

Alaska 2-1-1: A Critical Tool in Times of Disaster



When tragedy strikes—as it did most recently in Nepal when not one but two devastating earthquakes struck—our hearts go out to those whose lives have been changed so suddenly.

Some of us will be moved to help with recovery and rebuilding efforts on the ground. Many more of us will donate money to support those efforts.

And all of us can and should revisit our own emergency preparedness plans. If Alaska 2-1-1 is not part of your preparedness plan, it needs to be.

A critical tool in times of disaster, Alaska 2-1-1 is here for you. One call to 2-1-1 will connect you and your family to timely information and important relief and recovery resources.

When United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems petitioned the FCC in 2000 to designate 2-1-1 as the official information and referral phone number, advocates described its value largely in terms of the ease of a three-digit number capable of connecting citizens with needed services. People need a simple and efficient way to learn about and access services during emergencies.

Since then, 2-1-1 systems have grown to cover 92.6 percent of the country. Over the ensuing years, 2-1-1's have played vital roles in all types of disasters including hurricanes in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, California wildfires, and avian influenza. Through 2-1-1, those affected by such events were able to get relevant, up-to-date information on such things as shelter availability, location and hours of response centers, road closures, evacuation routes, and where volunteers were needed.

Here in Alaska, our 2-1-1 call center is co-located in the Municipality of Anchorage Emergency Operations Center for ready integration into emergency response. The Municipality refers Anchorage residents to 2-1-1 for assistance and the 2-1-1 staff is directly coordinating with the Public Information Officer to provide up to date, accurate information to the community. Working together with the Municipality supports a connected culture for emergency response and recovery that is vital to ensuring effective communication flow.

In addition to co-location, the 2-1-1 staff participates in Municipality-run trainings as well as FEMA and AIRS training to ensure consistency in protocols that facilitate process execution in chaotic situations. Because of these trainings, 2-1-1 staff are equipped to be deployed anywhere in the United States to support 2-1-1 efforts in emergency situations. In fact, Alaska 2-1-1 has helped in emergencies across our state including support for Interior flood relief, H1N1 Immunization Clinics, and the Juneau avalanche.

When not serving in an activated emergency situation, Alaska 2-1-1 answers calls for help from Alaskans throughout the state looking for information and referrals from our list of thousands of health and human service providers. Alaska 2-1-1 maintains the most comprehensive community services database in the state.

Alaskans seeking help can speak directly with a trained Information and Referral Specialist by dialing 2-1-1 or 1-800-478-2221 from 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Calls are confidential and free of charge. A special partnership with Language Line allows specialists to communicate with limited English speaking callers in more than 170 different languages including all Alaska Native languages. Alaska 2-1-1's website is available 24/7 at www.alaska211.org.

Living in Alaska, we've seen our fair share of natural and man-made disasters over the years. We know a major earthquake is always a possibility. And while no one can predict what the future holds, it's good to know Alaska 2-1-1 will be there to help.



Help starts here. Dial 2-1-1
2-1-1 | 1.800.478.2221 | www.alaska211.org | alaska211@ak.org