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# The Exchange

Texas Information and Referral Network

Spring 2001

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The Texas Information and  
Referral Network is a project of  
the Texas Health and Human  
Services Commission

## 211 in Texas

The Texas Public Utilities Commission (PUC) on March 20, 2001 approved new rules for the use of the 211 dialing code in Texas. This action by the PUC was in response to the July 2000 ruling by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and a petition for rulemaking filed by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

The FCC ruling assigned the 211 dialing code for use by community information and referral provider organizations nationwide. The 211 code will provide direct access to information about community services such as utility bill payment, housing assistance, food pantries, legal aid, mental health services, state agency services and programs, drug and alcohol abuse and hospice.

The PUC rule provides guidelines for the implementation of the 211 service in Texas. The Texas Information and Referral Network has built a statewide system that will provide the access through 211 to health and human services information. 211 calls will be free of charge for the caller.

### When can I call?

The 211 dialing code is not currently operational. 211 implementation plans call for phases beginning in 2002, contingent upon available funding. The Texas I&R Network will let you know when 211 is available in your area.

### Who will I call?

The Texas I&R Network is comprised of 25 Area Information Centers (AIC) in communities across Texas. The AICs will answer the 211 calls when the service is available. Right now calls can be made to the local telephone numbers for the AICs. The phone numbers for the AICs are included in this edition of the exchange.

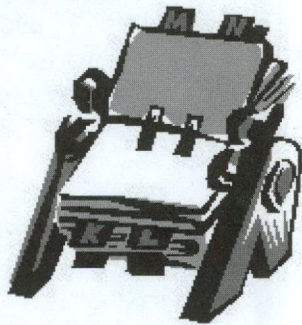
For more information on the 211 dialing code contact Judy Windler at 512-424-6540 or [judy.windler@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:judy.windler@hhsc.state.tx.us)



# New Members of the Network

## Beth Wick -- I&R Development Specialist

Beth Wick has joined the Texas I&R Network as the new I&R Development Specialist. Beth was formerly the Executive Director of the Community Council of the Rio Grande Valley, the Area Information Center for the Tip of Texas Region. Her primary responsibilities include identifying and developing new Area Information Centers; representing the Network in community and state meetings; and providing technical assistance and support to members of the Network.



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## New Area Information Centers

The **Deep East Texas AIC** is located in Jasper, Texas. This region includes the 12 counties of Angelina, Houston, Jasper, Nacogdoches, Newton, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, and Tyler. This program is part of the Deep East Texas Council of Government's Area Agency on Aging. **Director Holly Anderson** is assisted by staff members Lesa Reaves (database manager), and Alva Adkins and Jean Louis (I&R specialists). The Deep East Texas AIC has recently hosted two community provider meetings, established collaborative efforts to build and maintain the regional database of health and human services, publicized the availability of information and referral services in the community, and started plans to create and distribute a printed directory of community resources.

The **United Way of Greater Wichita Falls** covers the 11 counties of Archer, Baylor, Clay, Cottle, Foard, Hardemas, Jack, Montague, Wichita, Wilbarger, and Young. **Director Rene Moquin** is assisted by staff member Cher Stange. The United Way of Greater Wichita Falls is not currently providing information and referral services by telephone, however their helpline is scheduled to be rolled out this summer. A printed directory of health and human services in the North Texas region will be available in May.

With the addition of these two new members, the Texas I&R Network has designated 21 of the 25 planned Area Information Centers. The four remaining regions (North East Texas, Middle Rio Grande, South Texas, and West Central Texas) are not far behind. Announcements should be made by the end of 2001. This will complete the Task Force goal of organizing the state into 25 regional area information centers with designated key providers in the communities that coordinated and disseminate information about available health and human services. Each of these designated AICs have agreed to comply with the Task Force roles and responsibilities, helping to ensure professional and effective delivery of information and referral throughout the network.







