords short-term coverage on an ad hoc basis to avoid service interruptions. Findhelp's centre is also an option in the event of a system failure, and centres could also back-up Toronto (although the concept has not been formalized). It is planned that Findhelp will serve as the back-up centre for 211 Thunder Bay, which will launch in 2008. 211 Ottawa is also scheduled to launch in 2008.

Concurrent with the launch of Toronto's 211 telephone service, Findhelp launched www.211Toronto.ca, an online directory of over 20,000 community, social, health and related government services. Integrated online directories have been launched for each 211 area, and a fully searchable, bilingual province-wide 211 directory will be available in 2008 (211Ontario.ca).

2. Organizational Design and Governance Arrangements

The United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada are leading the implementation of 211 at the national level in partnership with Inform Canada. These two partners have equal representation on the Canada Steering Committee (CSC), a national governance body for Canada's 211 initiatives. All 211 providers must be formally endorsed by the CSC and enter into a trademark licencing agreement with the United Way of Canada-Centraide¹. The provider can be an incorporated non-profit or registered charitable organization, or a service delivered by government or a designated agent of government. 211 Toronto services are provided by Findhelp Information Services. Findhelp operates the telephone service, manages online databases and owns the technology² that Web-enables 211 online databases.

¹ See success factors for licencing.

² Findhelp developed a robust, scalable, enterprise-class software on an Oracle® platform, funded by Human Resources Skills Development Canada, 2002-2004.

3. Business Model

3(a) Activities, Channels and Migration

211 Toronto operators provide multilingual service 24 hours a day, 7 seven days a week. The service is free, confidential, multilingual, and accessible to the disabled. Among the most requested types of services are health and government services. The population coverage is 2,6000,000 with a 20% penetration rate and an annual call volume of 534,000.

The 211 Toronto 'self-service' website can be found at www.211Toronto.ca. The website complies with international standards and is updated daily. The 3 current sites (Toronto, 211Niagara.ca, 211SimcoeCounty.ca) serve about 30% of Ontario's residents. The planned expansion to 8 sites will increase access to about 50% of Ontarians.

Findhelp promotes the online service extensively, targeting service providers and other professionals. The telephone channel is identified as prime for mediated service, especially for vulnerable citizens and people who face barriers to service. Findhelp identifies outreach as a critical aspect of service, with a focus on priority groups.

Findhelp is currently seeking funding partners to support implementation of "Chat", instant, online access to an information and referral counsellor. Youth, newcomers and areas that do not have 211 telephone service would be the target groups for this service.

3(b) Funding

Funding for 211 Toronto is provided by United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT), the City of Toronto, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). CIC will contribute, in 2007, approximately \$200,000 through a transfer payment agreement to help cover extended hours for 211 telephone service in Niagara Region and Simcoe County. CIC's support for the 211 service in Ontario is related to the fact that between 25% and 30% of callers surveyed two times per year represent people who have lived in Canada for six years or less. Findhelp's service (Toronto and components of the Ontario service) are funded through transfer payment partner agreements, service contracts, a UWGT allocation grant and earned revenue.

3(c) Human Resources Issues

Findhelp's retention rate for call centre personnel has been exceptional, especially when compared against industry metrics. Counselors and editorial staff are unionized (CUPE 3173). 211 counsellors are AIRS³ certified information and referral specialists, and editors are AIRS certified resource specialists. 211 providers aim to have all eligible staff certified. AIRS certification is a combination of experience and a successful grade on the certification exam. InformCanada manages AIRS certification in Canada. Under an MOU with InformCanada, Findhelp administers certification, the Canadian Taxonomy of Human Services and professional I&R training. The 211 Charter outlines the standards for service providers, which includes AIRS Accreditation for the agency providing the service.

³ Alliance of Information and Referral Systems.

Findhelp plays an active role as a training organization. Highlights over the last 5 years include:

- 15 preparatory training sessions for Certified Information and Referral Specialists (CIRS) Information & Referral Training for 1150 participants from across Ontario, including settlement workers (800), staff at Community Care Access Centres (220) and Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (50), and as part of Integrated Response Training for the Toronto Development Services Sector (80).
- 25 one and two day workshops for 420 participants on Information, Referral and Communication Skills, Understanding the Human Services System, and Using the Internet as an I&R Provider
- Development of customized curriculums for Service Ontario Contact Centres, settlement workers and the developmental services sector
- Annually, between 55 and 80 conference and exhibit presentations, as well as 12 presentations at AIRS Conferences
- Annually, hundreds of outreach visits and presentations to language classes, job fairs, and community groups and forums.

