

Help starts here: 211 Saskatchewan

BY MICHELE TYNDALL

We all know to call 911 in an emergency, or 611 for help with our phones, but there's another number in Saskatchewan that is just as easy to use, and provides access to an amazing array of services: 211 Saskatchewan.

Provided by United Way Regina and United Way of Saskatoon and Area, through the support of the Community Initiatives Fund and Can Pacific Potash, the 211 Saskatchewan website was launched in the fall of 2013, and the expanded service, which includes the 2-1-1 phone line, texting and web chat, was launched this June.

"Finding current information on appropriate and available services to meet day-to-day needs is often a very daunting task for many people, so a three-digit dial code connecting us to 24-by-7 support to find services is an effective 'front door' which makes navigation much easier," said Erica England, Direc-

tor of Development & Engagement, United Way of Saskatoon & Area.

Today, 211 Saskatchewan boasts over 5,000 listings that include non-clinical health services, government services and social services. Topics range from mental health and addictions to home, food and income information. The service is free and confidential.

"Many studies on issues affecting citizens of Saskatchewan have found service navigation to be a key challenge. While such a challenge is not unique to Saskatchewan, providing a 'one-stop shop' for easier access to services is a viable solution for our province," said England.

To make the 211 Saskatchewan program effective, the services are also grouped together based on the people seeking those services. This includes immigrants and Indigenous people, all age groups from children and families to young adults and seniors, and people with unique issues such as veter-



Seniors can call 2-1-1 to enquire about home support, transportation, social and recreational programs, as well as medical information such as where to find a pharmacy with a low cost payment plan. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

ans or people with disabilities. Service information is available in over 100 languages.

In 2017, over 100,000 people used the 211 Saskatchewan website.

"Given travel distances between communities in Saskatchewan, and the fact that many services tend to con-

centrate in larger communities, it is important and helpful for people trying to access services to be informed and equipped with current and accurate information about those services, such as operating hours, fees, eligibility criteria, waiting lists, etc.," said England.

211 Saskatchewan calls are answered by trained information and referral specialists. They are able to link callers to the best available information for them based on their criteria (age, location, etc.) using their searchable database. These specialists also provide a human contact, someone to

listen and compassion for every caller's unique questions. This is especially helpful to seniors in Saskatchewan, who often find themselves living in isolation and unsure of their options.

"Information is provided based on their needs and locations. When a senior is faced with more than one challenge or need for support, the 211 community navigator is a trained professional who will listen and help the senior find available services," said England.

Calls to 211 Saskatchewan from seniors include inquiries about home support, transportation, social and recreational programs, as well as medical information such as where to find a pharmacy with a low cost payment plan. Other enquiries relate to meeting basic needs, such as food programs and mental health, and where to find help when facing abuse or domestic violence.

Visit www.sk.211.ca to get started today.

THIS SECTION WAS CREATED BY CONTENT WORKS, POSTMEDIA'S COMMERCIAL CONTENT DIVISION.