The Canadian Taxonomy of Human Services:
Update on the Initiative
November 2006

This information sheet is intended to update interested parties in the progress to date in creating a pan Canadian, bilingual Taxonomy of Human Services. The work is being undertaken by InformCanada, a partner with United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada in 211. 211 is the three digit dialing code designated by the CRTC in 2001 to enhance Canadians' access to information on community services. There are currently five 211call centres in Canada, two in Alberta and three in Ontario, serving approximately 15% of the Canadian population. In addition, 211 plans are being developed in BC, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces.

In 2004, the InformCanada Board recognized a need to create a classification system that would provide a "common language" for all 211 providers and their area partners in information and referral. The indexing system was seen as an essential building block for the eventual seamless delivery of 211 to all Canadians. After a year of study and input from the field, the AIRS/INFO LINE Taxonomy of Human Services, already a 211 standard in the United States, was chosen as the basis for this work. InformCanada and its partners in Ontario set about securing resources to Canadianize the Taxonomy.

During 2005, the first stage of Taxonomy development was undertaken. A stage 1 English language version was created by a national team of editors, an agreement with the owner of the Taxonomy (211 Los Angeles County, aka INFO LINE) was developed, and outreach with interested parties in federal, provincial and municipal governments introduced the classification system to managers of government information.

In 2006, work has continued with the support of Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services under the three-year 211Ontario.ca project. Findhelp Information Services, the 211 provider in Toronto, is managing the project. On September 11 of this year, the InformCanada Board agreed to the terms of the Sublicensing Agreement with 211 LA, paving the way for use by Canadian subscribers once the Canadian terms have been fully incorporated on the 211taxonomy.org web site. This historic agreement provides a legal framework for cross border collaboration on this important standard for 211. Remaining English language terms will be complete by early in 2007. Next steps include additional programming of the 211taxonomy.org web site and creation of a subscriber page for Canadian users on the InformCanada web site.

The work in French is underway, recognizing that the French version will not simply translate the English but needs to reflect cultural, linguistic and semantic differences. The Coordinator of French Language Services at Findhelp is developing term names for

each of the eleven basic sections of the Taxonomy, with definitions to follow. These will be reviewed by a French Editorial Team made up of database managers in community information centres that serve French populations in Ontario and Quebec. Additional outreach will include francophones from the Atlantic and Manitoba in the coming weeks. (This editorial process mirrors that undertaken in 2005 with English language editors from many parts of Canada who contributed to the English language version.)

The 211Ontario.ca project includes supporting community information centres as they convert their databases to use of the new classification system. MCSS staff are administering a Request for Proposals process that will allocate funds to local data contributors and expand the number of participating organizations to ensure the best possible coverage for 211Ontario.ca. Once data partners have been selected, an assessment will be done to determine training and ongoing support needs. It is anticipated that all the local and regional data contributors that make 211Ontario.ca possible will be using the Taxonomy by July 1, 2008. The interface in the Community Information Online Consortium (CIOC) software most often used by 211 and community information centres will be complete by the end of November. This will give subscribers to the English and French versions of the Taxonomy optimum use of the classification system.

The Taxonomy continues to attract attention from government information managers. A recent session convened by Chartwell consultants created a demonstration crosswalk of Taxonomy terms to the Governments Strategic Reference Model (GSRM) terms used to model government business processes. Interest has also been expressed by the Municipal Information Systems Association (MISA) in Ontario. MISA wants to investigate working with InformCanada to expand and deepen the Taxonomy for potential use by 311 systems which manage requests for information and task fulfilment within some of our larger municipalities.

It is anticipated that once the English and French versions of the Canadian Taxonomy are in place, on-going editorial support in both languages will be provided through a combination of subscription revenues, special projects and in kind donation of staff time by one or two of the larger Canadian users.The Canadian Taxonomy will benefit on-going from user input via a users' listserv and dialogue with a network of Canadian editors to review new terms for local relevance. The Canadian Taxonomy will always be a work in progress, reflecting the changes in programs, funding and usage in the Canadian service delivery system itself.

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