3(d) Performance Measurement

Toronto, Simcoe County and Niagara Region have an evaluation plan⁴ that documents the impact of 211 against the stated goal that users receive the services that meet their needs and are self-reliant in accessing the services they require. This plan is based on the initial Evaluation Plan for 211 in Toronto, which was developed jointly by Findhelp Information Services and the UWGT's Program Effectiveness Organizational Development (PEOD) team.

In 2006, 211 Toronto calls had a 88% answer rate, which almost met their target of 90% of calls answered. Of the callers who were polled on their experience using 211 in Toronto, 100% said that they would use the service again, and would recommend the service to their family and friends.

The web-enabled databases of community resources (e.g. 211Toronto.ca, 211Niagara.ca, etc.) help to offset the number of calls to 211. Moreover, since the number of users of this web service does not impact the cost of its service delivery, online service delivery is the most likely way to create efficiencies in the 211 system. To track its use, web statistics are reported monthly. These include entire site hits for the month, average number of site hits per day, page views for the month, average number of page views per day, visits for the month, average visit length, and unique visitor total for the month.

⁴ For details, see *211 Evaluation Plan for Niagara Region, Simcoe County and Toronto*, January 2005. Online at http://211canada.typepad.com/211ontario/2005/09/211_evaluation_.html

3(e) Use of Information Technology/Web 2.0

Information technology is an integral part of 211 infrastructure. Internet service is built on a robust, enterprise class, Oracle® database, hosted by the City of Toronto. In Ontario, achieving a coordinated centralized database will allow for greater interoperability between service providers (examples: extended hours and emergency service) and allow all human services professionals to access the same high-quality, reliable database as 211 operators.

Studies have shown that good access to information for service providers can reduce the time spent looking for information and drive more resources toward front line service delivery (as opposed to information and referral). With infrastructure funding from Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Findhelp developed the enterprise class Oracle® application that supports searchable online information and referral directories, best represented by 211 websites. Findhelp makes enhancements to the application as required for new projects, services and user groups. Findhelp also works very closely with Community Information Online Consortium (CIOC), the community-based, non-profit organization that represents a user group of over 80% of information and referral providers in Ontario. CIOC software is used to input and manage human services data, which is uploaded into the Oracle® system on a scheduled basis.

Blogging has been a major factor in promoting principles of information and resource sharing. Weblogs are set up for major projects and initiatives. The current information sharing weblog, 211.ca (and shortcut to Ontario, 211ontario.info) are in need of reorganization. However, regular users can find what they need and recognize the importance of a central repository.

Findhelp manages the weblogs, and accepts requests from all 211 proponents for postings. At present, each province has its own weblog and national represents an additional blog. The structure was set up in this way to support multiple authors. Although attempts have been made to include additional authors, there has been no uptake on self-posting and managing weblog areas. Active weblogs, 211 National and 211ontario.info, have averaged approximately 60 views per day since being launched in 2005. Since launch, each weblog has had almost 500,000 views.

Weblogs are also used for the Virtual Library, a resource tool that forms a local knowledge base, and is available to 211 counsellors in all areas. The Virtual Library contains information that is highly localized, cannot be easily indexed, or is temporary or volatile in nature. Information includes location of flu shot clinics, voter information during elections, events, major road or building closures and other information identified by local providers as important to callers. The Virtual Library is not publicly available; however, by 2009 the network of users will broaden, as information and referral providers across Ontario will be trained in its use and be able to both post and retrieve information. The Virtual Library has been identified as a way to create an integrated repository of local knowledge that supports the delivery of community based information and referral.

