

211 Role in Emergency Response and Recovery in Ontario Newsletter – January 13 2014



disponible aussi en français

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.

Province-Wide Emergency Exercise

The 211 Regional Service Partners in Ontario successfully conducted a province-wide emergency exercise in September to test and improve processes and their ability to respond and work together. The exercise, with a simulated tornado in eastern Ontario included inter-organization communications, mock calls, website creation and updating the related database.

Toronto Storm Causes Deluge of 211 Calls

In the first 17 hours of the July 8th flash flood, 682 people received reassurance, direction and up-to-date information when they called 211 Central.

“The woman in the car in front had water up to her windows, it was awful, very frightening,” said one shaken driver caught unexpectedly in the one-in-100-year sudden storm that hit Toronto, stranding commuters and resulting in 300,000 residents without hydro. Most 211 calls were



from people who had lost power and their access to information from T.V., the internet or radio and felt very isolated. They called to find out the extent of the power outage and when the hydro repair would be completed. As the power remained out, callers asked about dealing with spoiled food and getting about in the city because the transportation hub at Union Station was flooded and would remain so for days.

All 211 Service Providers at Emergency Response and Recovery Institute

Every 211 service provider across Canada attended a one day training workshop in Niagara Falls in October. Participants from 6 provinces 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 learning points.

The experience and learning from the current *211 Role in Emergency Response and Recovery Collaborative Project*, which has funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, was presented. It included the importance of relationships with municipalities, including up to date notification lists, the role of databases of information relevant in the disaster that may not be needed at other times and preparation and training of staff.



Highlights of other workshops were the experience of the 211 service in Calgary during the June floods, the skills of partnering, the importance of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) Standards that are the backbone of 211 service in Canada, the importance of de-briefing with stressed staff who are dealing with continual calls from anxious residents and a commitment to continue to enhance national 211 training and education in this area.

Meaford Water Emergency

In the early morning of Monday July 22nd a major break occurred in the main feeder line which supplies water to all residents in the urban area of Meaford, a population of about 11,000 residents in the County of Grey on the southern shore of Georgian Bay. Many residents were without water for the day. A drinking water distribution centre and portable toilets were set up. When residents were cleared to resume using water, there was a boil-water advisory for tap water.



The Town of Meaford immediately involved 211 Central East Ontario and advised residents to call 211 for information on their messaging system. On the 211 lines, Information Specialists provided the

latest up-to-date information throughout the week to 277 people who called with related questions. Questions included 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. □

For more information contact:

- **Ontario 211 Services**, Andrew Benson, abenson@211ontario.ca
- **Central**: Sue Wilkinson, Findhelp Information Services, swilkinson@findhelp.ca
- **Central East**: Pam Hillier, Community Connection, PHillier@communityconnection.ca
- **Central South**: Rosanna Thoms, Information Niagara, rthoms@informationniagara.com
- **Dufferin-Peel**: Carroll Francis, Regional Municipality of Peel, carroll.francis@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