**Alamo Region**

(210) 227-4357  
UW of San Antonio and Bexar County  
PO Box 898, San Antonio 78293

**Bryan/College Station Region**

(979) 595-1760  
UW of Brazos Valley  
3370 S. Texas Ave, Bryan 77802

**Central Texas Region**

(254) 770-6842  
Central Texas Information and Referral  
PO Box 450, Belton 76513

**Coastal Bend Region**

(361) 882-4636 or (800) 421-4636  
UW of the Coastal Bend- INFO\*LINE  
PO Box 9011, Corpus Christi 78469

**Concho Valley Region**

(915) 942-4357  
UW - First Call for Help  
PO Box 3710, San Angelo 76902

**Deep East Texas**

(800) 435-3377  
Deep East Texas Area Information Center  
274 East Lamar Street  
Jasper, 75951

**East Texas Region**

(903) 534-9977  
UW of Tyler/Smith County - INFO LINE  
4000 Southpark Drive, Tyler 75703

**Golden Crescent Region**

(800) 574-9745  
Golden Crescent Area Information Center  
PO Box 2028, Victoria 77902

**Gulf Coast Region**

(713) 957-4357 or (800) 833-5948  
UW of the Texas Gulf Coast  
PO Box 924507, Houston 77292-4507

**Heart of Texas Region**

(254) 299-1123  
CareLinc Network  
5400 Bosque Blvd, Ste 200, Waco 76710

**Middle Rio Grande Region**

Under Development

**North Central Texas Dallas Region**

(214) 379-4357  
Community Council of Greater Dallas  
400 N. Paul St, Ste 200, Dallas 75201

**North Central Texas Fort Worth Region**

(817) 258-8100  
UW - First Call for Help  
210 E. Ninth St, Fort Worth 76102-6494

**North East Texas Region**

Under Development

**North Texas Region**

(940) 322-8638  
UW of Greater Wichita Falls  
P.O. Box 660, Wichita Falls 76307

**Panhandle Region**

(806) 373-2662  
UW Helpline  
200 South Tyler, Amarillo 79101

**Permian Basin**

(915) 682-4357  
Casa de Amigos  
1101 E. Garden Lane, Midland 79701

**South Central Texas Region**

(512) 324-1899  
UW - First Call For Help  
PO Box 1925, Austin 78767

**South Plains Region**

(806) 765-6262  
CONTACT Lubbock  
PO Box 6477, Lubbock 79493

**South Texas Region**

Under Development.

**Southeast Texas Region**

(409) 721-5465 or (800) 395 5465  
LinkAGE Access Services  
PO Drawer 1387, Nederland 77627

**Texoma Region**

(903) 813-3558 or (866) 283-9662  
Texoma Area Information and Access Center  
3201 Texoma Pkwy, #290 Sherman 75090

**Tip of Texas Region**

(956) 447-4636 or (877) 404-4636  
Community Council /Rio Grande Valley  
PO Box 182, Weslaco TX 78596

**Upper Rio Grande Valley Region**

(915) 533-0998 or (800) 333-7082  
Rio Grande Area Information Center  
1100 N. Stanton, Ste 610, El Paso 79902

**West Central Texas Region**

Under Development

**Texas Information and Referral Network**

(512) 424-6520  
PO Box 13247, Austin 78711  
<http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/tirn/tirhome.htm>





## **Internet Project Kickoff**

On March 8, 2001, Area Information Center representatives and Health and Human Services Commission staff members met in Austin to launch the kick-off of a project to build and implement an Internet-based database of health and human services in Texas.

Consumers and professionals will be able to access accurate, current, and comprehensive information about available services.

The website will be up and running by September, 2001. The initial version will include data from 17 of the 25 AICs, with the remaining regional sites incorporated by 2002. More details about this project will be published in the next issue of *The Exchange*.

