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**SURGE IN UNITED WAY HELPLINE CALLS CAUSED BY
SHIFTING ECONOMY IN CENTRAL TEXAS**

Calls Increase by 30 percent for Basic Needs Assistance

AUSTIN, Texas – Feb. 10, 2010 – The newly unemployed, underemployed and anxious are creating a surge in calls to the United Way helpline (2-1-1) in Austin, as well as around the country. Recognizing its vital role in the community, United Way Capital Area and 2-1-1 Texas are joining the nationwide celebration of 2-1-1 day on Feb. 11.

The day's purpose is to bring attention to the helpline as a valuable community resource. 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline is a free, confidential, multilingual resource available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The helpline is available by phone or as a resource database online, providing information and referrals to health and human service agencies, faith-based organizations, disaster relief resources, and volunteer opportunities. The local 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline is collaboration between the Texas Health and Human Service Commission and United Way Capital Area.

Last year, Central Texans placed nearly 247,000 calls to 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline, an increase of 30 percent year-over-year and more than 1 million calls since it began operating in 2002. 2-1-1 Centers across the nation answered more than 15.7 million calls.

Locally, 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline saw a 50 percent increase in assistance and referrals for health and dental needs, a 26 percent increase in food and housing requests and a 20 percent increase in mental health referrals. In partnership with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline is the point of contact for information on the H1N1 Flu season.

2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline also partners with Foundation Communities each year to bring millions of dollars back to Central Texans by helping eligible residents file their taxes free of charge. In 2009, 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline answered 14,500 community tax center calls. More than 17,000 people took advantage of the tax preparation program saving more than \$2 million in fees and netting more than \$43 million in refunds and credits.

As the current recession continues and more people are laid off or have their hours reduced, they need somewhere to turn for help. 2-1-1s around the country are reporting that calls from these newly unemployed or newly underemployed are more complex, take more time and require additional explanation to navigate the complicated maze of available services. In fact, in a January survey¹, 86% of 2-1-1s across the country reported receiving more calls from callers who have never used 2-1-1 before. Furthermore, approximately 90% report received more calls from callers who have never before accessed any form of basic needs services (food pantries, rent assistance, utility assistance, public assistance benefits).

In order to continue answering these vital calls, federal legislation - the Calling for 2-1-1 Act - is in the works to create a federal grant program to match private resources for 2-1-1.

About United Way Capital Area

United Way Capital Area is working hard to advance the common good by focusing on the building blocks of a better life: education, financial stability and health. UWCA helps individuals and families in need and works to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place. Our vision in Central Texas is a caring community where the opportunity to fulfill human potential is always within reach. For more information, please visit www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org.

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