Ontario 211 Services Corporation
ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011
Helping People Find the Right Community and Social Services
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To contact Ontario 211 Services Corporation:
Ontario 211 Services Corporation • 543 Richmond Street West, Suite 220 • Toronto, ON M5V 1Y6
Bill Morris, Executive Director • Phone: 416-777-0211 ext. 221 • Email: bmorris@211ontario.ca
To find community and social services in Ontario: www.211ontario.ca
REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

211 is best known for its three digit telephone access to information about social, community, government and health related services. By connecting people with the services they need, we reduce the delays created “when you don’t know where to turn”. 211 acts as a stitch in time, preventing small problems from spiralling into a crisis.

Over the past year, our reach grew from 60% of Ontario residents to just under 80%, on schedule and on budget to reach 100% by the end of 2011. The Board of Directors of Ontario 211 Services Corporation is proud of how we maintain first-rate operations at the same time that we connect more and more people with needed services.

In 2010/11, our Information and Referral specialists handled over 550,000 calls, a 10% increase over the previous year. What is remarkable about this is that it was done with very limited marketing of our service – the growth came from strong word-of-mouth. People are talking about the 211 telephone service because it works – 93% of callers were “extremely satisfied” with the quality of service. For the second year in a row, 211 was ranked in the top echelon of public sector call centres.

None of this would be possible without the hard work of staff and volunteers. Several Board members, myself included, attended some of the launches in the year past. It is heartening to meet with community members, particularly the local United Ways, who have put so much effort into bringing 211 to their communities.

211 receives financial support from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, local United Ways and many municipalities. In times of limited public expenditures, we are grateful that our funders continue to recognize the value of 211 to our communities.

Underlying our strong results is 211’s database of over 56,000 agencies and services from all regions of the province. No matter how people contact us, they can trust that our data is comprehensive, professionally managed, accurate and accessible. Our website, www.211ontario.ca, which hosts this database, received over 4 million page visits.

Since joining the Board, I have received an education in social media. We have added several new channels: a blog, a twitter account, youtube and flickr. These innovations help 211 to be a visible presence with the youth of our province.

I have come to realize that 211 is not simply a call centre and a website that connects people with needed help, but it is an information system that provides an authoritative knowledge layer about the supply and demand of human services.

In the past year, we’ve acted to ensure that our data resources keep up with the expansion in the reach of our telephone service. We’ve also been developing new business processes to improve the efficiencies around data gathering activities. We are continuing to reach out to provincial ministries, municipalities and agencies to provide access to the data for service planning and the creation of specialized databases. In short, 211’s authoritative data is increasingly being recognized for its value in improving human services delivery throughout Ontario.

Connecting people with services. Providing a picture of human services in Ontario. These two value propositions are at the core of our mission for 211.

Kent Gillespie
President
As we close in on our goal to reach all residents of Ontario with our telephone helpline to community and social service information, behind the scenes activity ensures that we sustain the best quality of service and data and the best run 211 system in North America.

We remain on schedule and on budget to reach all Ontario residents in this coming year. Destiny Bedwell, Ontario 211’s Communications and Marketing Coordinator played a key role in organizing launches in 10 communities. Destiny also played a big role in outreach, attending events such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association conferences to spread the good news about 211.

Our major report “Why People Call 211” showed that the total number of calls increased by 10% to 560,000. As in previous years, calls about health services topped the rankings at number one. Strong word of mouth means that our call volumes continue to grow – almost half our callers heard about our service from someone else, while 17 per cent said they would tell 10 or more people about 211.

This year, the emerging 211 Canada system was strengthened by developments on both the east and west coasts.

- 211 launched in British Columbia on November 2 and is now available to Metro Vancouver, Squamish-Lillooet and the Fraser Valley Regional Districts, serving over 2.6 million people.
- BC211 also worked with O211SC and Findhelp (Ontario Central Region) to identify the needs and potential resources of a 211 information management system. The Request for Proposals will be issued in the Spring of 2011. Ontario’s advanced development means that we can play a key role as the Canadian system develops.
- The Nova Scotia government announced their support to start the 211 service, providing an anchor in the Atlantic Region. Bell Aliant, Atlantic Canada’s largest telephone and telecommunications provider, has very graciously donated advice on how best to proceed with a national telephony and data management system.

