Wisconsin Callers in 2018 to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Established in 2005

the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is the nation’s most recognized suicide and mental health crisis line.

The Lifeline is not one large national call center. Instead, it is a network of 170 independently operated, independently funded local, regional, and state-level call centers. Currently there are only 4 Lifeline-affiliated centers in Wisconsin. They have the critical expertise and linkages to local resources that callers in crisis deserve.

To participate in the Lifeline network, centers operate to the highest standards of suicide care. They do an incredible job of de-escalating crisis situations, decreasing emotional distress, and reducing suicidality.

In the event local centers are unable to answer, the Lifeline re-routes calls to backup centers in our network (both in and out-of-state).

Why is this?

The number of Lifeline calls that needed answering by Wisconsin call centers increased 63% from 2016 to 2018

How can I help?

In 2018, the Lifeline received 2.5 million crisis calls from across the United States

29,402 calls were from Wisconsin

Of the 29,402 callers, 8,180 individuals pressed "1" to be transferred to the Veterans Crisis Line and 169 pressed "2" for Lifeline’s Spanish Language Line.

Ideally, the remaining 21,053 calls in 2018 would have been answered by Lifeline call centers in Wisconsin.

Of those, only 6,303 calls (30%) were able to be answered in-state.

Which meant 14,750 callers in crisis were unable to be answered by a Wisconsin call center.
In 2019, there are 4 Lifeline network call centers in Wisconsin:
- Journey Mental Health Center - Emergency Services Unit (Madison)
- Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division (Wauwatosa)
- North Central Health Care (Wausau)
- Acute Care Services - Crisis Intervention Team (West Bend)

Why were only 30% of 2018’s Lifeline calls in Wisconsin answered in-state?

Lifeline call centers in Wisconsin set the hours and coverage areas for when and where they will take Lifeline calls. They do this based on funding and staffing levels.

Most Lifeline-affiliated call centers in the U.S. (including in Wisconsin) answer calls on other helplines in addition to the Lifeline. Despite their very best efforts, call volume can, at times, strain center capacity and callers may hang up while they wait for the next available counselor.

In addition, many parts of Wisconsin currently have no coverage for Lifeline calls. This means calls the Lifeline receives from these areas must be routed and answered out-of-state.

When calls are re-routed to centers out-of-state, Wisconsin callers in crisis wait longer, they receive fewer linkages to effective local care, and are more likely to abandon their calls.

Research shows the Lifeline is an effective, life-saving safety net for those in crisis (Gould et al., 2007, 2013, 2015, 2017; Ramchand et al., 2016). According to a 2018 survey of Lifeline centers, almost 98% of the crisis calls are de-escalated such that costly, highly-restrictive responses from law enforcement and emergency medical services are not necessary.

The Lifeline is federally funded to manage the call routing, best practice standards, public messaging, and technical assistance for its network. However, the funds that sustain our network’s centers come from state, county, and local sources. Many centers struggle to find enough funding to operate and grow.

These call centers are key components of Wisconsin’s behavioral health systems because they represent an entry point into other levels of coordinated care. They provide critical services for Wisconsin residents at serious risk, especially those with nowhere else to turn.

Wisconsin Lifeline centers need expanded support and more centers are also needed.

Please join the cause!
Reach out to your local centers and decision-makers in Wisconsin.

Learn more about the Lifeline as well as how to contact your centers in Wisconsin by visiting:
http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/our-network/