

Support for Full Funding of Vermont 211 in FY2024

Prepared for the Senate Appropriations Committee
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Having only recently learned that Vermont 211 is at risk of ceasing operations, Hunger Free Vermont and the Vermont Foodbank submit this urgent request for funding support for Vermont 211 in FY 2024. Vermont 211 is a critical, foundational system for people experiencing food insecurity and many other issues to access resources and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Thousands of people across Vermont rely on this system, in moments of great distress, and through 211, are often also connected to additional supports beyond those they were specifically seeking. At a time when two in five (40%) of people in Vermont have reported experiencing hunger and food insecurity during 2022, the highest rates ever recorded, according to studies carried out by UVM researchers, this system is actively helping people find food every day. Additionally, this system is a critical resource for the 41,000 households / 72,000 individuals who have recently experienced a significant drop in their 3SquaresVT benefits following the final Emergency Allotment payment in March. The safety net is our system of food shelves, meal pantries, and food support services that is housed and kept current in the Vermont 211 database system, is a low-barrier access point for the many low-income Vermonters who lack internet access, and especially for older Vermonters who may be unable to use, or wary of, online information.

Reducing the funding or Vermont 211's hours of operations does not change the need for this service. People in Vermont continue to need this connection to services and the timing could not be worse for reducing access to this information. Vermont 211 is the relied upon service for the state of Vermont that supports some of the most vulnerable in our community. As federal pandemic-era programs are ending, the need for support remains high, as evidenced by Vermont 211's [statistical reports](#):

- In March of 2023 Food was the top online search term and the top "Unmet Need"
- In just the first three months of 2023 "Basic Needs" including food and housing supports was the top reason people contacted Vermont 211
- In 2022, the top reason for all contacts was housing (even while pandemic-era housing programs were in place)

The Vermont Foodbank's network of 225+ food shelves, food pantries, and meal sites relies on Vermont 211 to help connect community members to their food resources. With many of those organizations reporting between 15% and 84% increases in utilization since 2022, it is even more important to maintain access to the information that Vermont 211 provides. Recently a Vermont Foodbank network partner shared that they are seeing 50% more new visits from people who have not used their food shelf before. Many of these people, who have not used charitable food or social service resources, are finding resources like this from Vermont 211.

Should Vermont 211 reduce hours of operation or, worse yet, close, these inquiries would need to be serviced by our partners at the Agency of Human Services. This is more than our state partners can take on, especially in an environment where they are already working at maximum capacity. Other services [currently fulfilled by Vermont 211](#) would end all together with no replacement in the near term.



Likewise, every year Hunger Free Vermont provides Vermont 211 with a comprehensive list of the 300+ free open summer meal sites for children statewide, so that families have one place to call where they can quickly be directed to the site closest to where they live. We also include 211 as the place to call for information on many other programs, and no replacement service exists. For many years, nonprofit service providers throughout Vermont have been working to promote Vermont 211 as the one number to remember, and as the reliable and trusted place where someone will always answer and always try to help. The loss of Vermont 211 at this point would likely cause significant confusion and disruption of access to a wide range of services for many of the most vulnerable people in our state.

Thank you for considering funding Vermont 211 at their full request of \$1,404,888.88. As a critical partner in the work of helping people in Vermont get their basic needs met, Vermont 211 is a foundational system to ensure that people can get food and meals when and where they need them. This is also a critical piece of the ongoing conversation about meeting the ongoing needs of people in Vermont, including housing, child care, and all human services supports - without access to this information, these systems and resources cannot work as intended. We ask you to include Vermont 211's requested funding in your Committee's FY 2024 budget request.