One of our newest staff, Kelly Bergeron, Online Initiatives Manager, quickly made her presence known by establishing 211 in the world of social media. In addition to our web site (www.211ontario.ca), you can connect with us through our blog (http://blog.211ontario.ca), through Twitter (www.twitter.com/211Ontario), Flickr (www.flickr.com/211Ontario) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/211Ontario). Have a look to see pictures of the many events and launches of the past year.

The Operators Group, chaired by Carroll Francis, focused on launch support, expanding the database in newly served areas and reviewing how our data collection processes can be streamlined. Carroll also attended Board meetings of O211SC to ensure that the views of Operators were considered in the planning and decision-making process. We are grateful for Carroll’s level-headedness during our ongoing period of transition.

We also filled the position of the Data Quality and Innovations Manager. Laura Leather complements her Master’s degree in Library Science with a solid back-
ground in project management, customer service, training, and staff coaching. Lily Hoang, our Data Initiatives Assistant, continues to support these efforts, while completing her education.

Marta Hajek, the Operations Manager, is a core member, ensuring that all parts of the work plan are moving forward and keeping the office humming during my frequent road trips. She is ably assisted by Philip Ferrao, Finance and Office Manager, who makes sure the bills are paid on time and accounts are kept up to date.

Our team of external consultants provides the expertise a small organization like O211SC could not provide by itself. Janine Elias Joukema continues to play a strong role as facilitator for the Board Strategic Planning sessions and regular Operator meetings, ensuring they are kept on track and all decisions are documented and followed up. Roger Maloney, our Municipal Consultant, provides a strategic voice as we continue to strengthen relationships with the municipal sector. Barry MacMaster brings his deep knowledge and insight to the development of the critical IT and database systems. David Priebe, our wordsmith and scribe, provides the business writing and policy skills, to zero in on the critical issues facing us.

Lastly, I thank the Board of Directors, under the leadership of our new President, Kent Gillespie. Their guidance in setting the strategic direction as we move Ontario into the national system is invaluable.

Bill Morris
Executive Director

211’s New Brand Promises to Help People Find the Right Community and Social Services

In an effort to clarify and better communicate 211’s key messages to the people of Ontario, work began in late 2010 on the development of a new brand concept for 211 services in the province. An earlier brand audit had outlined the issues around the scope of 211’s services and the need to evolve key messages to support 211’s partners and Ontario’s social service agencies as 211 Ambassadors. To that end 211 now offers agencies the opportunity to cobrand with 211 to improve the public’s access to their services. 211’s three digit phone number helps callers remember accessing information on their services is easy as dialing 2-1-1. A new tagline and an enhanced logo were chosen in the Spring of 2011.

With research showing that many Ontarians feel they are unsure about where they can turn when they need information on community and social services, the tagline “when you don’t know where to turn” was identified as a powerful summation of the way many people feel when they are looking for help. A secondary message, “211 helps people find the right community and social services,” serves to further underscore that 211 is “the” premier source of information and callers are extremely satisfied with the referral information 211 provides.

In anticipation of a forthcoming mobile application for 211 and the launch of www.211.ca later in 2011, the image of a smartphone will appear on much of the new branded material. This image also reflects the convergence of internet and phone technology in one vehicle to meet consumer expectations. This speaks to the commitment by 211 to create new interactions with consumers of community and social services, as well as the staff of agencies, and in so doing help to meet the long-term business objectives of 211.
THE NATIONAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: A PROGRESS REPORT

At the core of the 211 Canada vision is the goal of providing Canadians the best information and better access to services, not just in their own community, but anywhere. To fulfill this ambitious objective, 211 information needs to organized and aligned using common technology. With that in mind, in early 2010 BC211 and Ontario 211 partnered to implement a new 211 Information Management System (IMS), which can be utilized by other 211 providers elsewhere in Canada.

To ensure results of this and other related work would truly be national, the 211 Canada Steering Committee established the National Technology Committee, with the mandate to define a National Telephony and Information Management Architecture for the 211 system in Canada. With considerable assistance from Bell Aliant, and a Task Team drawn from across Canada, the National Telephony And IMS Architecture Report was completed and approved by the 211 Canada Steering Committee in early Spring.

