

▶ Connecting Families to Resources

Every family will need help at various stages of their children’s lives, whether it’s assistance with daily caregiving like childcare or transportation, occasional support during illnesses or developmental screenings, or crisis intervention such as food or rental assistance due to job loss.

To help families connect to resources and/or assistance in their own communities, it is important that clear, easy-to-access pathways or access points exist. **Current hotlines and websites contain limited information and are not comprehensive enough to inform families of the existing support options in their communities and to better ensure they can connect to those options.** Additionally, not all pathways share information among each other. This makes it difficult for families to know where to turn to when they need help, and for professionals, like pediatricians, teachers and home visitors, to effectively connect families in their care to community supports.

Currently in Texas, there are various pathways intended to connect families to resources and services, including 2-1-1 Texas, Help Me Grow, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Parent and Youth Helpline, and findhelp.org. Each of these connecting/access points are managed and funded differently depending on their respective community – some are funded by the state, others funded privately. There are also communities in which none of these centralized access points or connection points exist. The infrastructure to help connect families to services exists in silos, based on how it is funded and structured. As a result, families and professionals often do not know about these “connectors”, let alone the services and programs available to help them thrive. **A more coordinated, less siloed system could connect more families to the resources they need in a timelier way, ultimately leading to less families in crisis.**

▶ How Texans Currently Connect to Help

In trying to connect families to community-based resources, professionals often turn to the state’s child abuse and neglect hotline.

Over the last decade, the DFPS DataBook consistently shows that 40% of hotline calls do not meet the state's legal definition of abuse or neglect.

According to DFPS data on Information and Referral calls, many of the callers identified as community agencies, medical providers or parents/relatives, but ultimately, a referral to a community-based resource would have been more appropriate and helpful to that family.

Texas Information and Referral Network (2-1-1)

2-1-1 Texas is a statewide information and referral system that connects individuals in need to local resources and can be leveraged at the local level as part of a community’s response system.

In 2023, 2-1-1 Texas received **2,123,125 calls for assistance**. The top three requests were:

