

# 211 Launches in NB

FREDERICTON (GNB) – **211 NB**, has been launched by the provincial government in partnership with the federal government and the United Way to assist youth, seniors, and those requiring mental health support.

[Gov't of NB Press Release](#) (Oct 15, 2020)

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**This interview was conducted by the Saint John Priority Neighbourhoods community newspaper *Around the Block* – Re-printed here with permission.**

## **Randy Hatfield:**

*Randy Hatfield is the Executive Director of the Saint John Human Development Council (SJHDC), Saint John's social planning council. The HDC identifies and addresses social issues in Greater Saint John through research, information, coordination, and networking. ATB spoke with Randy about the 211 service now available to New Brunswickers.*

## **Please tell our readers: what is 211 and what's in it for them?**

When you don't know where to turn, help starts at 211. It is a free and confidential information service that connects people quickly to critical government, community, social and non-clinical health support. The CRTC has set aside those three numbers for information referral – 911 is emergency; 811 is health; 411 is directory information; 311 is municipal services; but 211 will connect you to information referral specialists, community navigators, who have access to a database of community and government services throughout the province. Rather than just providing basic information to a caller, they are trained to work with you to identify the issue, to look at resources that are available nearby, and to follow up with you to make sure that you received information that is appropriate and accurate. It really is the front door to help.

**So, if I'm hearing you correctly, 911 is if you have an emergency and you need a service, and 211 is if it's not an emergency but you need someone to help you understand where you could find help.**

That is correct. It's not uncommon to have a lot of calls related to where you can get food, for example. The community navigator who answers the phone doesn't just give you an address for a food bank and hang up; they ask questions to understand the full picture. The caller may need shelter and financial assistance as well, and not just food, for instance. In this way, they can match the callers' needs to available resources, referring them directly to an agency or an organization that can help. The beauty of 211 is that New Brunswickers can speak with a real person. This eliminates the stress of trying to wade through the changing information people are processing each day. It's available 24/7, with access to over 150 languages, and, to-date, calls are answered in less than 30 seconds.

## **How long has New Brunswick had 211?**

New Brunswick has never had 211 before October 2020. The HDC used to produce a Community Services Directory - a print directory of government and non-profit agencies and services - that people could read and use as a resource. In 2003, we created an electronic database of all our print directories and put it online, so an individual could go in and do a search for services in their community. But 211 is more than that; it is province-wide and has a telephone piece to it. We've always lacked the telephone piece in New Brunswick - the person who could listen to you, ask you questions, and help you find what you need.

## **So, what is happening now that's different?**

This is a COVID-related response to the need to connect people to services. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, it was launched thanks to funding from the federal government, in partnership with the United Ways of New Brunswick and the provincial government. This has two parts. First, it has provided resources for us to hire two specialists to put services that are comprehensive, province-wide and bilingual into a database. A 211 database includes websites, programs, locations, services, hours of operation, accessibility, accommodations - everything you could want to know about any program or service that is available to you. The database is the foundation. The second part is the telephone piece, which we've never been able to enjoy in New Brunswick. The phone is more accessible to many people who might need services. Not everybody can go online, not everyone knows how to navigate a database, but most of us can call 211 and be connected to a live person on the other end.

## **So, it sounds like the people who most need the information about the services haven't been able to get it easily, and now they will! Do we have 211 forever now?**

We are optimistic that 211 will continue. A strong case can be made that there is value to the Province, to New Brunswick's community non-profit organizations, and to citizens who need help knowing what services are available, where they are, and how they can access them.

## **How can the reader help 211 make that case?**

Use the service and talk about it. Spread the word. In the first four weeks, there have been hundreds of calls! The needs included emergency food access, questions about unemployment insurance, mental health, substance use disorder services, health care, basic needs, consumer services, environment, public health and safety...this award-winning service has proven its value in any province that has rolled it out. And COVID has taught us that people, particularly if self-isolating or observing public health requirements, still need information. Through 211, they can get it quickly and accurately.

## **So, if I am hearing you correctly, you would encourage readers to use the service because the more they use it, the more likely they are to get to keep it?**

That's exactly right. When a caller dials those three numbers and gets the assistance that they need, they're making the case for continuing the service and allowing New Brunswick to join the 211 family. It's free, it's confidential, and it's a 24/7 operation!