

Crisis Services: 988 and 590 Programs Annual Evaluation 2024

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Problem Statement

Prior to the national implementation of 988 in July of 2022, the number of calls from Illinois residents to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline that were answered by Illinois call centers hovered around 20 percent. Further, the availability of mobile crisis team response to adults was spotty or non-existent across the state, resulting in law enforcement being the de facto mental health crisis response in many communities. With the implementation of 988, Illinois funded six in-state 988 call centers with the goal of answering 90–95% of 988 calls in-state. The 590 program is supporting mobile crisis response teams (MCRTs) across the state with the goal of 24/7 statewide availability.

Evaluation Objectives

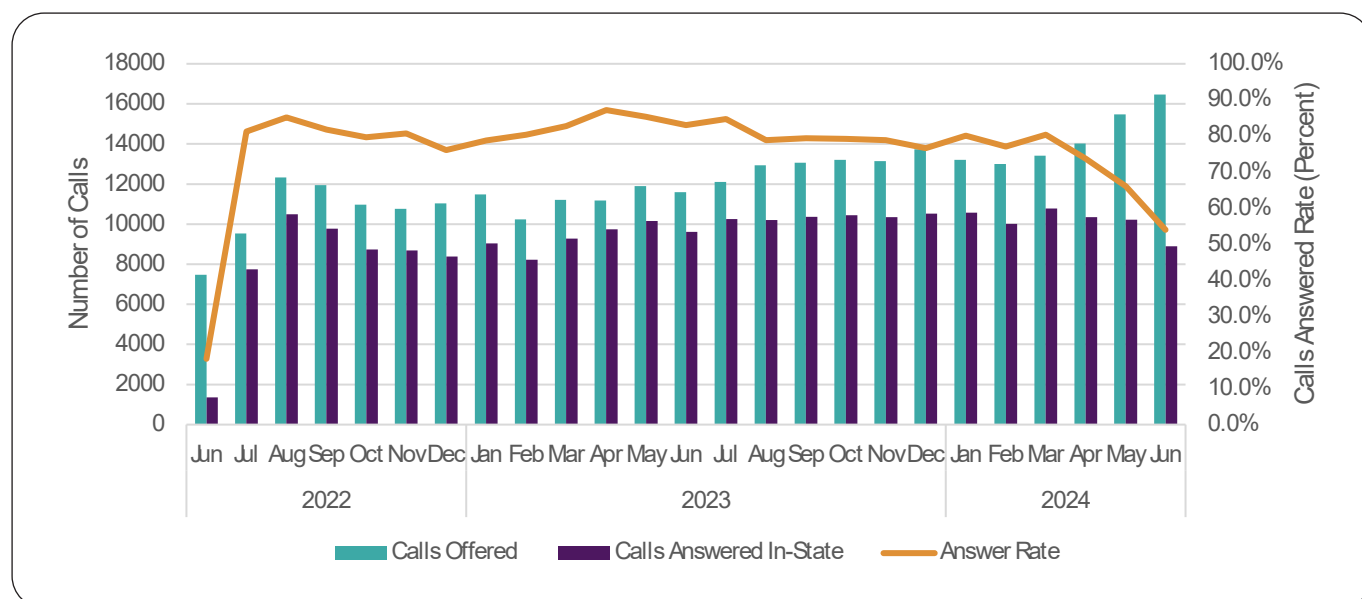
The evaluation of the 988 Call Centers and the 590 MCRTs includes quantitative components designed to provide information

on service volume, populations served, and short-term outcomes, as well as qualitative components to delve into implementation challenges and opportunities.

Main Findings

Figure 1 shows there has been a gradual increase in monthly call volume, with the highest volume, 16,474 calls, occurring in June 2024. While in-state answer rates were stable in the first three-quarters of FY24, ranging from 77–85%, in the final quarter of FY24, answer rates dropped to 74%, 66%, and 54% in April, May, and June, respectively. During this period, PATH, the largest call center serving as the state backup, was experiencing staffing challenges. Given the size of the call center, this drove the overall in-state answer rate to 54% for June 2024. Answer rates are expected to improve in FY25 with the addition of Centerstone as the 8th call center for the state.

Figure 1: Calls Answered vs. Answered In-State (June 2022 - June 2024)



When callers are in need of an in-person response, centers may engage 911 to request police and/or EMS response or contact 1 of 65 Illinois agencies that provide 590 mobile crisis services. In

FY23, statewide 1,098 (1%) 988 callers were transferred to 911 for emergency response and 2,960 (2%) were transferred to a 590 mobile crisis team.