Ontario 211 and BC211, have leveraged the National Architecture Report, with the assistance of KPMG, to design a Request for Proposals (RFP) to procure a new 211 IMS solution.

Initially it was thought that specialized software would have to be commissioned to manage the common 211 information database, but it soon became clear that the needs of the 211 IMS initiative would be better served through Software as a Service (SaaS). The 211 IMS RFP will be released in June 2011.

In its most basic form, SaaS, or cloud computing, is the provision of software applications over the Internet. Its popularity has been increasing dramatically, particularly among companies that are interested in minimizing their upfront costs and ongoing IT maintenance expenditures. And while it may seem mystifying to the non-IT crowd, it is actually quite common – just ask anyone who has ever checked their email online.

A critical component of the proposed new system will be its ability to reflect changes and produce reports on 211 service demands in real time, which will ensure that the information provided to 211 users and stakeholders is always up to date. This will be particularly useful in times of local crisis, when 211 is expected to act as an essential non-emergency source of information.

In keeping with the National Technology Architecture, BC211 and Ontario 211 also proposed that a number of refinements be made to earlier plans for the 211 IMS. The suggested enhancements include:

- an improved ability to manage and self-update service data records
- the option for consumers to provide web-based feedback on services and programs
- content management tools that allow users to link to useful information associated with a particular agency’s area of work
- superior search capabilities
- the ability to integrate with 211’s call centre functions for more complete data on referrals and calls

By moving to an SaaS model under a single national architecture, the costs of start-up, ongoing support, maintenance and operations will be reduced. At the same time, the centralization of core call processing and application systems will ensure a high-capacity national 211 system that is infinitely scalable and resistant to single points of failure.
TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CRTC’S LANDMARK DECISION

August 9, 2011 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission’s (CRTC) decision to assign the three-digit dialing code 2-1-1 for public access to community information and referral services.

Canada’s first 211 telephone helpline service was launched June 2002, when 211 Toronto began answering calls. Since then, 211 services have been launched in three more provinces, with coverage expanding significantly each year.

With the help of provincial investments, expansion of 211 in Ontario moved into high gear in 2007, the same year O211SC was incorporated. Full coverage is expected by the end of this fiscal year.

“The CRTC’s decision was absolutely pivotal for the development of 211 in Canada,” says Bill Morris, Executive Director of O211SC. “And it came at a really opportune time from a technological point of view. Modern database technology was advancing rapidly, and there had also been a number of advancements in call centre technology. When combined with the power of an easy-to-remember three-digit phone number,” says Morris, “it provided us with the foundation to take information referral a great step forward.”

Morris credits Canada’s United Ways and information and referral providers with having the foresight to recognize the growing need for a centralized and accessible source of information on community and social services. “Not only have the United Ways provided funding to the 211 initiative across Canada, but they have also been our greatest champions. Without their involvement, there would be no 211.”

In addition, the Ontario Trillium Foundation funded the research to examine the capacity of Ontario’s not-for-profit information services to deliver 211 in Ontario and how it could be done. The Government of Ontario has also been instrumental in bringing 211 to all Ontario, as has been support from many municipal governments.

In only ten short years, 211 has developed in an almost exponential fashion across Canada, with service available or in the planning stages in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. Nearly 20 million Canadians have access to 2-1-1 phone service in their communities, a number that is sure to rise sharply in the coming years.

“I think the great achievement of these past ten years,” says Morris, “is that it’s made information resources available to Canadians at a whole different level. There was a real community need for access to this information, and with 211 we are serving that need.”

snapshot

211 Achieving World-Class Standards of Customer Satisfaction

The SQM Group, a respected consulting firm that specializes in performance assessments for call centres, conducts a survey every year of actual 211 callers to benchmark 211’s performance against more than 400 leading call centres in the U.S. and Canada. The results of the study, which took place between March and August of 2010, involved 625 households in Ontario, providing a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error (+/- 3.9%). The survey results were extremely encouraging with more than 93 percent of respondents reporting they were very satisfied with the 211 call centre, an outcome that SQM terms “world class”. By way of comparison, the average result for a call centre is 70 percent. Significantly, 17 percent of callers have or would tell 10 or more people about 211, one of the highest word of mouth ratings SQM has ever seen.
In 2003, when a plan (211 For All Ontario) for province-wide 211 service was established for Ontario, the focus was squarely on a telephone helpline. A website was set up, but largely served as a professional resource, rather than a public channel.