## **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Directories Available**

The 2001 Directory listing all 65 ECI programs in Texas, as well as other parent-friendly resources is now available. The directory includes information on ECI eligibility, a description of services, assistance in locating local services, as well as a list of state and national resources available for families with children with disabilities. To obtain a directory or for more information, call the ECI Care Line at 1-800-250-2246, TDD/TTY (512) 424-6770, Or, visit the web site at <http://www.eci.state.tx.us>

## **Utility and Rental Assistance are Top Service Requests in 2000**

Several of the Texas I&R Network's Area Information Centers (AIC) were surveyed in February for a report of their top two service requests in 2000. The category most often cited was financial aid and support. Within that category, most frequently requested services were for utility and rental assistance. These statistics aren't a surprise, but we wanted to place a face on these callers so we asked the AICs two questions : Who are these callers? Where are these calls referred?

The majority of callers are receiving ongoing assistance from several government sources such as food stamps, Medicaid, Disability, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). However, the survey reported a rise in callers requesting assistance for the first time because of a recent crisis such as job loss or sudden illness. First time callers generally locate help within the county and municipal assistance programs. Subsequent calls are often referred to faith based charitable organizations. These organizations often have limited and sporadic funding, resulting in unmet needs. In light of these reports, it quickly becomes apparent that for many Texans, finding adequate funding for the basic needs of shelter and utilities continues to be a struggle.

Better coordination of strategic planning to address these individuals and families in need may be just around the corner. With the implementation of the Internet-based database system, and eventually the 211 dialing code, the Texas I&R Network will be able to more clearly identify what services are needed by Texans and what services are available. This data can be consolidated on a regional and statewide basis, so that community planners can make better decisions about how to make responsible use of limited resources.



# Resources

## Training and Networking Opportunities

Improve the professionalism of you and your information and referral staff by attending one or both of these upcoming training conferences. The Alliance of Information & Referral Systems (AIRS) conference "**Collaboration: the Competitive Edge**" will be held in Orlando, Florida, **on May 21-24, 2001**. The Texas Alliance of Information & Referral Systems (TAIRS) conference "**ACCESSING Texas.....Two Steppin into 2001**" in Fort Worth, Texas, **August 8-10**.

Both conferences will offer daylong intensive workshops, a chance to take the Certified Information & Referral (CIRS) and Certified Resource Specialist (CRS) examinations, as well as a variety of workshops focused on skills, abilities, knowledge and the technology necessary to maximize the strengths of our programs and better serve our communities through Information & Referral. To find out more about these opportunities contact: AIRS at (206) 632-2477 or TAIRS, Vicki Mize, at (817) 258-8109.

## Four Ways to Find Help in Texas

The Texas Information and Referral Network provides four resources to help individuals access information about health and human services in Texas.

The first method is our network of **Area Information Centers**. These agencies have been designated as the regional coordinators for the statewide information and referral network. A list of AICs is included on pages 3 and 4 of this issue of Exchange.

Second, our directory "**Finding Help in Texas**" lists agencies that provide an information and referral service in Texas. This is available on the Texas I&R Network as a searchable database.

Also available as an online database is **Health and Human Services : A Reference Guide**. This directory profiles over 220 state agency programs and includes information about contact information, description, services provided, eligibility criteria, and authorizing statutes.

The fourth product is a listing of **state agency toll free hotlines**. All of these resources can be accessed through our website at <http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/firn/firhome.htm> or by calling (512) 424-6520.

## AIC Accreditation Status Report

Area Information Centers are required to start the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) accreditation process within one year of being designated as an AIC. These standards address all aspects of information and referral service operation, including service delivery, the resource database, reports and measures, cooperative relationships and organizational requirements. The Texas I&R Network Task Force required accreditation to ensure a high level of customer service for Texans who need help.

There are currently six accredited information and referral agencies in the United States, two of which are from Texas: the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast and the Southeast Texas Area Agency on Aging. Nine of the Area Information Centers have taken the first step towards accreditation, and are working hard to document their policies and procedures. Two additional agencies (Community Council of Greater Dallas and the Community Council of the Rio Grande Valley) have completed this step and are preparing for an on-site review by AIRS representatives.