Figure 2: Calls Transferred to 590 Mobile Crisis Teams or Emergency Services (June 2022 - June 2024)

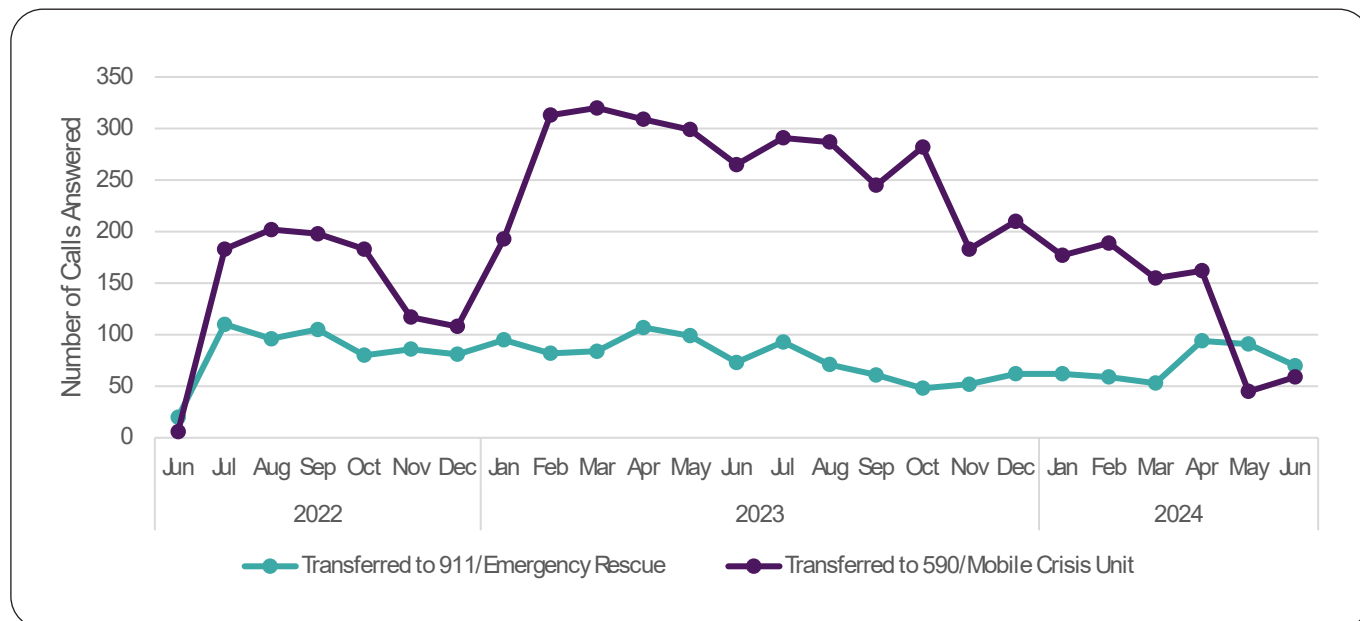


Figure 2 shows the monthly numeric counts where there has been a stark decrease in mobile crisis team transfers between October 2023 and June 2024. While the in-state answer rate declined during the last few months of this period, that does not explain the decrease in the number of 590 transfers. Except for June 2024, the number of in-state-answered calls was stable, ranging between 10,009 and 10,779. At the start of FY24, 3% of callers were transferred to 590 teams. By the end of the year, this had dropped to less than 1%. The rate of transfers to 911 was consistently 1% across both years. A similar trend was noted for text/chat contacts. In FY23, transfers to 590 teams ranged from 1–5% of all contacts, and 911 transfers ranged from 1–3%. In FY24, 590 transfers ranged from 0–4%, and 911 transfers from 0–4%. While in-state answer rates for chats and texts were low, these numbers suggest a higher level of crisis acuity among those using text/chat to reach 988 compared to those connecting via the phone.

During the reporting period (FY24 Q1, Q2 & Q3), providers recorded a total of 21,653 MCRT responses. Of the total MCRT responses, 16,199 (74.8%) involved an Engagement Specialist (ES). There was a wide discrepancy between the providers, with responses involving law enforcement or EMS ranging from 0–100%, though the modal value in each quarter was 0.

Continuing Challenges

In the coming year, a qualitative study will be conducted to understand implementation challenges and successes, including those related to staffing and connecting callers needing an in-person response to 590 mobile crisis teams and, in the case of emergencies, 911.