3(f) Partnerships

The information and referral database utilized by 211 providers is made up of contributions from over 40 information and referral (I&R) providers that collect and

maintain data in large and small communities across Ontario. This database represents current, accurate information in both English and French on approximately 60,000 programs and services in Ontario. It is also utilized by some government programs, including the Ontario Victim Support Line, and data is streamed into Province of Ontario web portals. Until 2007, the data was also used by Clinidata, the private sector organization that provided Telehealth Ontario. The Service Canada website is a recognized portal partner to 211 websites (which means that it is allowed access to records). Mutual benefit has been achieved by collaboration on common standards such as inclusion policies, naming standards and terms of use.

Through a sustained service level partnership between Findhelp and the City of Toronto, the City provides the Oracle® hosting environment for the servers that deliver web-based 211 directories and related portals. Findhelp provides community services data that is used in the development of the city's valuable community mapping services. The database is currently managed through contractual agreements between Findhelp, which is the database coordinator, and contributors, who are data stewards.

211 is a service for service providers, and partnerships with other NGOs are critically important. At the local level, 211 providers are very active within their service provider community – providing information resources, training, education and outreach.

Webfeeds and other IT developments will allow 211/I&R providers to meet the specific needs of other NGOs at very little, or no, cost. 211 and information and referral services (and assets such as the database) can have a significant impact on how resources are applied. The goal of a comprehensive, reliable community information and referral service is to reduce time spent collecting, maintaining and searching for information and to direct the benefit to enhancing the quality and quantity of direct service delivery.

4. Community Engagement

Findhelp adheres to the principle of identifying priority groups for outreach. The telephone service does not have a marketing budget; however, staff resources are made available to conduct outreach activities. For example, Findhelp conducted 390 outreach activities in 2005, and 363 in 2006.

Community relevance has been a major topic of interest throughout 211 planning, especially at the service provider level. I&R providers are commonly small not-for-profit information centres, libraries, or government service counters. Forums have centered on questions such as:

- Will standardization eradicate community relevance?
- How can efficiencies be achieved while maintaining quality service in a community?
- What is community participation in a national system?
- Will centralized governance reduce the community impact of quality I&R services?

5. Issues Encountered/Challenges

- Governance. Issues have involved primarily the type of governance - from traditional centralized corporation to open source community.
- Funding. It was recognized in the early development stages that private, charitable funders are not interested. (UWGT reported that the general response from major

private donors was “211 is infrastructure and government should fund it.”) Since then, the absence of committed government funding partner(s) at the provincial and national levels has hampered efforts to build the system out.

- Leadership. Service provider/UWC-CC tensions have made leadership difficult. The major infrastructure developer and service provider (Findhelp) is seen as Toronto-based and therefore Toronto-centric; other I&R providers lack infrastructure to emerge as true leaders; UWC-CC is currently providing leadership, with InformCanada’s involvement. Similar difficulties were encountered in the US.
- Overbuilding and duplication of efforts. This is always a concern as initiatives exist in pockets throughout Canada and at the national, provincial and local levels. Conferences, weblogs and dedication to outreach, community consultation, knowledge-sharing and collaboration have been good ways to mitigate the effects of siloed development.

6. Critical Success Factors

6(a) Major Factors Contributing to the Success of the Initiative

i. Common Vision

As early as 2003⁵, 211 proponents agreed on a common vision, and the principles have contributed to the success of 211 services. The common vision was developed through consultation with the broader community. Key groups included the phase 1 Steering Committee, and a larger project Reference Group made up of representatives from the I&R sector and the United Way movement throughout Ontario.

The common vision represents components of 211 service delivery that are critical and essential. The following elements are considered to be important criteria for 211 services: locally relevant; built on existing strengths; multi-channel access; effective and efficient; professional and high quality; coordinated; sustainable; delivered by the community sector.⁶

ii. Coordination Between Service Providers

In 2005, Community Connection, Findhelp and Information Niagara delivered a proof of concept that illustrated how a 211 consolidated system delivers enhanced effectiveness and efficiency. The service partners agreed to:

- Deliver high and consistent standards of 211 phone service, meeting agreed upon targets, including over the course of any given month achieving an answer rate of 85% of calls within 45 seconds and a call abandonment rate of less than 10%

⁵ http://211canada.typepad.com/211ontario/2005/09/211_for_all_ont.html

⁶ In 2007, UWC-CC’s 211 project featured a municipal strategy, which represented a departure from this aspect of the common vision. The project encouraged municipal and regional government to undertake service delivery as part of their public information system, building on the scale of existing infrastructure and municipal access services such as 311.

