

Written Statement of Fact

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Before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health U.S. House of Representatives
Submitted for the Hearing Record**

“Dial 988 +1: Examining the Operations of the Veterans Crisis Line”

September 18, 2024

Chair Miller-Meeks, Ranking Member Brownley, and members of the Subcommittee:

I am providing this Statement of Fact for the record to clarify the information I attempted to communicate during the hearing. This statement reaffirms to Veterans that the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is the life-saving resource that they can trust 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, 365 days a year.

The VCL was created to provide crisis intervention for “Veterans who are at high risk for depression and experience high rates of suicide.”¹ On average the VCL provides crisis service to Veterans who are approximately 9-times more likely than other Veterans to die by suicide.² This means that Veterans who are at higher risk for suicide are more likely to use the VCL than Veterans who are not. This is a population-based statistic and not a causal statement that could have been misunderstood during the hearing. VCL uses this data to inform ongoing efforts to enhance coordination for suicide prevention beyond the call.

When a Veteran connects to our trained Crisis Responders, many of whom are Veterans, the VCL successfully de-escalates distress and suicidal crises among high-risk Veterans and connects them to receive appropriate care. Data shows that 96% of calls to VCL are successfully resolved without dispatching emergency services. From 2019-2021, this equated to 1.38 million calls that were handled and without the need for local emergency services.³ Of the 4% of VCL calls that are emergency situations, Veterans who talk with VCL responders and coordinate safe transportation plans to emergency care are both more likely to present to emergency care in general and more likely to connect with VHA care.⁴

Conclusion

¹ Public Law 110-110

² Hannemann et al., 2021

³ Britton, Bohnert, et al., 2023

⁴ Stearns-Yoder et al., 2023

The VCL is effective at supporting Veterans through crisis management and care connection services. Among Veterans who had suicidal thoughts 1) the majority reported that using the VCL played a role in stopping them from acting on those thoughts; and 2) the majority of those who accepted a local referral reported that using the VCL helped stop them from acting on those thoughts.⁵

I appreciate the Committee's continued support and collaboration in this shared mission.

⁵ Johnson et al., 2021