Few people could have predicted the explosive growth since then of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In only a few years they have transformed the way people engage with the world around them, and that includes the ways in which they search for, process and use information.

In November 2010, Kelly Bergeron joined Ontario 211 Services Corporation as their Online Initiatives Manager. “I wanted to build awareness of 211 on the digital front,” says Bergeron, “and I also wanted to develop relationships between 211, agencies and the public.”

To that end, Bergeron set up a blog, http://blog.211ontario.ca, as well as a Twitter feed (www.twitter.com/211Ontario), a Facebook account (www.facebook.com/211Ontario) and a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/211Ontario).

The blog, which launched in December 2010, is updated frequently and features coverage of 211 events, such as regional launches, as well as articles of topical interest (Volunteer Week, for example, or International Women’s Day). A recent addition to the blog has been profiles of agencies that are part of 211’s database. “Not only are we providing agencies with a platform to promote their work,” says Bergeron, “but we’re also spreading the word about the 211 brand.”

Building awareness of the 211 brand is the raison d’être of such initiatives, says Bill Morris, Executive Director of Ontario 211 Services Corporation. “What we’re really creating with 211 is a branded information network for human services.” Bergeron agrees, adding that her goal is to make 211 “the” social network for social services in Canada.

### Meeting Caller’s Needs Across the Province

Each year, 211’s eight call centres report on the calls they have received over the past year. The Caller Needs Report that results from this work is an invaluable source of information for 211 and its stakeholders. The report helps to illustrate what services people are looking for in a community and the highest needs for social services.

In 2010, the top five reasons people called 211 were to seek information on health, on income and financial assistance, on housing, on community services, and on legal information and public safety. Although the composition of the top five reasons varied slightly from region to region, questions on health-related matters were predominant throughout the province.

Also provoking a large number of calls were requests for information on food and meals, federal government services, provincial government services, individual and family services, consumer and commercial issues, and mental health and addiction concerns.

The 2010 Caller Needs Survey also collected information on the age of callers. Results showed that callers were fairly evenly divided between age groups, with the largest proportion of callers (32 percent) aged between 36 to 60.
Of critical importance to the development of such a network is the national website for 211 service, www.211.ca, which is expected to launch in the fall of 2011. The new website will give individual agencies greater control of their own records. In the same way that Facebook users can personalize their individual profiles with pictures, information, links and applications, the new 211.ca site will allow agencies to upload their logos, update information on the services they offer, and include links to the agencies’ Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts.

As is increasingly the norm on consumer-oriented websites, the new 211.ca will have built-in feedback loops as a way of further empowering site users and contributors. “We’re building something that will be much more than a one-dimensional information delivery system,” explains Morris. “What we’re aiming to provide is a truly engaging vehicle that benefits everyone. Consumers will be better informed, agencies will learn more about their services and how to optimize them and funders will be able to see feedback on the effectiveness of programs and services.”

In the meantime, 211 Ontario’s existing website has been treated to an interim update that incorporates recent changes to the 211 logo and branding messages. “We’ve improved site navigation and made the entire site more user-friendly,” says Bergeron. “Already we’re receiving some very positive feedback from site visitors.” As Bergeron sees it, the possibilities are almost limitless for 211 as a social media tool. “I see huge potential for 211 as a national service,” she says. “The work we’re doing now is only the beginning.”

### snapshot

**211’s Data Expert Group Ensures Agency Information is High Quality**

Over the past fiscal year, 211’s Data Expert Group has been working to ensure data readiness for Ontario’s 211 system – a challenging task given the extensive and ongoing growth of 211 services in the province.