- Deliver consistent standards for data quality and associated data policies
- Develop professional and consistent communications tools and messaging which present a common identity for all users
- Apply public sector investment in advanced database functionality of the *findhelp* software to enable members of the public and service organizations to search 211 online effectively
- Develop a consistent evaluation framework so that collection, organization and reporting of information are consistent and the value of information is thereby maximized for social service planners.

With the launch of 211 telephone service in Halton Region and Windsor/Essex, both delivered by government, the level of coordination that can be sustained through collaboration and partnerships will be tested. Early collaboration has been positive, and with Findhelp delivering extended hours service for regions, standards and evaluation are somewhat assured through critical mass. In 2008, 211 services in Thunder Bay and Ottawa are expected, both to be delivered by community based organizations, in partnership with Findhelp for extended hours service.

Until now, Findhelp has developed and hosted local 211 online directories on the common platform, and with a common look and feel. In March 2008, the launch of 211Ontario.ca will consolidate 211 online service across the province into a single, fully searchable, bilingual database of human services.

iii. Keeping an Eye on the Future

In 2005, Community Connection, Findhelp and Information Niagara had established the backbone of 211 in Ontario, which although it required workarounds and short term solutions, has most of the components required for a consolidated system. The realities of day-to-day service delivery can mire organizations in operational logistics and impede progress on an initiative as ambitious as 211. However, by agreeing to the following guiding principles for the future of 211, all three organizations have kept an eye on the future for 211 and senior managers and board members have remained actively engaged in shaping the big picture:

- 211 service is provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year, regardless of the community's population size or wealth, and a "systems approach" is taken to implementing new regions
- 211 service has no geographic gaps; access is provided even if there are no local 211 champions
- 211 will eliminate duplication, resulting in efficient use of resources and freeing up more time for service delivery
- A single 211 conduit is necessary for provincial and national funding partners
- Proponents are dedicated to pooling resources, knowledge, tools and experience so that everyone's capacity and level of competence is enhanced

- A system is required to support 211 call centre services in the event of spikes in call volume or service interruptions (i.e. during an ice storm or power outage)
- Multilingual capacity is shared throughout the system
- Recognition of the effect of economies of scale in driving greater efficiency

iv. *Community Governance*

Organizations involved in planning and providing 211 services must ensure that the governance of their organizations is aligned with 211. Each 211 provider organization is governed by its own Board of Directors (or municipal Board/Council) and led by its own staff. 211 service is a program area for each organization and each delivers several additional services related to a common I&R mandate and competency. For example, Information Niagara is a volunteer centre and provides an interpretation service. Findhelp coordinates many province-wide projects including the 211Ontario.ca project. Community Connection provides extensive services to small businesses. Each organization works collaboratively with I&R providers and United Ways in adjacent regions on the 211 initiative.

Developing a consolidated system requires embracing a new way of working for the staff and Boards of Findhelp, Community Connection and Information Niagara. Becoming a system means developing new competencies within each organization and challenging how things are done against the commitment to a province-wide 211 service.

Findhelp's recently launched strategic plan includes a strategic position for 211 in the organization, which includes the organization's commitment to 211:

The Findhelp Board of Directors is dedicated to supporting the development of 211 service that fulfils Findhelp's commitment to stakeholders, promotes service delivery standards amongst multiple stakeholders, and develops resources and increases sustainability.⁷

v. *Working with Assumptions*

Work on a community-based ISD initiative such as 211 means working with a great deal of uncertainty. 211 proponents have consistently evaluated and established assumptions, which has made it possible to continue development with multiple distributed partners and stakeholders, and even in the face of funding uncertainties. Assumptions at the end of phase 2 (2006)⁸:

- 211 Ontario is supported by funding for province-wide service delivery based on a four year roll-out budget and sustained into the future.

⁷ http://findhelp.ca/downloads/2007-2010_Strategic_Plan_EN.pdf

⁸ http://211canada.typepad.com/211ontario/2006/05/211_ontario_fin.html

- Community I&R will be strengthened and form an integral component of the 211 system across Ontario.
- As the primary funders of community I&R in Ontario, the United Ways of Ontario will remain strong partners at the local level.
- Municipalities and regions will continue to support community I&R.
- Federal funding will support integration and interoperability of 211 provincial systems across Canada.

