

**BC211**  
**BACKGROUND**  
April 19, 2016

---

- In 1953, the original predecessor to bc211 began under the name Community Information Service which published the first edition of the Directory of Health, Welfare and Recreation services in Metro Vancouver. It is known as the Red Book and updated annually.
- In 1997, the first help line branded as 211 was launched in 1997 by United Way Metro Atlanta. There are now 243 help lines across USA branded as 211, offering 90% coverage in America.
- In 2001, United Way/Centraide Canada and other partners won approval from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to use 211 for community, social, government and non-clinical health information.
- United Way agencies across the country responded to the needs for trusted, centralized human services information and referral services and provided core support. The network now includes: Alberta 211, Quebec 211, Ontario 211, New Brunswick 211 (online only), Nova Scotia 211, Nunavut 211, Saskatchewan 211 (online only) and bc211 (to date: phone, text and website directory specific to Metro Vancouver, Squamish-Lillooet, Sunshine Coast and the Fraser Valley Regional Districts). Manitoba runs a similar program for decades, called Contact Community Information, with support from the United Way of Winnipeg.
- In 2010, bc211 became the operating name of the British Columbia Services Society, with representation by United Way Lower Mainland and stakeholders on their board of directors, for annual returns for enhanced transparency.
- bc211 was the first Canadian 211 to be accredited through the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems to meet strict criteria for data management and staffing roles.
- The British Columbia Services Society now receives contributions from the provincial government and City of Vancouver to offer specialized subsets of the 211 database for a Victim Information Line, Alcohol and Drug TRYline, Problem Gambling Help Line, Youth Against Violence Line and the Shelter and Street Help Line.
- bc211 coverage is currently limited to the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, Squamish-Lillooet and the Sunshine Coast. In the 2015/16 fiscal year, bc211 received 236,000 visits to the online resource directory and saw a 40% increase in queries from the previous year. Bc211 also answered 56,000 phone calls, over 350 text messages and made 66,000 referrals to community agencies for help. The top 3 reasons for calling bc211: housing and homelessness, substance use and violence/domestic abuse.