

June 2007 Marks the Fifth Anniversary of 211 in Canada



On June 13, 2002, Findhelp Information Services answered the first 211 call in Canada launching Toronto's landmark 211 service, and five years of setting and exceeding benchmarks for information and referral in North America.

211 would not have been possible without the support of founding partners: the United Way of Greater Toronto, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the City of Toronto, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

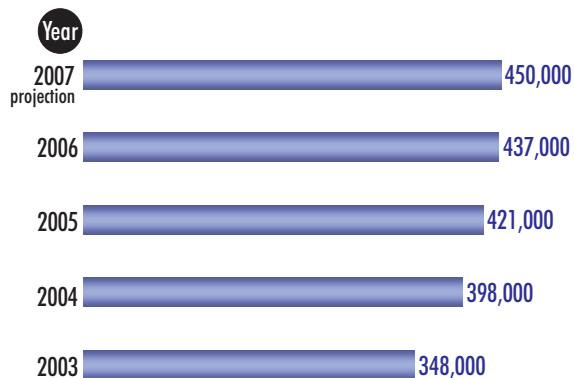
Representing an important part of phase 3 of 211 in Ontario, 211Ontario.ca will be a free and publicly accessible bilingual web directory of over 60,000 community, health and social programs and services available throughout Ontario.

Funded through a strategic investment of \$3M from Strengthening Our Partnerships, a program of the Ministry of Finance, and with support from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Findhelp Information Services is the transfer payment agency responsible for the project, and work will take place from April 2006 to March 2009.

This briefing paper captures some of the highlights of the last five years and the goals for the years ahead. For a complete report, please refer to the 211 Ontario 2006 Annual Report, which includes detailed statistics, case studies and survey outcomes.

211 Calls Received by Findhelp

Includes extended hours service for Niagara Region and Simcoe County (November 2005) and Halton Region (June 2007).



Online access to information

Concurrent with the highly publicized launch of Toronto's 211 phone service, Findhelp launched www.211Toronto.ca, an online directory of over 20,000 community, social, health and related government services. 211Toronto.ca proved to be an exciting proof of concept for both the comprehensiveness and reliability of the database, and the robust, scalable web application.

Findhelp coordinates province-wide data with over 40 data partners that collect and maintain data in large and small communities across Ontario. The last five years have been a period of increased editorial collaboration resulting in many shared successes as demonstrated by the launch of numerous online directories. Mutual benefit has been achieved by collaboration on common standards such as inclusion policies, naming standards and terms of use. A new survey of data partners is being conducted in 2007 to better understand the sector's collective strength and capacity.

Through a sustained service level partnership between Findhelp and the City of Toronto, the City provides the Oracle® hosting environment for the servers that deliver robust web-based 211 directories and related portals. Findhelp provides community services data that is used in the development of the city's valuable community mapping services.

211 Websites and Portals

January 2008 | 211Ontario.ca

- Settlement.Org Newcomer Portal

2007 | 211Ontario.ca

- Fully searchable Ontario directory
- Settlement.Org Ontario Portal

June 2007 | 211Halton.ca

- 211 local directory

March 2007 | 211Ontario.ca

- Directory of Justice Services and Resources in Ontario

November 2005 | 211SimcoeCounty.ca

- 211 local directory

November 2005 | 211Niagara.ca

- 211 local directory

October 2005 | 211Ontario.ca

- Inventory of Programs and Services leading to employment of Training Boards of Ontario

March 2005 | 211Ontario.ca

- Ontario Aboriginal Calendar and Services Directory
- Directory of Youth Justice Services in Ontario

