



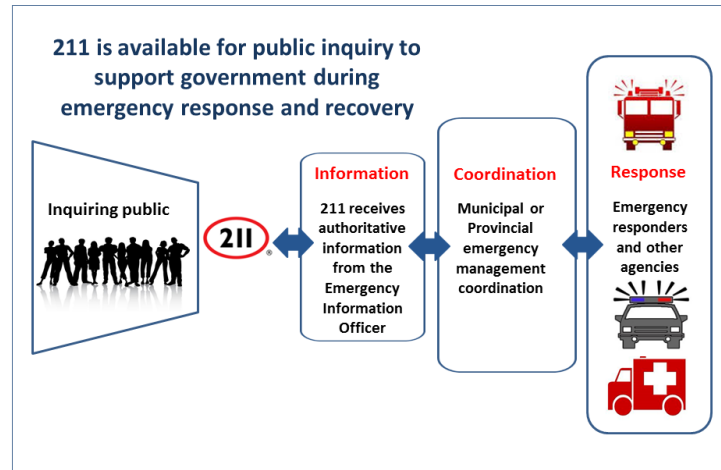
# 211 Role in Emergency Response and Recovery in Ontario

## Newsletter Highlights – April 2014

### 211 - an access point and a service

The telephone number 2-1-1 is recognized as a 'front-door' partner to other information and referral service providers and as the gateway for the public to human services in Ontario. 211 service helps people navigate the complex network of human services quickly and easily, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in over 150 languages. For emergency responders and managers, 211 provides a channel for authoritative information to

the public about anything relevant to the emergency that does not require police, fire or ambulance, such as the location of emergency shelters, where to get basic supplies and how to donate goods. This helps to alleviate the non-emergency calls that go to 911 and other Municipal phone lines. In addition to calling 211, people can look up information for themselves using the website [www.211Ontario.ca](http://www.211Ontario.ca) which provides details including hours of service and eligibility about the 65,000 community and social services in Ontario.



### Protocols and Agreements with Municipalities

During a disaster Emergency Information Officers (EIO) are key providers of information the public needs in an accurate and timely way. 211 partnerships with Municipalities include having communication



protocols in place to use the 211 line as the public information line during emergencies. To enhance preparedness, 211 service providers participate with Municipalities in emergency exercises. In Municipalities where a relationship is in place the work began with conversations or meetings with the Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC), Chief Administrative Officer, Fire Chief or social services department. Whether it is a declared or undeclared emergency 211 will receive calls

from the public about e.g. power outages, water issues, traffic accidents, fires, weather warnings etc. A communication protocol between 211 and upper and lower tier Municipalities includes:

- 1) Notification details on how and when to contact 211 staff 24/7/365
- 2) Notification details for 211 to reach key Municipal contacts
- 3) Information so that Municipal staff know how 211 can support the Municipality and residents
- 4) Activation procedures to engage 211's emergency support services

- 5) Communication procedures to establish ongoing two-way communication e.g. share media releases and other information with 211 as the situation changes and direct the public to call 211 for non-emergency information
- 6) Processes for feedback to the Municipality about the needs of the public

The Ontario network of seven 211 Regional Service Partners answered 527,212 calls to 211 in 2013. There are three primary components of 211 service: Public inquiry and information; online inventories and directories, and tracking and reporting caller needs. The services provided during an emergency build on this base of expertise.