As well as creating a data formatting manual that will help data contributors conform to 211 data standards and expectations, the group has been busy developing an Inclusion/Exclusion Policy that builds on the strategic framework established by the 211 Operators. They have worked to identify services and programs that might benefit from a 211 Record Template, and have also continued work on a 211 Maintenance Standard to help ensure high-quality data.

The group has also been working towards the implementation of a taxonomy indexing standard for 211.

During the upcoming fiscal year, the members of the Data Expert Group plan to focus on establishing key data standards and processes for 211, while they assure the continual supply of accurate and high-quality data to the system as a whole.
The fiscal year of 2010 was one of expansion mode for 211, with service launches in nearly every part of the province. The month of June saw launches in Perth/Huron Counties, as well as in Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington. Algoma, Oxford County, Durham Region and Hamilton came on board in September, followed by Rainy River in October. York Region and Renfrew County were next in January of 2011, while in March, 2011 launch of 211 services to the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville concluded expansion activities for the 2010 fiscal year.

With the launch of services to Leeds and Grenville, 211 coverage in the province of Ontario grew to encompass 78 percent of residents, up from 57 percent at the end of the 2009 fiscal year.

The expansion in Durham and York for 211 Central Region (Findhelp Information Services) meant 211 served 1.5 million more residents and represented significant growth for 211. In addition, 0211SC worked with Findhelp to strengthen 211’s resiliency by formalizing an agreement for the provision of after-hours and weekend service making Findhelp the 24/7 hub for 211 in Ontario. A generator was acquired to ensure that in the event of a power outage, 211 is available to residents without interruption.

An example of the growth being experienced by 211 across Ontario can be found in Central East Region, which saw a steady increase in call volume over the past fiscal year. “Since launching in 2005 we’ve had a 123 percent increase in calls, with 70 to 80 percent of calls from repeat callers. This shows that callers return to 211 when other needs arise,” says Pamela Hillier, Executive Director of Community Connection, service provider for the region. “Significantly, we are now receiving 46 percent of our calls outside the common 9-5 office hours, which demonstrates the need for 24/7 access to information to residents when other sources of help, such as government offices, are closed. It’s very encouraging.”

Across the province, 211’s regional service providers have been consolidating their community presence by establishing fruitful partnerships with local agencies or services.

In Eastern Region, 211 is the contact agency for the Tools4Schools program, which provides backpacks and school supplies for students from low-income households. “It’s a great example of how 211 can work with community partners,” says Marie-Andrée Carrière, Executive Director of the Community Information Centre of Ottawa, the region’s Operator. “We also assist in the administration of Toy Mountain and Christmas Exchange each year, acting as a primary contact point for volunteers, donors and recipients.”

In Central East Region, 211 provides similar assistance to the United Way of Bruce-Grey for a number of its programs, among them Winter Warmth, Christmas Cheer and a back-to-school Backpack Program. “Not only do we make the application process easier for these programs,” says Pamela Hillier, “but we are also able to provide additional referrals to families in need, who may need assistance finding help in other areas of their lives.”

Another exciting initiative is 211 Eastern Region’s partnership with Ottawa’s EMS services. All firefighters, police and paramedics in the city of Ottawa as well as emergency response teams of the Canadian Red Cross...
now have access to bilingual 211 materials to distribute to the public as needed, enabling them to further assist the people they serve. Emergency responders have been briefed on the services provided by 211’s multilingual telephone service and bilingual website, and 211 cards and information pamphlets are carried in all emergency vehicles.

In Northern Region, a one-year pilot project that furnishes free telephone service to low-income families was launched in September, 2010. Phones for Families, which provides connectivity for families who have children in Thunder Bay schools, and who currently do not have either wired or cell phone service, is administered with the help of 211 North (Lakehead Social Planning Council), whose information and referral specialists are assisting with the pre-screening and intake of the pilot’s participants. Access to 211 is free of charge from all pay phones in Thunder Bay.

In February, 211 South West was a key participant in the region’s annual emergency preparedness training exercise, which is intended to enhance first responders’ ability to prepare for and respond to both natural and man-made disasters. Overseen by the Windsor-Essex County Regional Emergency Management Coordination Committee, the exercise was a resounding success for the participating services and agencies. “The municipalities who fund 211 were able to see how useful we are in such an emergency,” says Jennifer Tanner, Project Manager for 211 South West at the City of Windsor. “By providing vital information such as road closure updates or coordinates of evacuation centres, 211 diverts non-emergency callers from 911 and allows emergency personnel to focus on the crisis at hand.”