August 2004 | 211Toronto.ca

- HospitalityWorks.ca, employment and support service

March 2004 | 211Toronto.ca

- Women's Shelter and Support

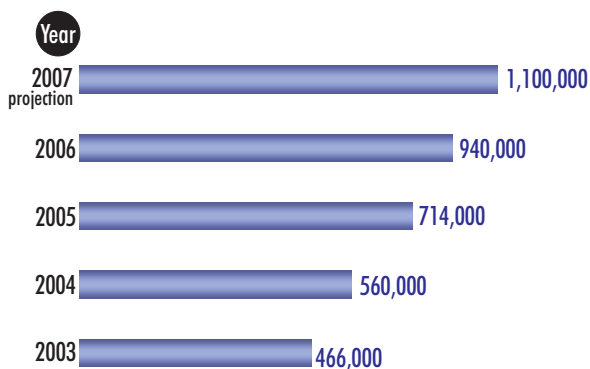
December 2003 | 211Ontario.ca

- Access to Professions and Trades in Ontario for Foreign Trained Professionals

June 2002 | 211Toronto.ca

- 211 local directory
- Possibilities: Toronto's first online Employment Resource Centre
- Settlement.Org Toronto Portal

211 Website Visits



Collaboration and Leadership

Findhelp subscribes to a business model based on sharing and openness of knowledge and resources, that propels creative thinking and innovation, and amplifies the benefits to all stakeholders including end users. Findhelp recognizes that all organizations delivering 211 services are invested in each other's success and continues to be very interested in sharing knowledge and experience to help others develop effective 211 services.

Building on a solid foundation of nearly 50 years of strong sectoral relationships, Findhelp remains the flagship information and referral provider in Canada and has organized seminal events for the sector nationally and in Ontario. The most recent was the 211Ontario.ca Training and Partnership Conference held in March 2007 which 72 participants from 38 organizations attended. In addition to hosting two national conferences, Findhelp has also provided key support for conferences in Ottawa (2002), Vancouver (2005), Niagara Region (2006) and Winnipeg (2007).

Key Events

March 2007 | Provincial

211Ontario.ca Training and Partnership Conference

February 2006 | Provincial

211 Ontario Project Symposium

October 2004 | National

Canadian Community Information and Referral Conference, St Lawrence Hall, Toronto

December 2003 | National

Canadian Community Information and Referral Conference, Metro Hall, Toronto

Findhelp is accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), the international standards body for information and referral. In addition to meeting rigorous AIRS standards, Findhelp has built bilingual capacity, and supports equitable access to services for Francophones. As well as French, Findhelp continues its commitment to meeting the needs of newcomers, with many languages directly spoken by counsellors, and further support provided through a local language bank coordinated by Findhelp, and access to a three-way interpretation service as needed.

The agency frequently produces or collaborates on reports documenting findings and experience, and manages several websites on behalf of the community of service providers (www.informcanada.ca, www.informontario.on.ca, www.211Canada.ca). Weblogs such as www.211.ca are a valuable and accessible resource for all stakeholders, and all reports are made publicly accessible on these sites.

Key Reports and Publications

March 2007 | 211Ontario.ca Report on Community Consultation

February 2006 | 211 Immediate Assistance and Long Term Support

February 2006 | 211: Advancing the Provincial Consolidated Vision, Phase 2

September 2003 | 211 Service Reassures Callers During August 2003 Blackout

July 2003 | 211 for All Ontario Bringing People and Services Together, Parts 1 and 2

June 2003 (and every year) | 211 Annual Report

January 2003 | 211 Evaluation Plan

InformCanada and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS)

Findhelp has consistently and actively partnered with the provincial and national associations, InformOntario and InformCanada, to move information and referral initiatives forward. On behalf of InformCanada, Findhelp has developed a three year, Canada-wide implementation business plan for the Canadian Taxonomy of Human Services. Findhelp is active in the North American organization responsible for information and referral standards (AIRS), participating in the Standards and Accreditation Committee, Technology Committee and 211 Leadership Council.

IRON

Since spring 2004 Community Connection (Collingwood), Findhelp Information Services and Information Niagara have worked very closely together, and since October 2005 have operated as a consolidated system in the delivery of 211. The three organizations formalized their work together in a collaborative body known as the Information and Referral Operators' Network (IRON), to strengthen ongoing effectiveness and capacity. It is anticipated that other organizations will join IRON, especially 211 implementation representatives, as they integrate into a consolidated 211 system.

211Ontario.ca project

211Ontario.ca represents the collective vision of Ontario information and referral providers, who are dedicated to providing information about community, social, health and related government services. Information that is collected and maintained by editors in communities throughout Ontario is being coordinated into a single online database that can be searched by keyword, topic or region.



