

June 6, 2019

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket 18-336
Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners:

I write to you as someone who currently works at 211Info for the past few years, and, as someone who worked at Lines for Life for several years as a crisis intervention specialist taking calls through the NSPL.

I write on behalf of the callers I speak to on a daily basis to urge you to designate a 3-digit code as a Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline – and to reject the North American Numbering Council (NANC) recommendation that no such line should be established.

Frankly, I believe the NANC simply fails to appreciate the severity of the mental health and suicide crisis we are facing in the United States – and as such, they elevated convenience and status quo over the desperate need for an easy to access crisis service -- a 911 for the brain.

211Info is a fantastic resource, but consumers are already frustrated and confused by mixed messages on what services we provide on this line at 211. And, we have a lengthy phone tree to manage, and calls can, and have sat in the queue for well over an hour before on a frequent basis. We at 211 are not the right choice for a suicide crisis line. We have a flow chart on all of our desks at work for taking suicidal callers, and this flow chart walks us through how to warm transfer a caller over to a crisis line, such as the NSPL. Using 211 in this manner is a bandaid that won't ebb the flow, we at 211 are not the answer to this problem. We're not set up to cover this ask, we are fantastic at what we do, but you call a plumber when you need a plumber, and you call an electrician when you need an electrician. We have very different skill sets compared to those answering the NSPL, and our community in crisis deserves people prepared to answer the call in the most supportive manner.

Over 47,000 people in the United States died by suicide in 2017, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Put another way: More Americans died by suicide 2017 than were killed in action in 40 years of the Vietnam War.¹ 2018 likely saw at least 47,000 more deaths by suicide, and we will see another 47,000 or more deaths again this year.

Suicide was the second leading cause of death among young people in the United States, and there were more than twice as many suicides (47,173) in the United States as there were homicides (19,510).

And of course the deaths are just the tip of the iceberg – 1.3 million adults in the United States attempted suicide in 2017, and nearly 10 million had serious thoughts of suicide.

The bottom line is that we are in the midst of a crisis in the United States – we are losing loved ones, neighbors and colleagues to suicide at a shocking and unprecedented rate.

N-11 numbers cover an array of services within the United States. There is 911 for emergency medical, police, or fire. 811 for underground public utility location. 711 for TDD relay for the deaf. 611 for telephone company customer service and repair. 511 for traffic info. 411 for directory assistance. 311 for municipal government services and non-emergency calls, and 211 for information and referral about community services.

Information and referral. That is what we here at 211info are for; we dig through a database to find information about services so that our community can advocate for their needs. We give out information about community services in the area, and we place people on waitlists for services in the area. We're great for doling out information and conducting surveys. But we're not trained in behavioral health services. Part of our training at 211 is to NOT offer advice. Motivational interviewing, crisis de-escalation and intervention are not in our playbook at 211. But they are in the crisis intervention specialists' playbooks who are currently manning the NSPL.

I've been working at 211Info for about as long as I worked at Lines for Life taking calls from the NSPL. It's an entirely different world, it's a entirely different hat to wear. And the crisis we're going through here in the United States regarding mental health deserves more than cost-cutting initiatives and bandaids. Our communities lives matter more than that. Please designate a 3-digit code as a Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline. Please don't put this in 211Info's sandbox, we are really the wrong choice.