As of December 1, United Way Worldwide’s COVID-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund has raised more than $57.3 million for pandemic response efforts, powering essential work in communities in the U.S. and around the world. United Way and its network of local partners helped to ensure access to critical information through 211 and aid for families and people who were in need of services like food, shelter, emergency utility assistance and more. Together, we helped families stay in their homes, kept people fed, supported students’ virtual learning and helped our most vulnerable neighbors stay healthy and safe.

We don’t know how long the pandemic will last, but we know it will take time for people to get back on their feet. United Way will be there every step of the way, working with partners to address immediate needs and fill gaps quickly, and helping communities rebuild to become stronger, more equitable and more resilient. This work looks different in each community, based on need and existing resources.

Through the United Way Worldwide COVID-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund, we reached over 27 million people, providing critical aid and relief. Based on calls to 211, the biggest needs have been rent, utilities and food, so United Way and its partners have stepped up to help people cope in these tough times.
Providing health services and support to our communities took on urgent importance during COVID-19. United Way worked with our local partners to offer accurate information, preventative testing, health kits and other wraparound supports to those experiencing health needs.

We also supported those on the front lines. United Way of the East Tennessee Highlands partnered with the Appalachia Service Project (in Johnson City, TN) to install plexiglass separators between staff and patients at the local health center, a testing site for COVID-19, to protect them from the transmission of the virus.

Essential to our United Ways’ response work was focusing on populations already at higher risk and those with barriers to accessing healthcare. In Pascagoula, MS, United Way for Jackson & George Counties partnered with the two free medical clinics in the area that serve populations with multiple comorbidities, who are at higher risk of hospitalization and death if they contract COVID-19. The clinics expanded their existing services to help patients lower their weight and blood pressure and better manage their diabetes, giving these patients a better chance of surviving the virus and improving their overall quality of life.

The pandemic had a trickle-down effect on individuals already dealing with healthcare challenges. Joe, a 60-year-old homeless man, was awaiting a liver transplant when the virus started to limit hospital capacity in his area. United Way of the Dutchess-Orange Region, in Poughkeepsie, NY, had previously partnered with local agencies to secure funding for Joe’s surgery and life-saving medications. When Joe’s transplant was postponed due to COVID-19, he needed to remain on multiple, expensive prescriptions to ensure his liver function. Through United Way funds, the local partner was able to continue to help Joe access his medications until his transplant was rescheduled a couple of months later.

In India, United Ways focused on meeting essential needs, providing multi-week supplies of healthy and fresh food essentials, as well as basic sanitation items. They brought mobile handwashing stations into areas without access to running water, and taught residents in the local dialects about the importance of mask wearing, social distancing and handwashing techniques to slow the spread of COVID-19. They have also filled a critical response role by supplying PPE, hand sanitizing stations and ventilators to local healthcare providers.

The local United Ways who received funding from the UWW COVID-19 Community Response & Recovery Fund provided over 852,000 people with health supplies and assisted with payment of more than 18,000 medical bills. They also helped connect people to mental health services, with over 113,000 people receiving mental health counseling.
FOOD ASSISTANCE

As businesses shut down and people lost wages, feeding the family became the most pressing need. Food insecurity has doubled overall from pre-pandemic levels and has tripled among households with children. Black and Latinx households struggled even more, experiencing food insecurity at about twice the rate of white households. Many families had to seek help from food pantries for the first time.

Claire and her family experienced an unprecedented challenge when both she and her husband were laid off in the midst of the pandemic; they quickly burned through their savings to continue paying their bills and put food on the table for their three children. Local organizations in Daytona Beach, FL, in partnership with United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, provided food and covered utility bills for Claire’s family when they needed it most. After her experience, Claire said, “I am so amazed at the food provided and we can’t thank you enough. This is the support we needed to figure out our next steps as a family.”

In Niagara, Ontario, United Way Niagara has done whatever it takes to make sure vulnerable children and their families don’t go hungry during the pandemic, like securing and delivering $50,000 worth of food to pantries and foodbanks across eight cities and counties. After their weekly After School Matters program was forced to close, they refocused their efforts and started delivering food and care packages to the families of the 200 children who participate in the program, ensuring that these families continue to receive the care they need.

A common thread for United Ways who received support from the UWW COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund was providing food assistance—both to individuals and families, and to food pantries struggling with increasing demand. Throughout the pandemic, United Ways have served over 33.2 million meals and provided food assistance to more than 6.5 million people.
RENT AND UTILITIES ASSISTANCE

For anyone already struggling to get by, the COVID-19 pandemic was a true crisis. Millions were laid off or furloughed, losing hours and wages. Research shows the majority of Americans have little or no savings; one unexpected bill can knock the average family off a stable financial pathway. Over and over again, United Way stepped up to help individuals and families cover utilities and rent, keeping the lights on and people in their homes.

