**Background**

211 WNY’s comprehensive information and referral program exists to help individuals in need access services in the community which can best alleviate or eliminate specific needs. Community Resource Specialists will assess the needs of a person and help empower them to make informed decisions about which resources may best meet their needs. Community Resource Specialists will offer multiple options for consideration whenever possible; they will not recommend or endorse providers. Community Resource Specialists may offer follow-up assistance and advocacy to ensure access to services.

**Inclusion Criteria**

To be included in the 211 WNY Resource Database, an entity must:

* Provide health and human services to residents within 211 WNY’s seven-county service area, which includes Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming Counties;

OR

* Carry out a related role, such as funding, planning, coordinating, or monitoring, in the health and human services network of the aforementioned service area.
  + *Health and human services*are defined as any services that address human needs or “help people to become more self-sufficient, sustain independence, strengthen family relationships, support personal and social development and ensure the well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities” (AIRS).
  + Note: An agency need not be based locally in the 211 WNY service area in order to be included, as long as the agency serves residents of the service area without requiring them to travel outside of it. Thus, national and state agencies headquartered outside of the service area may be included.
* In addition, an entity must maintain a demonstrated ability to provide the service(s) it says it provides, as indicated by information from clients, affiliated professionals, or other sources.

Service providers meeting the above criteria may include, but are not limited to:

* Organizations designated as non-profit according to IRS 501(c)(3)
* Government offices, agencies, and programs (federal, state, county, and municipal)
  + Elected representatives and officials
  + Public resources (ex: libraries)
  + Public school districts
  + Public and private schools for special needs
  + Non-profit and for-profit hospitals
  + Chambers of commerce
  + Religious organizations providing health or human services if eligibility is not restricted by denomination or limited to members of a congregation
  + For-profit organizations meeting community needs that are insufficiently met by non-profit or government services in the community (ex: local utility companies such as National Fuel)
  + For-profit organizations that accept Medicaid or provide free, low-cost, or sliding scale health and human services
  + Private practitioners licensed to provide perinatal/postpartum depression counseling (a need judged by our Resource Department as warranting an exception to the general rule of excluding private practitioners)

Providers in existence less than 6 months may be included on a provisional basis.

There is no charge for inclusion in the 211 WNY Resource Database.

**Exclusion Criteria**

Entities with any of the following characteristics are not eligible for inclusion:

* Organizations having a documented history of problems with law enforcement or consumer protection/complaint agencies
* Organizations offering services only to their own members
* Organizations offering illegal services or denying services on the basis of nationality, religion, color, race, sexual orientation or any other category protected by civil rights laws
  + Note: This should not be construed as prohibiting the inclusion of services meant to meet the special needs of target populations delimited by age, gender, health, disability, or other characteristics. However, such programs must be open to all people within their target populations.
* Organizations that provide free or low-cost services only when their primary purpose is to market the organization’s main business
* For-profit organizations, *with the exception of* those that accept Medicaid, provide free, low-cost, or sliding scale health and human services, or meet otherwise unmet community needs, as described in the Inclusion Criteria above
* Private practitioners, *with the exception of* those providing perinatal/postpartum depression counseling, as described in the Inclusion Criteria above

An included provider will be reviewed and removed from the 211 WNY community resource database if it:

* Consistently fails to provide the services or functions it claims to provide;
* Consistently fails to be available to the community during its stated hours;

OR

* Is consistently unresponsive to requests by 211 WNY to review and update the information included in its respective listing(s).

If a provider offers services that are both excluded and included, the provider will be included, but only those services that meet inclusion criteria will be indexed. Excluded services may still be mentioned in the service description, according to the discretion of the Resource Department.

**Methodology**

Every listing will be verified at least annually to ensure that the services in the Resource Database are accurate and up to date. With each instance of verification, the name and title of the person verifying the information will be noted.

211 WNY reserves the right to edit information to meet format and style guidelines as well as space limitations.

The Inclusion/Exclusion Policy will be reviewed, at minimum, every three years.

Returned and approved agency profiles will be kept or stored for a minimum of three years. The Resource Database will be safeguarded by computerized back-up. The back-up database will be kept in a secure location protected from destruction or theft.

**Decision-Making Process**

Eligibility for inclusion does not guarantee inclusion in the Resource Database; 211 WNY has the right to prioritize and limit inclusion. Inclusion does not imply endorsement and exclusion does not imply disapproval. Upon request, 211 WNY will send written notification about its decision to include or exclude a given entity. An entity denied inclusion may, upon request, meet with members of the Resource Department to discuss the decision.

If complaints are received about an agency to which 211 WNY is currently making referrals, the Resource Department may take one or more of the following actions:

* Call, email, or visit agency staff to verify complaint information;
* Perform any research necessary to enable a determination regarding inclusion or exclusion;
* Check with the agency's funding sources;
* Document any complaints received. If significant in content or quantity, these complaints may be shared with the community's funding/planning bodies, at the discretion of the Olmsted Center for Sight.

**DISCLAIMER:**

Information provided by agencies and individual service providers for inclusion in the 211 WNY Resource Database will be made available to the general public in various formats, including telephone information and referral, a searchable online service directory, and printed materials.

Staff will make referrals to specialized services for in-depth information and case management. When appropriate, staff will also make referrals to professional associations that provide current listings of individual practitioners in areas such as law, dentistry, or medicine.

While staff will strive for the utmost accuracy and usefulness in their information and referrals, 211 WNY is not responsible for the quality of service delivered by any provider to which callers are referred.