Social Information Exchange Network (SIEN) & Unite Us — Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Social Information Exchange Network (SIEN)?

The SIEN is a regional, cross-sector care coordination system designed to connect providers across health, human services, behavioral health, education, and workforce systems. It allows organizations to work together through shared referrals, real-time communication, and outcomes tracking. The goal of the SIEN is to build a coordinated and equitable ecosystem where individuals can access the right supports at the right time — without falling through the cracks created by siloed systems.

2. What is Unite Us?

Unite Us is the secure technology platform that powers the SIEN. Through Unite Us, partners can send and receive electronic, closed-loop referrals, track whether an individual receives a service, communicate across agencies in real time, and identify trends, gaps, and community-level needs through data.

3. How will community organizations be engaged going forward?

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are central to the SIEN's success. Engagement will include listening sessions, focus groups, co-design of workflows, onboarding and training support, and continuous opportunities to provide input. This is a partner-driven initiative, not a top-down rollout.

4. Why is this webinar only the first step?

A Social Information Exchange is not a single tool — it is a system transformation that requires planning, collaboration, and community input. This session introduced the vision, shared regional examples, and began identifying partners who want to help shape the next steps.

5. How does the SIEN differ from 211 / Help Network of Northeast Ohio?

211/Help Network is a phone-based information and referral hotline for residents. It provides live assistance, crisis support, and connections to services — **an incredibly valuable and needed community resource**, especially for individuals without internet access or those needing immediate human support. The difference is that the SIEN/Unite Us system is a secure, closed-loop referral platform used by providers to coordinate care between agencies. It is also a regional data platform that tracks referrals, service outcomes, unmet needs, and system trends, helping partners identify gaps and improve equity. Together, they complement rather than replace one another.

In short:
211 helps individuals find services.
The SIEN helps agencies coordinate care and uses data to strengthen the entire ecosystem.
211/Help Network connects people to agencies — SIEN connects agencies to each other

6. Does the SIEN duplicate existing services?

No. The SIEN does not create new programs; it connects and strengthens existing services. It reduces fragmentation, repeated intakes, gaps between providers, referral confusion, and lost follow-up.

7. Is Unite Up free? Who pays for it?

Unite Us is free for all nonprofit non-clinical community-based organizations (CBOs). Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are also able to use Unite Us at no cost. Other clinical and healthcare entities may have associated costs, but the regional SIEN funding effort aims to build a shared fundraising approach to remove barriers for all partners.

8. How is the SIEN evidence-based?

Research shows that closed-loop referrals improve access and outcomes, cross-sector coordination reduces duplication and inequity, shared data systems strengthen community planning, and whole-person approaches support both health and workforce stability. Similar systems across Ohio and the U.S. have shown strong outcomes.

9. How does the SIEN support the workforce system?

The SIEN helps address the social determinants of work — transportation, childcare, mental health, housing, and more. It connects jobseekers to supports more quickly, improves coordination between workforce, behavioral health, and social service providers.

10. How does the WorkOhio Connector Program relate to Unite Us and the broader SIEN?

The WorkOhio Connector Program will use the Unite Us platform as its primary referral and care coordination tool. This allows WorkOhio Connectors, workforce partners, and community organizations to securely send, receive, and track referrals for employment supports and wraparound services such as transportation, childcare, behavioral health, and other barriers to work.

At the same time, WorkOhio's use of Unite Us is intentionally designed to serve as an introductory pilot and learning opportunity for the broader Social Information Exchange Network (SIEN).

This means:

- **WorkOhio is not a separate system** — it operates *within* the same Unite Us infrastructure that powers the SIEN.

- **Workforce-focused referrals** through WorkOhio help demonstrate how cross-sector coordination (workforce, human services, behavioral health, education) works in practice.

- **Partners onboarding through WorkOhio** gain early experience with shared workflows, closed-loop referrals, and data-driven coordination that will later scale across the full SIEN.

- **Lessons learned from WorkOhio implementation** (referral pathways, response times, unmet needs, coordination gaps) will directly inform the design, governance, and sustainability of the broader SIEN network.

In short, the WorkOhio Connector Program functions as a practical on-ramp to the SIEN, allowing partners to begin coordinating care immediately through Unite Us while helping build the long-term, region-wide system for integrated workforce and social support coordination.

11. Will this create extra work for organizations?

Most partners ultimately experience less work and less duplication because the system replaces manual referral processes, reduces repeated intakes, and streamlines communication across agencies. Onboarding and training are provided with ongoing support.

12. How is client privacy protected?

Unite Us is fully compliant with HIPAA, FERPA, 42 CFR Part 2, and state privacy requirements. Data is encrypted, access is controlled, and clients choose what information is shared and with whom.

Case Scenario: Stabilizing a Family & Re-connecting a Young Adult to Work

Maria, a 19-year-old Youngstown resident, arrives at a local nonprofit behavioral health agency seeking support for anxiety and depression. During intake, the clinician learns she recently aged out of foster care and has:
• Unstable housing

• No reliable transportation
• Limited family support
• Interrupted college coursework
• Barriers to employment due to mental health and lack of wraparound services

Maria also shares that she has been sleeping on a friend's couch and struggling to attend job interviews due to transportation issues and anxiety.

Coordinated Response Through SIEN

The behavioral health clinician uses SIEN to complete a care coordination intake and, with Maria's consent, initiates referrals:

• **Housing insecurity** → Youngstown area housing nonprofit + rapid rehousing program
• **Mental health support** → Internal behavioral health services + peer support referral
• **Employment support** → OhioMeansJobs-Mahoning County workforce navigator
• **Transportation barriers** → WRTA mobility assistance
• **Food + basic needs** → Local pantry and stabilization supports
• **Credential completion** →Regional college re-engagement coach via Youngstown State wraparound program

Each organization updates the SIEN record:

• Housing agency schedules same-week intake
• Workforce navigator schedules barrier-removal support + job readiness program
• WRTA engages and coordinates transportation support
• YSU success coach supports re-enrollment to finish her credential
• Peer support specialist initiates weekly check-ins

A "care team" is formed — the workforce coach, housing case manager, and mental health clinician share updates in SIEN to ensure alignment.

Progress & Outcomes

Within 2 months:

• Maria secures transitional housing
• Enrolls in a short-term training program through OMJ and a mental health peer-support group
• Receives transportation assistance and financial coaching
• Re-enrolls in college coursework with advising support
• Gains stability and begins interviewing for positions with a community employer partner
• Reports improved mental health and decreased crisis episodes

Macro-Level Impact Through SIEN Data

Quarterly data shows similar patterns among young adults exiting foster care in Mahoning County:

• Transportation barriers — High frequency
• Housing instability — High frequency
• Behavioral health support needs — High frequency
• Post-secondary re-engagement — Limited access
• Workforce attachment — Inconsistent

Community partners convene to:

• Map youth aging-out pathways across systems
• Co-design a youth transition referral protocol
• Expand transportation supports for young adults in job training
• Explore a transitional supportive housing model for opportunity youth
• Strengthen warm-handoff pathways between children's services → adult services

Why This Matters

This example demonstrates how SIEN:

• Coordinates care regardless of entry point
• Aligns behavioral health, housing, and workforce systems
• Reduces duplication and improves warm handoffs
• Creates real-time population insights to inform planning
• Turns individual cases into systems-level solutions and policy shifts

For more information or to schedule a one to one meeting, contact:

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