Olivia was working as a childcare provider in Tucson, AZ when the pandemic hit. Her center closed, and she immediately lost the source of income used to support her and her 10-year-old son. Initially, she was able to use savings to cover expenses, but as the pandemic continued and her childcare center remained closed, she struggled to keep up. United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona and their local partners helped Olivia with her most pressing expense, rent, and then helped ensure she had access to affordable groceries and household goods. In the time before Olivia’s work reopened, United Way helped fill the gap and made sure Olivia and her son stayed in their home and had healthy food to eat.

Throughout the pandemic, United Ways have provided rent and mortgage assistance to over 109,000 households and paid more than 100,000 utility bills.

CHILDRENCARE AND EDUCATION SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS

As communities everywhere grappled with how to respond to the pandemic—especially how to keep children healthy, and also keep them learning—United Way was there. Over 24,000 households received childcare assistance through local United Ways this year.

Lindsay and Seth, both healthcare providers, have worked on the frontline of the pandemic since the beginning. With many childcare centers closed, they needed a safe and affordable childcare option for their toddler. United Way of Delaware, Henry & Randolph Counties, in Muncie, IN, partnered with their local YMCA to provide childcare to critical need employees. The program offered a safe, nurturing environment for Lindsay and Seth’s daughter to thrive, and gave them peace of mind as they worked to save lives.

With another school year interrupted by the pandemic, schools, students and parents alike have struggled to keep on track and achieve educational milestones. Students of color from low-wage families are disproportionately at risk of learning loss, which is compounded when the virtual classroom requires access to the Internet, a personal computer, access to software and other resources. Many United Ways—from Chicago, IL to Wailuku, HI—are addressing the digital divide by providing grants to students and school districts, so they can purchase much-needed hardware and software and participate in remote learning.
A SOCIAL SERVICE AND COMMUNITY RESOURCE CONNECTOR

211 is a free and confidential service that helps people across the U.S. and Canada access local resources. The service is available by phone, text and web 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in 180 languages. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, 211 has seen a tremendous increase in calls, texts, and web queries. By August, the average call volume was 150% higher than normal, but many 211s saw increases of 200–400%. This translates to about 60,000–80,000 calls per day, vs. the typical 35,000 calls per day.

211 has fielded 20 million calls so far this year. Calls to 211 have generally mirrored the pandemic. Early on, most calls were about the virus and getting tested. As the economic impact deepened, calls shifted to requests for help with food, rent and utilities. As protections like eviction moratoriums ended in late summer, calls continue to rise from people who feared eviction or foreclosure.

Across North America, over 90 agencies within the 211 network received support from the UWW COVID-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund, which has largely been used to increase staff capacity and meet increased demand.

STEPPING UP DURING COVID-19

Throughout the pandemic, the 211 network has stepped up to the challenge in a big way:

- 32 Governors and state public health departments promoted 211 as the official source of accurate information about the virus for residents of their states
- Dozens of 211s have been selected by state governments, municipalities, and private philanthropy entities to screen people for and administer relief funds
- United Ways across the country are leveraging 211 data to advocate for policy changes to support and protect individuals impacted by COVID-19
- 211s and United Ways are working with our national partners, like Lyft and DoorDash, to deliver meals, household goods and school supplies and to help people get safely to non-emergency medical appointments, jobs and grocery stores throughout the country to help overcome lack of access to safe, reliable transportation

THANK YOU

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, United Way has provided help to millions of people around the globe in a matter of months. We’ve helped families feed their children, make rent, keep the lights on and slow the spread of the virus. And through 211, we’ve made 20 million connections to help—guiding people to access local resources, including testing, medical care and help with finding a job.

But with economic impacts that far outpace those of the 2008 recession, and the other broad-ranging effects of a global pandemic, much work is still needed to rebuild our communities. United Way is using our unparalleled scale and convening power to work with partners—from community coalitions to the largest global corporations—to build on what is working and make our communities stronger, more resilient places where everyone can thrive.

With the help of 2.5 million volunteers and nearly 8 million donors, our global network gives us the stability needed to be here for the long haul, and the agility to send help where it is needed most. Together, we can make our communities the places that we need them to be—equitable, respectful and opportunity-filled. We’re grateful you are with us.

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.

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