The project is responsible for the development of the Ontario version of the new bilingual Canadian Taxonomy of Human Services in partnership with 211LA County, the organization that has developed the American version, and

InformCanada. The Taxonomy will be available to human services editors from all sectors by subscription through InformCanada. The English version was available in May 2007, and the Canadian French Taxonomy will be available by the end of 2007.

211Ontario.ca will launch as a publicly accessible, bilingual online directory in late 2007. Taxonomy development, training, user testing and standards work will continue through to March 2009.

The 18 communities across Ontario engaged in a consultation in late 2006 reached a consensus that an online province-wide information resource must have inherent local relevancy and credibility. To achieve that relevancy it must meet the geographic requirements of provincial, regional and local stakeholders and users, and it must also be adaptable to reflect the diversity and meet the unique information needs of specific communities.

Software

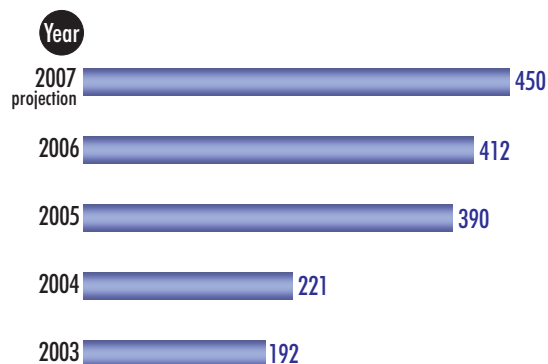
With infrastructure funding from Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Findhelp developed the robust, scalable, enterprise class Oracle® application that supports searchable online information and referral directories, best represented by 211 websites. Findhelp makes enhancements to the application as required for new projects, services and user groups. Findhelp also works very closely with Community Information Online Consortium (CIOC), the community-based, non-profit organization that represents a user group of over 80% of information and referral providers in Ontario. CIOC software is used to input and manage human services data, which is uploaded into the Oracle® system on a scheduled basis.

Standards, Training and Outreach

Findhelp's role as a training organization has continued to expand. Highlights over the last 5 years include:

- 15 preparatory training sessions for Certified Information and Referral Specialists (CIRS)
- Information & Referral Training for 1150 participants from across Ontario, including settlement workers (800), staff at Community Care Access Centres (220) and Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (50), and as part of Integrated Response Training for the Toronto Development Services Sector (80).
- 25 one and two day workshops for 420 participants on Information, Referral and Communication Skills, Understanding the Human Services System, and Using the Internet as an I&R Provider
- Development of customized curriculums for Service Ontario Contact Centres, settlement workers and the developmental services sector
- Annually between 55 and 80 conference and exhibit presentations, as well as 12 presentations at AIRS Conferences
- Annually hundreds of outreach visits and presentations to language classes, job fairs, and community groups and forums.

Presentation and Outreach Activities



Facilities

In August 2006, the agency's 80 staff moved to new, purpose-built premises. Improvements include upgraded workstations, additional desks and training rooms, and a security controlled 24-hour environment. The new centre also allows for significant call centre expansion enabling Findhelp to provide support to other 211 providers in, for example, extended-hours 211 service. A new automatic call distribution system will be procured in 2007.

Strategic Goals 2007-2010

The strategic goals for 2007 to 2010 will build on Findhelp's reputation, expertise and core competencies to achieve the agency's mission. Findhelp helps people find the community, social, health and related government services they need, and supports the work of human services professionals in meeting client needs.

Findhelp's service priorities are focused on underserved groups, including vulnerable citizens and all people who face barriers to accessing services, as well as other members of the public.

1. Centre of Excellence: Findhelp will continue to build its reputation as a centre of excellence by focusing on developing and enhancing its internal environment.

2. I&R Leadership: Findhelp will continue to demonstrate leadership through excellence in service provision, development of best practices, and dedication to publicly representing and promoting I&R in Canada.

3. Premier Provider of I&R Services and Training: Findhelp will deliver quality, cost-effective I&R service and training solutions for the broader human services sector.

4. Collaboration and Partnerships: Findhelp will participate in mutual planning and explore areas for innovation and collaboration when it can lead to improved availability and quality of information about human services.

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July 27, 2007 | Version 2