



New York
Get Connected. Get Help.™



United Way
of New York State

Testimony Submitted By:

Mary Shaheen, Vice President of United Way of New York State (UWNYS) and

President of 2-1-1 New York

For the Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction and Overdose Prevention

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the very important topic of opioids, addiction and overdose prevention. As New York State continues to tackle this serious public health crisis, I wanted to provide information on an important referral resource that could provide assistance to many individuals and families effected by this crisis, 2-1-1. Specifically I want to talk about a new feature that has been rolled out in certain areas of the state, an opioid texting platform, and how this has been serving individuals who may not wish to speak with a call specialist directly or who find the web search option more challenging. Particularly when it comes to individuals in crisis, like those suffering with addiction, immediacy is critical.

Thanks in large part to support provided by the Legislature over the last several years, 2-1-1 is a phone number and website that anyone across the state can access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, to talk to a specialist for help related to every day needs or in times of a disaster. 2-1-1 is completely confidential and available in 180 languages. In 2018, 2-1-1 received 1.8 million phone calls, 897,625 million web visits (exclusive of NYC), and just under 9,000 text-based contacts. Specifically, in 2018, 2-1-1 made 30,000 referrals to callers seeking assistance with mental health & addiction. These referrals were for substance abuse & addictions, crisis intervention & suicide and mental health services & facilities, to both local and New York State resources.

In New York State, 2-1-1 services are provided by 8 contact centers that serve 10 distinct 2-1-1 regions. All must meet basic 2-1-1 operating requirements and provide basic information and referral services. All have expanded their services in ways that reflect local partnerships, preferences and resources. Some are very engaged in DSRIP partnerships, others in Continuum of Care arrangements, some are the direct contact for Help Me Grow, as just a few examples. In New York City 2-1-1 is embedded within the 311 system and can provide the same level of assistance and support for basic information and referral as well as disaster and crisis calls.

Most recently, and most relevant to the hearing today, certain areas of the state have launched a text pilot platform (by texting “opioid” to 898-211) that can be used by people seeking drug treatment, their loved ones, or the general public to get immediate help via cell phone. Developed by the Heart of Florida 2-1-1, this platform allows texting automation with integrated referral data and guides for individuals who opt-in to the program after completing a series of questions to assess what information would be best for them. It also encourages individuals to have a live encounter with 2-1-1 specialists should they wish. The adaptive automated text tracks perform the initial intake and, depending on the responses, offer 4 distinct paths, all with local, state and national information and referral links, categorized as the following:

1. For those seeking general information, which includes: facts, overdose reversal medication information; how to safely dispose of prescription medications; and how to report tips anonymously.
2. For those seeking information for someone they are concerned about. This could include: signs of opioid use/overdose reversal medication; treatment options-detox, inpatient and outpatient; and support groups for family/friends or persons using.
3. For those seeking information for themselves as someone using, including treatment options-detox, inpatient and outpatient; local support groups; and resources for students.
4. For treatment providers which includes resources for treatment for a client; information on how to be added as a resource for treatment; and best practices for treatment providers.

We have provided a flowchart that provides more information on these categories. Those who have reached out to 2-1-1 seeking opioid treatment information are offered the option to opt-into a 130-day automated supportive messaging campaign that provides daily affirmations and on-going communication. Four regions now offer Opioid Texting and a 5th is planning to do so.

The texting option is still very new and actual usage is dependent on awareness. The platform is available and operating in New York State and offers one part of a solution to the challenges of opioid use and addiction. However, if fully implemented across the state, we think that the 2-1-1 opioid texting platform could provide tremendous assistance in your endeavor to tackle this public health crisis. In addition, this service can collect information on additional need, including additional prevention and treatment options.

The cost to implement the opioid texting platform is population based. In NYS, the annual cost to implement, market and then continue to provide texting, is \$55,000. As such, we strongly encourage the Legislature to include \$55,000 in the 2020-21 budget specifically for the 2-1-1 opioid texting platform so that 2-1-1 can be a partner and resource to individuals and families across the state affected by opioid use and addiction. This is in addition to the \$1.5 million that we seek annually from the Legislature in overall operating support for 2-1-1 to maintain current service across the state 24/7/365 in all 62 counties.

Thank you.