<b>1. Public Inquiry for Information</b>	
<b>Everyday</b>	<b>During Emergency Response and Recovery</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 24/7, confidential and multilingual</li> <li>▪ TTY, chat and email accessible</li> <li>▪ Trained in serving vulnerable populations including advocacy and follow up support</li> <li>▪ Trained in crisis intervention and creating safety plans for endangered callers</li> <li>▪ Protocols with 911, crisis and distress lines, &amp; volunteer centres</li> <li>▪ Monitoring social media and posting facts or notices to call 211</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Answer calls from the public regarding non-emergency information such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evacuation information</li> <li>- Location of shelters</li> <li>- Road closures and traffic detours</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Capacity to handle large call volumes through mutual assistance agreements with 211 Ontario network</li> <li>▪ Central access point to register volunteers, donations or people</li> <li>▪ Rumour control by monitoring social media and posting facts or notices to call 211 or visit specific websites</li> </ul>
<b>2. Online Inventories and Directories</b>	
<b>Everyday</b>	<b>During Emergency Response and Recovery</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continually updated comprehensive database of human services across Ontario</li> <li>▪ Province-wide database accessible online at 211Ontario.ca</li> <li>▪ Annually updated pre-disaster database of organizations that provide services in times of disaster</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continually update disaster database with emerging information and services throughout response, relief and recovery period</li> <li>▪ Make database available to other organizations in the community</li> <li>▪ Maintain a continual information exchange with Emergency Information Officer to ensure only authoritative information is disseminated</li> </ul>
<b>3. Tracking Caller Needs</b>	
<b>Everyday</b>	<b>During Emergency Response and Recovery</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collect non-identifying details about calls, TTY, social media and email contacts</li> <li>▪ Track needs, trends, unmet needs and service gaps</li> <li>▪ Produce reports to support community planning and advocacy organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide real-time reports to Emergency Information Officer to support emergency response</li> <li>▪ Produce Service Reports and After Action Reports with aggregated data to support community planning activities</li> </ul>

## **Training and Exercises**

Ontario 211 Regional Service Partners participated in The Huron Challenge: Trillium Resolve, in 2012, an emergency exercise that involved dozens of organizations across four counties in central Ontario. This was an opportunity to test collective ability to respond and to work together with partners in the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management (OFMEM), Municipalities and other service organizations that

respond at times of emergency. Drill scenarios were multi-layered and included a radioactive fuel spill, road closures, multiple accidents and power outages. From 211 providers the exercise response required up to date and reliable information to the public in a fast changing information environment. Additional roles for 211 providers included collection of information about offers to volunteer and donate goods and services. An internal 211 Ontario emergency exercise in September 2013 tested and improved processes to respond and work together. Representatives from six provinces and every 211 service provider in Canada participated in a training workshop hosted by Ontario in October 2013 focussed on the role of 211 in emergency response and recovery. A presentation on the role of New Jersey 211 in supporting people affected by Hurricane Sandy opened the workshop. The importance of building trustworthy relationships prior to needing them, the requirement for continual flexibility and the particular vulnerability of people without family who are isolated, were a few of the many key lessons.



## Case studies

**Toronto Storm Flooding** - In the first 17 hours of the July 2013 flash flood, 682 people received reassurance, direction and up-to-date information when they called 211 Central. People without power had lost their access to information from T.V., the internet or radio and felt very isolated. 300,000 residents were without hydro. Many called 211 to find the extent of the power outage and when the hydro repair would be completed.

**Meaford Water Emergency** - In July 2013 a break in the main feeder line which supplies water to all residents in the urban area of Meaford on the southern shore of Georgian Bay resulted in residents being without water for the day. A drinking water distribution centre and portable toilets were set up. The Town of Meaford immediately involved 211 Central East and advised residents to call for the latest up-to-date information e.g. how long to boil water, whether to bathe a baby or wash vegetables, if water would be delivered to seniors and whether to flush the toilet or use the dishwasher. Restaurants, hair salons, day care centres and other business owners called to ask about using water for customers.



**Peel and Windsor Health Information** - In Windsor-Essex and Peel the 211 service was used by Municipalities to get important information out to people about H1N1 flu in 2009.

**Thunder Bay Flooding** - The City of Thunder Bay's Emergency Operations Group contacted 211 North in May 2012 when the City declared a state of emergency. 211 staff attended the morning Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) meetings to ensure they had the information callers would need such as where the Red Cross was registering people who needed food, clothing, toiletries and a place to stay.