6(b) Establishing Good Practices

The 211 service is a highly-accessible access point for information and referral, and is closely aligned with the standards for professional information and referral.⁹ In Ontario (and Canada to a lesser degree), 211 developments expand on established standards for I&R practitioners and promote best practices specifically related to 211. The following aspects of 211 have been established as good practices and effectively act as standards for 211 service:

- **Partnerships:** Strong relationships with municipal and provincial government partners.
- **Communications:** High quality and consistent communications tools and messaging that present a professional and consistent look and feel for all users.
- **Evaluation:** Application of a consistent evaluation framework so that collection, organization and reporting of information are consistent, and statistics are maximized for social service planning.
- **Common database:** Information collected as locally as possible, or by specialized community groups, with rigorous attention to quality and accountability; consistent standards for data quality and associated data policies as the basis for 211Ontario.ca; development of 211Ontario.ca as the basis of a province-wide online database that all organizations, I&R providers, individuals and 211 providers can use; Ontario I&R data collaborative allows multiple data partners to automatically access the central database to input local data and retrieve data for local projects.
- **Shared Tools:** Development of community-based tools – e.g. contact tracking system and integrated contact centre resource interface, 211 website template and application, call volume modeling, telecommunications processes and data management import/export tool to enable networks of community database editors to collaborate and reduce duplication; development and implementation of the bilingual, Canadian Taxonomy of Human Services (complete, April 2009)
- **Bilingual Service:** Outcomes realized through collaboration with Ontario's francophone community to ensure community engagement, relevance and utility; French functionality on collaborative, community-based data management application (used by the majority of I&R database editors).
- **Licensing:** UWC-CC secured trademarks on behalf of 211 proponents, and provides administrative oversight for a licensing committee.

⁹ www.air.org

Appropriate use of the 211 trademark helps 211 callers and people using the 211 online directories to be confident that they are accessing confidential, non-judgemental service and authoritative information. In 2005, a working group made up of the executive directors and a lawyer with expertise in licencing and intellectual property, completed a draft template licence that: outlines definitions such as territory, duration and termination; is standardized, i.e. essentially the same for every licence; can be customized by adding the name of the 211 service provider; has appendices that allow for amendments from time to time, such as a change to the territory covered by a 211 service; and is consistent with the 211 Canada Project Charter¹⁰ and the Minimum Standards for Operating a 211 Service in Canada.¹¹

7. Next Steps

The next steps for United Way Canada include;

- Establishing national and provincial (Ontario) 211 corporations
- Securing funding streams to support new corporations and service delivery allocations.

The next steps for service providers include;

- 211 Chat functionality (potential to drive efficiency, reduce service barriers)
- 211Ontario.ca (publicly accessible, searchable Ontario database – especially for professional use to reduce inefficiencies related to calls to 211 from human service workers)
- Extended hours service (cost-effectiveness of centralizing overnight service, evaluation shows no decrease in satisfaction -- note that type of calls overnight may play a part in appropriateness of centralized service.)
- Coordinated reports (100% participation in evaluation plan and consolidated reporting)
- Bilingual Canadian Taxonomy of Human Services
- Bilingual I&R system in Ontario

Ontario 211

The next steps for 211 in general are tightly bound to those for Ontario 211. In January 2007, UWC/UWO determined that it would create a new Ontario 211 non-profit corporation and governance body to provide the legal structure required for province-wide delivery of 211 services (The rationale was that in order to move towards a province-wide 211 system, there needs to be corporate powers to run the business end of the community enterprise).

¹⁰ The 211 Canada Project Charter can be accessed on 211Canada.ca.

¹¹ The 211 Canada Initiative is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding between InformCanada and UWC-CC.

As proposed, Ontario 211 would be governed by a Board of Directors comprised of volunteers selected for their senior leadership skills and broad linkages to the regions and communities throughout the province. The new corporation is proposed to knit together the system connecting the call centres. These eight sites form the backbone of what will grow into a province-wide system for Ontarians to connect with the human services they need. Ontario 211 proposes itself as the provincial governing body, responsible for establishing advisory committees and working groups. InformOntario and its constituent information and referral agencies will provide key input from service providers and data.

