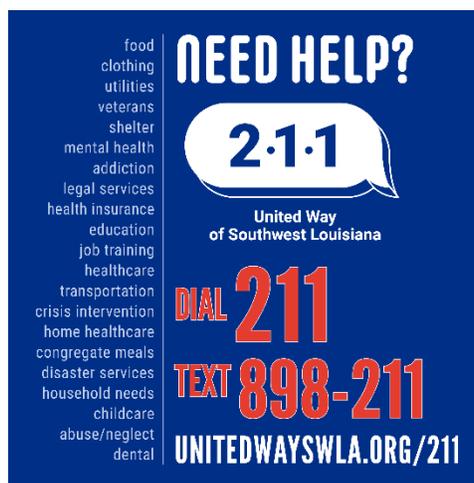




FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United Way of SWLA Bracing For Coronavirus Impact *Worldwide agency in touch with state and national leaders on the global pandemic*



LAKE CHARLES, LA, March 13 – United Way of Southwest Louisiana is warning the community that scam artists are trying to take advantage of nonprofits and consumers during heightened attention to the coronavirus. “We’ve got 80 years of experience handling community crisis large and small,” Denise Durel, president and CEO, said. “One thing that we always see is fraudulent individuals and entities trying to take advantage of vulnerable people during times of heightened worry and fear.”

Information about COVID-19, which has now been classified by the World Health Organization as a “global pandemic,” is evolving every hour and the United Way of Southwest Louisiana is now partnering with the Louisiana Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control to to provide up to date information to the public through its through it crisis relay service “211.”

Citizens can dial 211 or text 898-211 (keyword: LACOVID) to ask questions and/or access official information regarding the coronavirus including statistics and community resources for healthcare assistance. United Way’s accredited call specialists will have the most up-to-date information.

With Louisiana 211 now equipped and trained to answer questions from the public, the Louisiana Department of Health is asking residents to call 211 instead of the current general information line. Multilingual and hearing impaired services are also provided on 211.



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In addition to being able to call the Louisiana 211 and to sign up for text messaging, residents can get written answers to the most-asked questions by concerned citizens on unitedwayswla.org/coronavirus.

Over the past week, the call volume to LDH's general information line, that was only available during business hours, has increased from several calls a day to several hundred calls.

Dr. Alex Billioux, assistant secretary for LDH's Office of Public Health, said this change will give citizens the best way to get information any time of the day or night.

"The Louisiana 211 statewide network is established as the public's first and best source to connect callers with critical information about health and human services," Billioux said, "This expertise ensures that citizens can talk to a person who is trained to answer their questions 24 hours a day."

This week, LDH provided Louisiana 211 with a comprehensive list of questions that have come into the original information telephone line. These include questions about testing for coronavirus, symptoms and treatment and when to access medical help. Answers to all questions were provided by LDH's medical leadership team.

United Way of Southwest Louisiana has provided the 211 service to the five parish Southwest Louisiana area since 2017.

For more information on United Way of Southwest Louisiana, visit unitedwayswla.org or call 337.433.1088.

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