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NEVADA 2-1-1 BECOMES FIRST 2-1-1 SERVICE IN THE COUNTRY TO ACCEPT TEXT MESSAGES

Reno, Nev. —The Nevada 2-1-1 Partnership has announced that Nevada 2-1-1, a health and human services help line that connects individuals with essential services and referrals, will now be able to accept text messages with requests for assistance. Nevada 2-1-1 is the first 2-1-1 service in the country to accept text messages. The Partnership has also recognized the efforts of United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS) and the Crisis Call Center for spearheading this effort.

With a large increase in Nevada 2-1-1's call volume and operator levels remaining constant, the ability to accept text messages will allow more individuals to get information quicker and more efficiently since operators will be able to simultaneously take telephone calls and queue up text messages. The text number will be 898211 (txt211) and users will need to use their local zip code as the keyword.

"Although most callers to 2-1-1 use a land-line or cell phone, there is a growing number of individuals throughout the community using 'texting' to communicate," said Karen Barsell, chief executive officer and president of UWNNS. "Texting allows individuals to get assistance with an added layer of privacy and with greater ease. Many people are too embarrassed to ask for help. By having the option to text in questions or requests for assistance, Nevada 2-1-1 will be able to help even more people in our community." UWNNS provided funding to Crisis Call Center to complete the development of the texting capability.

The new texting capability will also allow Nevada's hearing and speech impaired community to use the 2-1-1 service to find information and resources.

"Prior to being able to accept text messages, 2-1-1 was only able to assist the Nevada population that is hearing and speech impaired through the Nevada 7-1-1 relay system," said Kathy Jacobs, executive director of the Crisis Call Center. "We want to be able to serve anyone in our community that needs help and this is another step in that direction."

In addition to being able to help more individuals, the texting capability will help increase capacity to handle large surges of callers in emergency and disaster situations. During these situations, text messaging can be the quickest and most reliable means of communication.

Users will also have the option to receive outgoing text "alert" messages from Nevada 2-1-1 regarding important announcements including emergency and disaster updates within the community.

Nevada 2-1-1 has a database of almost 8,000 services statewide that can help Nevadans in a multitude of ways. Since its inception February 2006, Nevada 2-1-1 has assisted more than 100,000 people statewide. At its launch, Nevada 2-1-1 was available in 39 percent of the state; now Nevada 2-1-1 has expanded throughout Nevada and is available to almost all residents of the state. Center hours are Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until midnight and Saturday and Sunday, 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.

As well as its new texting component, Nevada 2-1-1 provides the easy-to-remember telephone number 2-1-1 that can be used to connect callers with free information about important services and volunteer opportunities. This vital service can also be found online at www.nevada211.org.

About 2-1-1

Spearheaded nationally by United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), 2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember telephone number that connects callers with important community services and volunteer opportunities. 2-1-1 builds America's capacity to strengthen the way people access help and engage in civic life. In July 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established 2-1-1 as the nationwide number for non-emergency information and referrals. Currently, 2-1-1 is serving 82 percent of the United States population. Each state is responsible for planning and operating its own 2-1-1 system.

Nevada 2-1-1 is a statewide coalition of organizations including United Way of Southern Nevada, United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra, Crisis Call Center, HELP of Southern Nevada and the State of Nevada along with other non-profit and private businesses.

About United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra

United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra brings the community together to identify our most pressing needs, produce measurable results, and, thereby, improve lives. United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra is achieving meaningful impact here in our community by using expertise and knowledge through innovative funding of programs and initiatives that have a positive influence on the people of northern Nevada and the Lake Tahoe communities. For more information, call 775-322-8668 or visit www.uwnns.org.

About Crisis Call Center

Crisis Call Center was established as a program at the University of Nevada, Reno in 1966 to address the high rates of suicide prevalent in Nevada. Over the years, the Center has continued to grow and evolve in response to community needs. In addition to the 24-hour crisis hotline the Center also provides advocacy for victims of sexual assault, support groups for survivors of suicide loss and sexual assault and is one of two primary call centers for Nevada 2-1-1. Crisis Call Center is accredited by the American Association of Suicidology, maintains certification through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Agency and is a Standard of Excellence Partner with United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra.

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