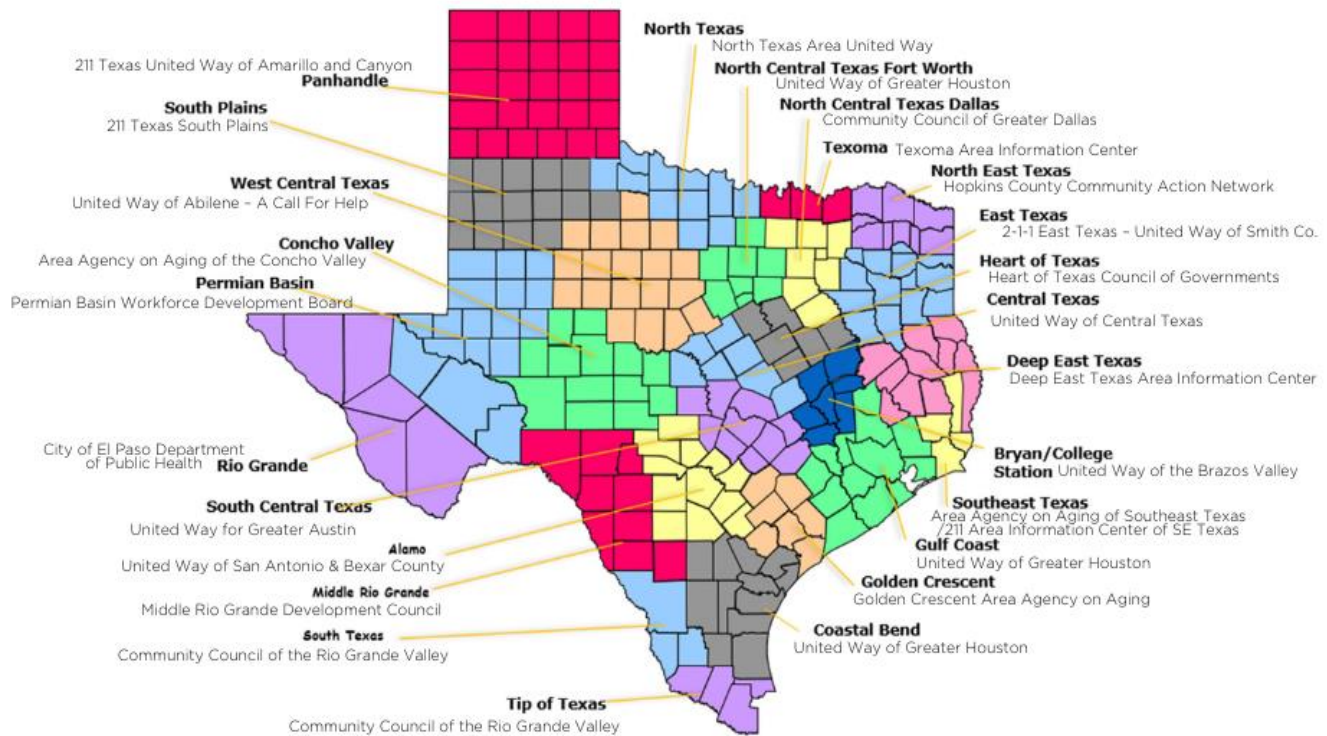
Housing/shelter

Utility Assistance

Food

*Information sourced from 211Counts Texas

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) manages 2-1-1 and contracts out to 25 different Area Information Centers (AICs) to carry out the functions of 2-1-1. Different entities hold each contract, and each contractor works with numerous entities to carry out operations.



State management of 2-1-1 Texas presents both strengths and weaknesses compared to other states. A positive is that the state has consistently provided funding (through Medicaid) for 2-1-1 Texas, although the funding has remained low. In 2023, the Legislature approved an increase, but most of the funding went to state technology improvements. Prior to that, the last increase in funding was over 10 years ago. One primary drawback of state management is the imposition of agency restrictions, which can hinder local AICs' ability to leverage 2-1-1 to collaborate with other community partners to address community issues, such as disaster response, child welfare, etc. As a result, some communities have created duplicate systems, leading to confusion and inefficiencies. Even other state agencies struggle with these restrictions, resulting in them expending additional resources to contract with other hotlines and websites to access services or to create their own. These databases are not as exhaustive as the 2-1-1 Texas database and must be continuously updated to ensure effective information. These inefficiencies are costly to both the state and local communities.

If administrative barriers were removed, 2-1-1 could better share resources and services with other local connection points for families, such as Help Me Grow, Family Resource Centers, DFPS' Parent and Youth Helpline, and online resources like FindHelpNow.

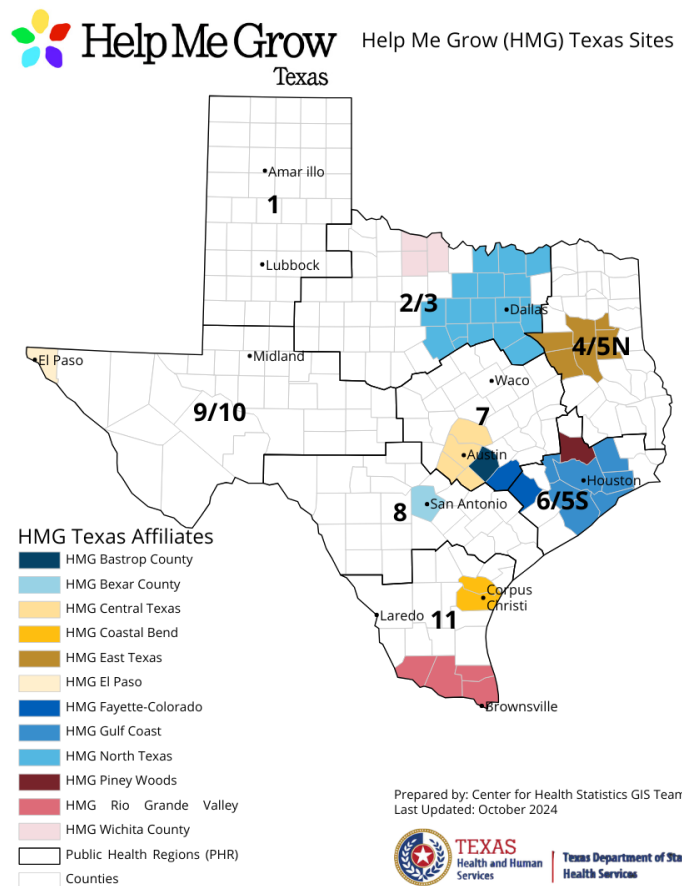
Help Me Grow (HMG)