In Central South Region, 211 staffers not only moved to new, purpose-built headquarters, they also celebrated the fifth anniversary of local 211 service. “Call volumes have been building steadily since 2005,” says Rosanna Thoms, Executive Director of 211 Central South (Information Niagara), “with a record 58,000 calls received in 2010 alone.” She and her colleagues are now busy building partnerships with groups in the community, among them healthcare providers who are hoping that 211 can help them steer patients away from emergency care services and towards local services and programs that better fit their healthcare needs.

**Compensation Model Design Wrapping Up**

The initial work around the design of a Compensation Model and the first phase of its implementation for 211 Operators is now complete. This work involved a painstaking analysis of operational costs and industry benchmarks across the 211 system in Ontario. Operators will be compensated on a cost-per-call basis. “We expect to have the cost-per-call model fully in place by June 2011,” says Executive Director Bill Morris. In order to ensure fair and appropriate levels of compensation going forward, 211 Operators will continue to provide financial and performance data.
WHERE 211 HAS LAUNCHED - MARCH 2011
2010 - 2011 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President
R. Kent Gillespie, Mississauga

Vice-President
John Kwekkeboom, Welland

Vice-President
Jim H. Alexander, Kanata

Directors
Michael Belliveau, Thunder Bay
Evelyn Brown, Bracebridge
Winnie Chant, Leamington
Jocelyne St Jean, Orleans
Mary Wilson Trider, Ottawa
Waqar Zaidi, Oakville

Nominations Committee
John Kwekkeboom (Chair)
Evelyn Brown
Winnie Chant

Audit Committee
Mary Wilson Trider (Chair)
Jim Alexander
Jocelyne St Jean

ONTARIO 211 OPERATORS

Central Region
Janice Hayes
Findhelp Information Services

Central East Region
Pam Hillier
Community Connection

Halton Region
Kate Johnston
Regional Municipality of Halton

Central South Region
Rosanna Thoms
Information Niagara

Dufferin-Peel Region
Carroll Francis
Regional Municipality of Peel

Eastern Region
Marie-Andrée Carrière
Community Information Centre of Ottawa

Northern Region
Marie Klassen
Lakehead Social Planning Council

South West Region
Jennifer Tanner
City of Windsor

ONTARIO 211 SERVICES CORPORATION STAFF

Bill Morris
Executive Director

Philip Ferrao
Finance and Office Manager

Marta C. Hajek
Operations Manager

Laura Leather
Data Quality & Innovations Manager

Kelly Bergeron
Online Initiatives Manager

Destiny Bedwell
Communications and Marketing Coordinator

Lily Hoang
Data Initiatives Assistant (Student)

DATA EXPERT LEADS

John Allec, 211 Central
Julia Brackenbury, 211 Central
Lillian Boote, 211 Central East
Rebecca Cowell, 211 Dufferin-Peel
Michel Fournier, 211 Eastern
Leslie Russell, 211 Central South
Kristen Tomcko, 211 Northern
Corrine Gallois, 211 Central
Melanie Beaudry, 211 Eastern
## 2010 - 2011 Financial Statement*

**Ontario 211 Services Corporation**

### Revenues

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<th>Description</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010 (Restated)</th>
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<td>Province of Ontario (MCSS)</td>
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<td>Amortization of deferred contributions</td>
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<td><strong>Total Revenues</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2,954,945</strong></td>
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### Expenses

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<th>Description</th>
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<th>2010</th>
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<td>Administrative &amp; Office Expenses</td>
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<td>158,923</td>
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<td>Service Delivery</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2,930,386</strong></td>
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### Surplus Before Surplus Repayment

- 2011: 61,375
- 2010: 24,559

### Provision for surplus repayment to MCSS

- 2011: -61,375
- 2010: -24,559

### Net Income and Accumulated Surplus

- 2011: 0
- 2010: 0

*Note:

Extracted from Audited Statements.

Copies of Audited Statements are available from the Executive Director upon request.