WIN 2-1-1: The Development of Evaluation Measures for 2-1-1 Information & Retrieval Systems

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Overview
Community Information and Referral (I&R) networks have played an important role in making health and human service information available for nearly 50 years. Recent efforts have been made by the United Way of America (UWA) and the Alliance for Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) to expand the reach of community information and referral networks through a designated 2-1-1 national dialing code. Their efforts have resulted in one of the largest information-intensive efforts ever launched in American history. Since the first 2-1-1 number was implemented by the United Way of Atlanta in 1997 there have been 141 active 2-1-1 systems implemented in 29 states. This effort has been supported by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), who designated 2-1-1 as the national dialing code for health and human services information and referral. It was further supported when, on June 12, 2002, President Bush signed into law the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-188) allowing the use of funds from state block grants to establish 2-1-1 systems. The “Calling for 2-1-1 Act,” which is still pending in Congress, would earmark $200 million annually from the U.S. Department of Commerce to develop and operate 2-1-1 I&R systems nationwide.

Research Questions
In order to determine the value of the 2-1-1 systems currently implemented federal and state funding agencies are mandating benefit-cost studies. In order to conduct sound benefit-cost analysis, valid measures need to be developed to better understand the use of this information. The current study was commissioned by the Washington Information Network 2-1-1 for the purpose of developing measures for evaluating the 2-1-1 service.

Method
• The research team visited the 211info call center in Portland, Oregon, in December 2004 and March 2005 to gather documents and conduct interviews with staff.
• Interviews were conducted with 7 staff members (including the director).
• In March-April 2005, a 211info staff member conducted 30 follow-up interviews (“call-backs”) with earlier callers (also referred to as “users” throughout this report).

Future Work
• Continuous Outcome Assessment
• In-Depth Interview with 2-1-1 Callers
• Research with Referral Service Providers
• Systemic Impact of 2-1-1 Services
• WIN 2-1-1 and a National Outcome Registry

IBEC Logic Model
Based on our research findings and a systems approach to the problem we developed a logic model to reflect inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes associated with delivering 2-1-1 services. We expanded the definition of the inputs traditionally defined as part of delivering 2-1-1 services. By making these values explicit at the front-end of our logic model we recognize the need to develop measures that value these inputs in later stages of the logic model.

Findings/Recommendations:
• Establish information sharing relationships with referral agencies - The capability to describe cost-benefit in terms of referral agencies is predicated on obtaining baseline information regarding the call activity of each organization.
• Continuous follow-up interviews with callers - Subsequent contact with clients should take two forms. 1) Brief “call-back” interviews will yield information about whether clients are acting on the referrals they’re given, whether they are able to solve the problem which prompted the call, how many people benefited from the referral, the affective state of the client, and the stage of crisis the client is experiencing. 2) More in-depth interviews should be conducted to investigate the social context of clients’ problems and gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, problem-solving skills, and application of strategies and resources discussed during the information intervention.

For more information, visit “Information Behavior in Everyday Contexts (IBEC)” at ibec.ischool.washington.edu