Help Me Grow (HMG) is a community-based framework for family support for families with young children ages 0-8. HMG started in 1997 with the premise that when systems of care and support are not organized, it can be difficult for families to access resources for their children and challenging for service providers to

connect families to needed supports. The HMG framework is now implemented in 28 states and has 5 core components:

- a centralized access point that assists families and professionals in connecting children to community resources that help them thrive;
- family and community outreach that builds parent and provider understanding of healthy child development, supportive services available to families in the community and how both outreach and service availability are important to improving child outcomes;
- provider outreach that supports early detection and intervention efforts and connects medical providers to community resources to support families;
- data collection and analysis that supports evaluation, helps identify system gaps, bolsters advocacy efforts, and guides quality improvement; and
- a parent advisory council to ensure family voice is involved throughout implementation.

The Help Me Grow framework launched in Texas in Fort Worth in 2019 and is now overseen by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Maternal and Child Health Unit. Now, HMG is in 12 communities serving 42 counties, each with their own unique centralized access point. Communities are at different stages of HMG implementation, including some that are still in planning stages. Each community aims to promote development, early identification, referral and linkage to community resources, including basic needs and family support. Between September 1, 2020, to August 31, 2023, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) reported **19,012 families were served through HMG Centralized Access Points.**



Current HMG Providers include:

| Lead Organization | Counties Served | Funding Source(s) |
|--|---|---|
| Bastrop County Cares | Bastrop | Private Funds |
| Champions for Children | Anderson, Cherokee, Gregg, Henderson, Rusk, Smith | Private Funds |
| Paso del Norte Children’s Development Center | El Paso | Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant |
| United Way for Greater Austin | Travis, Williamson, Hays, Caldwell | Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant |
| First3 Years | Harris, Galveston, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Liberty, Waller | Private Funds |
| My Health My Resources of Tarrant County (MHMR) | Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Fannin, Grayson, Hood, Johnson, Kaufman, Navarro, Palo Pinto, Parker, Rockwall, Somervell, Tarrant, Wise | Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant |
| United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County | Bexar | Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant |
| Easterseals Rio Grande Valley | Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Willacy | Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant |
| North Texas Area United Way | Archer, Clay, Wichita | Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant |
| Motivation, Education & Training, Inc. (MET Inc.) | Montgomery | HHSC-FSS Preschool Development Grant (PDG) |
| United Way of the Costal Bend | Nueces, San Patricio | HHSC-FSS Preschool Development Grant (PDG) |
| Stanzel Family Foundation | Fayette, Colorado | HHSC-FSS Preschool Development Grant (PDG) |

*It should be noted that Title V funding (\$30,500) is provided to Connecticut Children’s Medical Center for HMG technical assistance.

Additional state funding to sustain and expand HMG would be helpful:

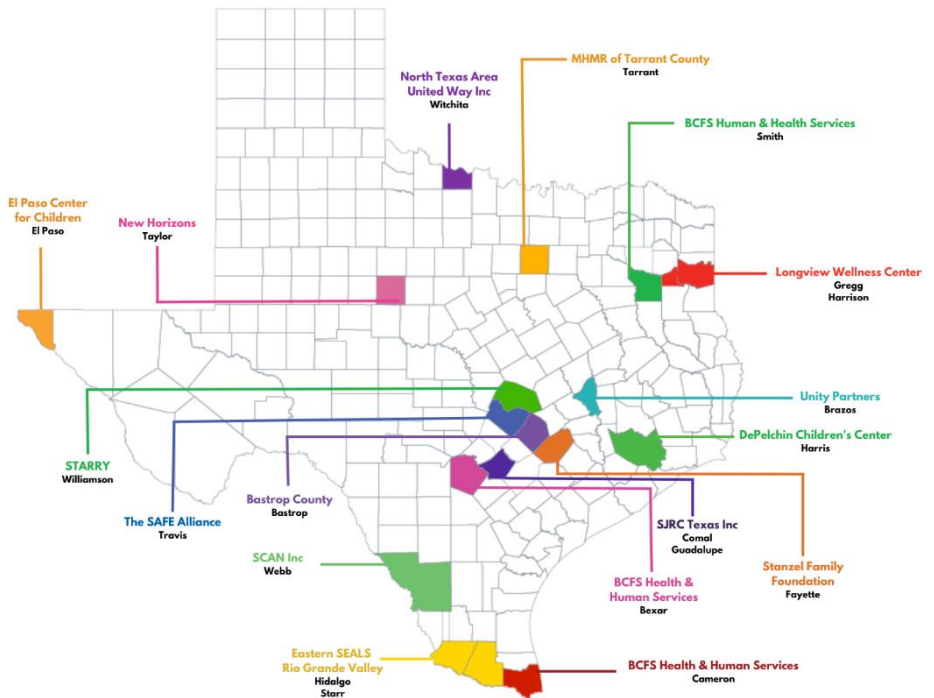
- DSHS is prioritizing current sites reaching full HMG implementation; currently only HMG North Texas (MHMR North Texas) has reached full implementation fidelity. DSHS has included Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant funding as part of their base budget request in their Legislative Appropriations Request for 6 of the 9 HMG sites that currently receive Title V funding - \$300,000 each, with the exception of MHMR at \$520,000.
- Additional funding would help current sites expand their reach to additional counties.
- The Preschool Development Grant (PDG) expires in December 2025, so those sites funded by PDG will no longer have any state funding to maintain services.
- Three HMG sites are supported through private fundraising which can be inconsistent. State funds would ensure services continue to reach families in those communities.

Family Resource Centers (FRCs)

Family Resource Centers are a physical “connector” of families to resources. **According to the Texas Family Support Network (TFSN), there are 17 FRCs across the state, and 7 of these are state funded and have served 13,535 families since 2018.** FRCs can serve as a **one-stop shop** for families, providing guidance to parents navigating through various systems, referrals for and access to community resources and socialization opportunities for all members of the family.

According to the National Family Support Network, Family Resource Centers across the nation have shown **positive impacts on both children’s success in schools and family economic self-sufficiency.**

FRCs have also contributed toward a national decrease in child abuse investigations by 26% and a 50% reduction in the need for out-of-home placements. **Considering their success, Texas families would benefit by having access to FRCs in additional areas of the state.**



The Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Parent and Youth Helpline

The DFPS Parent and Youth Helpline is another way that families can receive support. It is a number that is staffed 24/7 that can help families across the state connect to the resources they need.

DFPS data indicates in FY 22 and FY 23 combined, of the 22,547 callers needing referrals for a parent:

103 needed housing

408 needed mental health/behavioral health/substance use resources

1,595 needed legal assistance

269 calls were referred to 2-1-1 and 53 calls to Help Me Grow

► Policy Recommendations

Improve coordination amongst information and referral systems and provide clarity to professionals on what connectors exist in their communities to ensure families can access services in a timely manner, ultimately leading to less families in crisis. TexProtects proposes the following policy strategies:

1. Support infrastructure improvements and funding to ensure alignment between Help Me Grow, Family Resource Centers, 2-1-1, findhelp.org and other innovative ways communities ensure families are connected to resources. This includes:
 - a. Supporting improvements to 2-1-1 that align with our goals of ensuring families are connected to the resources they need by:
 - i. Addressing HHSC regulations to empower local 2-1-1s to more effectively form partnerships with other community organizations to address specific local needs.
 - ii. Expanding 2-1-1 beyond a resource and referral system to provide closed-loop referrals and a warm-hand-off to community partners. This ensures families are actually connected to the resources they need.
 - iii. Allowing local 2-1-1s to exchange their resource database with external partners, including vendors, through data sharing agreements for the purposes of a) connecting clients to a requested service; b) addressing nonmedical drivers of health; and c) decreasing redundancies in the health and human services system.
2. Lead on ensuring there is additional funding for other local connectors across Texas to serve more families, including Help Me Grow, Family Resource Centers and the Kinship Navigator Programs.
3. Lead on efforts to better align all HHSC's programming to ensure families are effectively and efficiently connected to the resources they need. When developing their strategic plan due on September 1, 2025, HHSC should consider all the services they offer (e.g. substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and early childhood intervention) and the connectors they are included in.

Contact ◀

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