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National Suicide Prevention Lifeline In-State Answer Rates, Stratified by Call Volume Rates and Geographic Region (2020)

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On July 16, 2022 “988” will become the new toll-free dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (the major crisis telephone hotline in the U.S.).¹ Lifeline calls are initially routed to crisis centers within the caller’s state. If the call cannot be answered in a reasonable amount of time, it is re-routed to an out-of-state crisis center. Having calls answered in-state is considered a best practice because crisis center staff can more effectively connect callers to local resources. The “in-state answer rate”—defined as the percentage of Lifeline calls originating from a state that are answered in that state—is a Lifeline quality metric, with 90% as the benchmark goal. This Datapoint characterizes variation across states’ in-state answer rates and assesses associations with rates of Lifeline call volume and geographic region.

Methods

State-level 2020 data on in-state answer rates and number of Lifeline calls—excluding calls to the Veteran (state mean= 25.0% of calls) and Spanish language (state mean= 1.4% of calls) Lifelines because callers from these populations are routed to separate Lifelines—were obtained from publicly available Lifeline reports.² Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau³ and Veterans Administration,⁴ we estimated the number of non-Veteran residents within each state in 2020. We used these data to calculate a rate of Lifeline calls per 1,000 non-Veteran state residents. This served as a population size-adjusted measure of demand for Lifeline services.

Results

The mean in-state answer rate was 71.3% (SD= 19.5%) and the range was 10.0% (Minnesota) to 98.2% (Rhode Island). Only seven states were at or above 90.0%. Mean in-state answer rates by U.S. Census Region were: Northeast= 76.1%, West= 76.7%, South= 70.6%, Midwest= 62.7% ($F= 1.32$, $p= .28$). The mean Lifeline call volume rate per 1,000 non-Veteran state residents was 5.54 (SD= 1.33) and the range was 3.75 (Maine) to 11.00 (Alaska). There was no correlation between a state's in-state answer rate and its Lifeline call volume rate (Spearman correlation= $-.11$, $p= .44$; Pearson correlation= $.06$, $p= .66$) (Figure 1).

Discussion

There is substantial variation in Lifeline in-state answer rates across states. The absence of a positive correlation between in-state answer rates and call volume rates suggests that low in-state answer rates are not the result of high demand for Lifeline services. Understanding how to improve in-state answer rates is important because Lifeline call volume is projected to potentially triple following the launch of 988.⁵

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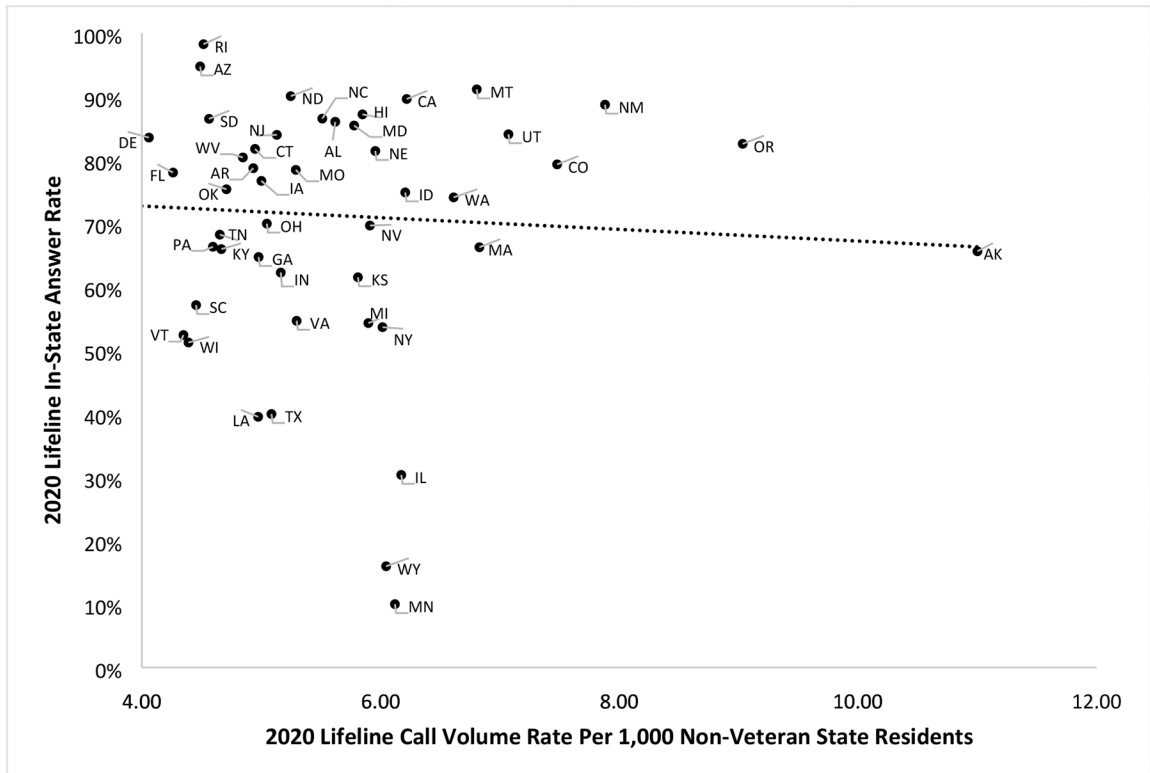


Figure 1. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline In-State Answer Rates and Call Volume Rates for U.S. States, 2020