**Niagara Hurricane Preparation** - Central South 211 staff used multiple tools to monitor the path of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 including information from Municipal staff to ensure that the most up to date information could be provided to the public. Social media was widely used e.g. Niagara Regional

Police tweeted 211 as the number to call, the Mayor of the City of Niagara Falls posted the media release to call 211 on his Facebook page and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake used their website.

**Windsor Building Collapse** - 211 is available every day, in Windsor, for example, a local parking garage collapsed and residents of a 35-unit apartment building were evacuated as a precaution until assurance of structural integrity could be provided by the Ministry of Labour. By calling 211 the public had access to victim services, basic needs, support for grieving family members or health resources.



**Renfrew Preparedness** - 211 Eastern Ontario is working closely with Police, Paramedics and Fire services to ensure that front line staff are aware of 211 and can refer clients to the phone or web service. “Our Paramedics are not always aware of the full range of social services and community resources that may be available. We are happy to work with the 211 service to leverage their expertise,” says Chief Michael Nolan, Chief of Paramedics for Renfrew County.

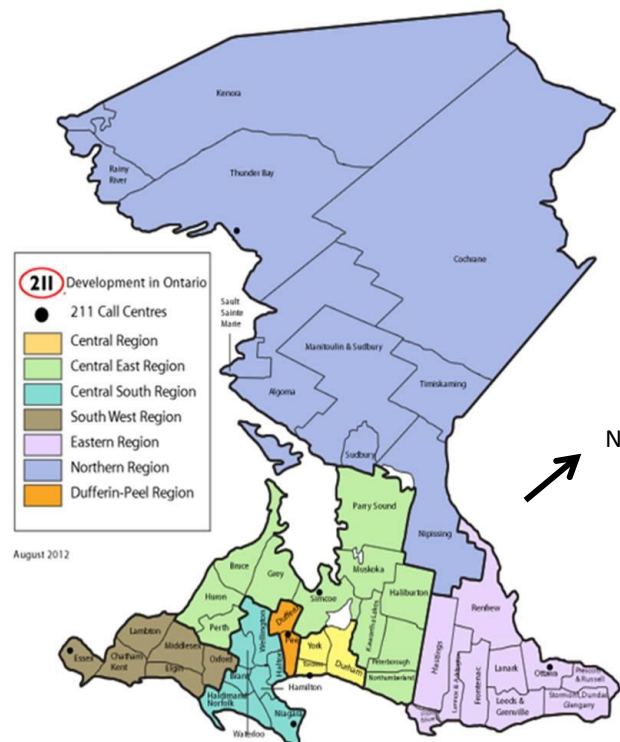
**Ottawa Single Access Point** - In Ottawa, the Coordinated Victims Assistance Network (CVAN) is working to create a “no wrong door” approach. Ottawa Police, Ottawa Victim Services, and local victim-serving agencies are working to ensure that victims can connect quickly to immediate and longer-term supports throughout the recovery process including an easy point of entry through 211 Eastern Region.

**For more information contact:**

211 Ontario Regions

**For more information contact:**

- **Ontario 211 Services**, Andrew Benson, abenson@211ontario.ca; Karen Milligan, kmilligan@211ontario.ca
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- **Central East:** Pam Hillier, Community Connection, PHillier@communityconnection.ca
- **Central South:** Rosanna Thoms, Information Niagara, rthoms@informationniagara.com
- **Dufferin-Peel:** Rebecca Cowell, Regional Municipality of Peel, rebecca.cowell@peelregion.ca
- **Eastern:** Marie-Andree Carriere, Community Information Centre of Ottawa, ma.carriere@cominfo-ottawa.org
- **Northern:** Marie Klassen, Lakehead Social Planning Council, mklassen@211north.ca
- **South West:** Jennifer Tanner, City of Windsor, jtanner@city.windsor.on.ca



Through the support of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, and some Municipalities and United Ways, 211 service is available to all Ontario residents to help people navigate the complex system of social, health and government services in the community. The Ontario Trillium Foundation is providing support to strengthen the emergency related work with partners. □