Ontario 211 has accelerated its development as a result of additional investments by the Province of Ontario in the 2006-07 Budget, which announced \$1.4 M to United Way and partners from the Ministry of Community and Social Services for one year for developments in the telephony system and planning and financial modelling for a potential provincial system. The same budget invested \$3M over three years for the development of the provincial online database (211Ontario.ca and the Virtual Library) and the development of a bilingual taxonomy of human services

The Online Channel

The 211Ontario.ca Project is conceived as the online channel of Ontario 211, with \$3 million in funding from the Ontario Ministry of Finance's Strengthening Our Partnerships (SOP) Program (under the leadership of the Ministry of Community and Social Services). The money is to be used to develop a web-enabled, multi-jurisdictional database that will hold all human services sector records for the Province. The development of this online database began in April 2006 and is scheduled to be completed by March 2009. 211Ontario.ca will launch as a publicly accessible, fully searchable, web-enabled directory of over 80,000 human services in the province.

The IM/IT division of Findhelp Information Services is leading this initiative, and will expand its web application that currently supports the online directories to create www.211Ontario.ca. Data that is collected province-wide and maintained locally by I&R data partners will be imported into the central database through a customized data management application. A data exchange standard will ensure that human services data flows effectively between local I&R providers and 211Ontario.ca. Information flow will be bi-directional, allowing providers to both contribute data (export) and retrieve it (import). The 211Ontario.ca system will be a "single stewardship of record" model, where each organization or program will have a designated steward that creates and maintains a record for it.

Virtualization

With virtualization, calls are automatically routed to the next available agent regardless of the location of both the agent and the origination of the call. After a specific wait time, calls are routed from a local centre to a larger provincial pool of agents. Under a virtualized system, geographic boundaries are broken down and agent utilization is maximized. The improved inter-site interoperability typical of virtualized systems facilitates overflow management and ensures the redundancy required to cope with emergencies, system failures or disasters. Virtualized call centre models are common in the private sector and are based on well-established assumptions about the savings and

other benefits that can be achieved by linking call centres located in multiple locations. Virtualized systems also improve customer satisfaction by reducing busy signals and caller wait times. Implementation of a virtualized 211 system in Ontario will depend on the relationship between the estimated savings possible and costs required to achieve virtualization.

Inter-jurisdictional Issues

The provincial government has a significant share of the jurisdictional responsibility for the funding and delivery of human services programs. Ontario and other provincial governments have primary responsibility for the broad area of social services, as well as non-clinical health care related services and programs. Provincial governments also have a shared responsibility with other levels of government for disaster and crisis response and recovery. In addition to their long-standing responsibility for various aspects of public health, in the mid-1990s provincial government assigned Ontario's municipalities funding and program delivery responsibility for a number of social services, including social housing and a portion of income support programs. The current division of responsibilities and funding for social programs has been the source of some friction between the province and municipalities, and the provincial government recently announced a process for re-examining and possibly realigning jurisdictional and funding responsibilities.

The federal government has primary or shared jurisdictional responsibility for parts of the 211 mandate, including newcomer settlement and integration, labour market training and adjustment, provision of services and programs for Aboriginal peoples, and shared responsibility for disaster and crisis response and recovery. In recent years, the federal government has transferred its responsibility and funding to Ontario in some of these areas, particularly in cases regarding newcomer settlement and labour market programs. Given their continuing responsibilities for recent immigrants and aboriginal Canadians, who are target populations of the 211 service, it can be argued that the federal government should play a role in funding the provincial 211 system.

Despite their jurisdictional responsibility for funding human services, the Ontario and federal governments have restricted their financial involvement to date in the 211 initiative towards start-up and infrastructure investments. In contrast, in the United States, state and federal funding has helped leverage local funding sources that have helped fuel the rapid growth of 211. As a result, more than 65% of Americans now have access to 211, compared to only 15% of Canadians. However, the provincial government has become more actively engaged in the 211 Ontario initiative during the past year. The Minister's letter sent to United Ways of Ontario announcing provincial start-up funding states, "The Government of Ontario supports the notion of 211 as a first point of access to a wide range of services." The Minister's letter also suggests the need for additional funders to be secured in order to achieve the goal of a province-wide 211 system.

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