



911 Hotline Alternatives

Transform911 Convening, March 4, 2022

During this convening session, workgroup chairs presented details of the following recommendations:

1. Center the voices of those who have experienced unintentional harm or trauma by the emergency response system
2. Foster a robust, well-marketed, and transparent ecosystem of alternative hotline options, including those both directly connected or not to centralized emergency response centers
3. Identify 911 emergency calls-for-service that could be safely transferred to alternative hotlines through community engagement, services gap analysis and law enforcement data analysis
4. Develop alternative hotlines that can provide immediate access to, and robust knowledge of, available resources that offer personalized supports
5. Ensure viable alternative hotlines are cost-free, widely accessible, technology driven, and able to support high call volumes 24/7

This document contains anonymous feedback from session attendees on the given questions following this presentation, conducted through the Mentimeter website. We suggest citing this document as “Public feedback during Transform911’s Alternative First Responders workgroup convening session on March 2, 2022.”

For additional information or inquiries, visit transform911.org, email us at transform911@uchicago.edu, or follow us on Twitter @T911HealthLab.

Are alternative hotlines a viable option to transform the existing infrastructure of the 911 emergency response system? Why or why not?

Yes, alternative hotlines have different core missions that can meet the needs of the community.

Yes - but careful consideration should be given to the intent and scope of the hotlines responsibility.

Yes. People in crisis should have different pathways available to access care.

Why-get the right need to the right party at the right time-removes waste and potential for additional harm to ALL parties

No - Because they represent a privatization of public service.

Yes, as long as there is proper protocols in place and the ability to transfer calls back and forth with data.

Yes, if there is an easy to remember number to access them and they are embedded within the behavioral health continuum of care

To an extent, but we risk the danger of having a plethora of different numbers that people can't remember in an emergency. It may be better to expand the toolbox for different responses that 911 can send than different hotlines.

Yes and numerous N11 (211, 311, 411, 511, etc) numbers already exist that need to be leveraged prior to creating more. There needs to be public education on what each is used for.

Are alternative hotlines a viable option to transform the existing infrastructure of the 911 emergency response system? Why or why not?

Absolutely, especially as trust across communities vary and we are a very large country. For example, the Crisis Text line has been quite terrific for many.

Alternative hotlines have the challenge of making their existence and purpose widely known in an environment where 911 is already almost universally known

Yes - two way relay or transfer will not always meet the needs of the receiving agency. For example 911 receives location information which is critical to on scene response.

if they are used there needs to be interoperability and connectivity into the 911 networks - ability to share location, call back etc should the alternative hotline person need 911 support and vice versa

There should be no wrong door in reaching out for help

Possibly, but there are concerns that many people may not know what is available out there and may get confused by the many options

As complementary models, alternative hotlines pose the opportunity for a robust *ecosystem* (rather than a monolithic central system) of response and support services – if they are well coordinated and their activities are equitably governed.

911, for many housed residents, are often utilized to resolve a conflict or complaint. Alternative hotlines center resolution around individuals who need service, and deprioritize resolving a complaint. (ie homeless person is sleeping in my doorway)

It may be only as viable as the risk that is assessed at the local level

Are alternative hotlines a viable option to transform the existing infrastructure of the 911 emergency response system? Why or why not?

Caution should be given not to create an environment where we have dozens of numbers for everyone to try to remember - it could become confusing and create additional barriers.

Privatized services should only be used if data is available to stakeholders much like current government data is subject to public records requests. However, government is already a pain getting data so it's hard to imagine private would be better.

One consideration could be provide training 911 staff to offer a 'fourth option' which could operate alongside people accessing the alt-hotline as well (i.e. no wrong door)

We must avoid private services at all costs. There are too many temptations to corrupt these services. The amount of money behind police/fire/ems/crisis dispatch is significant and who gets the call dictates their viability. (e.g. private prisons)

There will need to be accountability within those hotlines as well and trust that they are hiring people with the capabilities, skills and experience/education to provide the safe services.

you could have separate responsibilities within those numbers (311, 211, 911, 988)..

We must ensure transparency and accountability across all hotlines - 911 and alternatives.

Yes - 311 is generally known to be for municipal non emergent issues. 211 - is generally available for social services and 988 will be available for suicide prevention. If we stick with those and 911. It seem straight forward. Within those

How do we ensure existing 911 systems directly connected or operated by police or fire-rescue departments will direct calls to alternative response systems e.g. mental health responses. Such diversion may negatively (reduce) affect police budgets.

Are alternative hotlines a viable option to transform the existing infrastructure of the 911 emergency response system? Why or why not?

An updated understanding of 988 is that it is expected also to be able to serve individuals with other social issues such as housing, food, and heating insecurities, etc. not just suicide prevention.

Transforming also includes a metrics change. Quality or timeliness. Once the 911 line is answered, the triage will take time and shouldn't only be gauged by call answering to call dispatch

For those calls that would still come into an ECC, 911 professional need effective screening tools.

Yes, ensuring that technology is available to safely transfer those communications. 911 is still struggling to implement Next Generation 911 which will assist with alternate means of communications with 911

Austin Call Center answers with ""Are you calling for Police, Fire, EMS or Mental Health Services?"

