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211 Iowa to help Iowans, ages 65+, make COVID-19 vaccination appointments

Gov. Reynolds taps 211 Iowa as State COVID-19 Vaccine Navigators to bridge the gap between people and the vaccinations

Des Moines — Gov. Kim Reynolds has announced a partnership with 211 Iowa to provide vaccine navigation services for Iowans ages 65+. The partnership between 211 Iowa and the Iowa Dept. of Health will launch March 9, 2021. **Any Iowan, age 65+, simply calls 211 for assistance in making an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccination.**

211 will continue to serve as the COVID-19 Hotline in addition to expanding its role to help Iowa residents in Tier 1B navigate the COVID-19 vaccine process. 211 Iowa's expanded role is a partnership with the state of Iowa, Hy-Vee and the Area Agencies on Aging – also known as the Triple A's (AAA's). 211 Iowa's primary functions in the partnership will include data entry into shared documents and/or shared database and scheduling vaccine appointments for Iowa residents.

The 211 call specialists will ask for seniors' names and age or birthdates, but will not ask for social security numbers, insurance or financial information.

Starting March 9, 211 Iowa will begin taking calls from Iowans, 65 and older, who need assistance navigating the vaccine process. This phase will extend through the balance of the calendar year and over time, and as more vaccine becomes available, additional groups of Iowans who need help navigating the vaccine process will be able to contact 211 for assistance. Call specialists will be available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day.

At this time, only Iowans, 65 and older, are eligible for this service from 211. During the process, 211 Vaccine Navigators will have the ability to schedule older Iowans into vaccine appointments, through a private scheduling portal, at Hy-Vee Pharmacies. Additional pharmacies may take part in this partnership in the future but for now, the program is exclusively with Hy-Vee.

In order to accommodate the expected call volume, 211 Iowa will be adding an additional 75 temporary staff for the next two months. 211 offers a callback feature so callers can receive a return call instead of waiting on hold. Services are available in 150+ languages through Language Line translation.

“All temporary staff will be dedicated to vaccine navigation,” said Melissa McCoy, Iowa's 211 director. “Our regular 211 staff will remain focused on the traditional 211 service and the COVID-19 Hotline.”

McCoy said staffing needs will continue to be evaluated closely and either increase or decrease according to need/usage.

“We believe this program further solidifies the value 211 brings to Iowa residents — and we are happy to be able to continue to serve our state,” said Deann Cook, executive director of United Ways of Iowa. “We understand the frustration older adults without online skills and access have experienced when trying to schedule an appointment. This service will fill that gap, and we believe it will be welcome support for many Iowans and their families.”

211 Iowa is a free statewide information and referral service available to residents in all 99 counties. Iowans can call, text, use the mobile app, or [211iowa.org](https://www.211iowa.org) website any time of day on any day of the year to get connected to essential resources and programs that can help them meet their current need. 211 Iowa has served as the state’s official COVID-19 hotline since March of 2020.

Within the last year, 211 Iowa has connected more individuals with help and resources than ever before. In fact, since March 2020 when 211 Iowa was tapped to be the official COVID hotline, 211 usage has **skyrocketed** going up more than 81% in 2020, compared to the previous year. **More than 52%** of the to **138,849** contacts (both calls and texts) made in 2020 **were COVID-19 related (72,734 COVID-related in total)**. Those figures do not include users who accessed information using the 211 Iowa app or [website](#).

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ABOUT 211 IOWA

There may be a time that you or someone you know needs help, but don't know exactly what kind of assistance is available — let alone how to access it. 211 is where you go when you don't know where to turn for help, acting as a single point of contact to thousands of social service programs. 211 can assist by helping to clarify your personal situation and then utilizing an extensive up-to-date database to determine the best resource(s) for you. 211 is a free, comprehensive information and referral system linking Iowa and Nebraska residents to health and human service programs, community services, disaster services and governmental programs. 211 is a one-stop source of information for people looking for services.