In Wash State we hope 988 will provide "next day appointments" which we hope will reduce those getting to crisis

Yes

How can alternative hotlines address and/or resolve key systemic issues with 911 centralized emergency response centers?

They can assist with issues that require response or assistance that 911 does not have available as a resource.

Triaging to non-emergency services.

Design across the senses-eg NLP for text and voice, and automate such to optimize human resources and capacity.

By ensuring that alternative hotlines don't default to police response and protect caller anonymity when that's the caller's preference

They can assist community members with non emergency but generally urgent issues.

prioritize health-focused responses, not LE/EMS/Fire, when assisting community members with behavioral health needs

Texting lines can reach and address different issues that 911 operators are not able to do, e.g. a bit longer form conversation, especially for those who don't want to/are not able to talk on the phone.

Ideally, if the public knows their resources, the default wont be 911 "for everything".

Most low level calls have response times of 1+ hrs. A swift response when someone calls for service helps to reinforce their confidence in system responses.

How can alternative hotlines address and/or resolve key systemic issues with 911 centralized emergency response centers?

I don't think they will. "Alternative" systems operating tangentially with the established emergency response system will add complexity, reduce transparency and divert resources.

This is completely dependent on the capacity to support the hotline with response services in each jurisdiction. Successful integration of systems will always be a challenge, but not insurmountable.

Help offload calls from 911 that don't require deployment of traditional first responders to - helping to keep 911 lines clear and 911 call takers more available for exigent crises

Help support greater occupational wellness and support of call takers across the board

Alternative hotlines are not necessarily tied to call processing requirements that may allow for more meaningful interactions related to the callers need.

Being able to provide live services and response 24/7. If they don't individuals will revert back to 911 and in a more frustrated state than they may have been initially.

While some callers may say they don't want the police to respond, we have seen many instances nationally in which the police come even when callers request EMS and specifically that the police not be deployed

Having options to divert calls before they even enter the 911 system can help reduce incoming call volume so that 911 professionals can focus on those calls that do need traditional services.

The success of alternative hotlines will be impacted by the public education regarding who to call for which situations.

How can alternative hotlines address and/or resolve key systemic issues with 911 centralized emergency response centers?

dontcallthepolice.com provides guidance on how people can self triage and access alternate resources on their own unless it is absolutely necessary.

How can alternative hotlines obtain/gain buy-in from other public safety entities?

Clearly define their mission and identify methods/processes for including public safety when appropriate.

Invite other public safety entities, such as police leaders, for a 'ride along/listen along' at an alternative hotline site.

Share the same mission and goals

Highlighting the degree that alternative hotlines can divert non-emergency calls away from 9-1-1 so 9-1-1 can focus on its primary mission.

Not have to compete for limited resources

Develop relationships with public safety agencies which they interact with.

Public safety entities should fund alternative hotlines to conduct activities that evaluate community needs and develop recommended strategies!

Alternative hotlines could partner with intermediaries like smartphone makers and telecom companies to feature alternative numbers alongside 911 where it is built into systems like the core function of smartphone user interfaces (911 on lock screen)

Share training materials and curricula

How can alternative hotlines obtain/gain buy-in from other public safety entities?

Understand that this is a huge paradigm shift and the necessary relationships will take time to develop. Start simple and be patient.

Sharing of calls for service (scripts/protocols/procedures) that are used by both 911 & alt hotlines and identifying what works best

Encourage shared/similar training and hiring practices. Offer the possibility for workers to go between hotlines to support lateral and upward mobility for professionals

cross training also has its own unintended consequences.

Availability 24x7 for the desired services both at the hotline and local level. If availability at the local level isn't awake at 0300, then the default is the existing process of dispatching 911 resources.

apologies if not the correct term to use but to use an old cliché... "jack of all trades, master of none"...

"Buy-in" presumes the service being sold is worth buying. Framing the current state of the 911 system as broken in ways that are irredeemable is insulting to the people working incredibly hard to make it work.

How can alternative hotlines secure funds to build capacity and infrastructure to support high call volumes?

Ensure at the federal level that alternative hotlines are a complementary service

Encourage state and local policymakers to get creative with how they are using ARPA and COVID-related relief funds.

Make the case to policymakers through community driven outreach and education campaigns/lobbying at the state and national level

If we truly believe these have value across the nation we need to develop legislation and funding mechanisms.

Allow fee collection for alternative hotlines alongside 911 -- and for both, provide federal and state leadership/requirements to prevent raiding these funds (as is the case in many places today)

Determine whether there are opportunities to re-calibrate funding that is currently directed at inappropriate response modalities toward more needs-specific hotlines and response

I do not support funding of hotlines as alternatives to 911. The funding needs to go to broadening the capabilities and capacity and reach of 911.

The business case should be made as to why the alternate is needed, ie., 988 and mental health needs epidemic. Maybe a combination of public/partnerships, philanthropy and blended local/state and fed \$\$

This requires a detailed assessment of the the % of call types currently handled by 911 that may be better handled by the alternatives.

How can alternative hotlines secure funds to build capacity and infrastructure to support high call volumes?

I also do not support redirecting 911 funds to any other activity. We struggle to provide services with the funds available to us.

The federal government has already stated the 911 surcharges fees cannot be used for 988 development so would carry that forward to mean they cannot be used for other alternative hotline number development