Crisis Response and Transforming 911 for Public Health, Safety, and Justice

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Science in Service Of Cities.
OUR MISSION

Health Lab seeks to partner with civic and community leaders to identify, rigorously evaluate, and scale programs and policies that improve health outcomes and address systemic barriers to achieving health equity.

OUR APPROACH

IDENTIFY
Promising solutions to urban challenges

TEST
The most promising urban policies and programs

SCALE UP
The most effective and cost-efficient policies and programs
Health Lab’s Work Sits at the Nexus of Public Health Safety

**Areas of Focus and Associated Projects**

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<th>Homelessness</th>
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<td>• Road Map Initiative</td>
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<th>Public Safety, Diversion, Deflection, Reentry</th>
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<td>Continuum of Community Responders</td>
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<td>• Reducing Opioid Mortality in Illinois</td>
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<th>Equitable Access to Holistic Care</th>
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<td>• Comprehensive Care Program</td>
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<td>• Comprehensive Care, Community, and Culture</td>
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<td>Program (C4P)</td>
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<td>• COVID and Vitamin D Community Study</td>
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Why 911?

- Person needing support
- Police response
- Arrest
- Incarceration
- Ambulance
- Emergency room
- Mobile response team
- Psychiatric hospital
- Person calling on someone’s behalf
- 988 - formerly known as the National Suicide Hotline

Graphic: Jalyn Radziminski, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Is 988 The Answer?; Washington DC, June 2022.
At least 240 million calls to 911 are made in the US each year. Most are not related to a crime in progress, but still elicit a police response – sometimes with tragic results.

911 is the gateway to access wellbeing for many in crisis yet lacks critical investments and is poorly understood.
When working at its full potential, provides members of the public (who are) facing acute threats to their wellbeing with appropriate, equitable, relevant, immediate, and around-the-clock access to relief from distress. 911 is a complex system requiring expertise, communication, coordination, resources, and trust to span:

a) the diverse cultural, historical, linguistic and other realities across and within America's communities;
b) the methods by which users initiate the request for assistance—be that by way of a telephone call, text, or other defined mechanisms;
c) the call-taking, call-handling, and dispatching procedures; and
d) the response—be that by virtual or on-scene traditional (i.e., EMS, fire, or police) and/or other sectors of the first responder ecosystem.

First Responder Ecosystem: Includes 911 professionals, police, fire, and EMS responses, but not solely them. This term is being used alongside “alternative” responders. This first responder ecosystem:

a) includes responders who encounter the same or similar threats, challenges, and exposure to trauma that EMS, fire, and police do when responding to people in the midst of an emergency.
b) can be deployed by 911, 988, 311, or can exist in the community for people in crisis to outreach directly though hotlines or other means.
c) includes responses from community-based organizations that provide treatment and support to people in crisis, people who are homeless, people who are in conflict with one another and people with mental health and/or substance use challenges.
d) includes both virtual support and in-person responses.

911 Professionals: Includes telecommunicators, operators, call handlers, dispatchers and other 911 personnel – we use this term to better reflect both the role and the credibility of these key personnel, especially in light of the complexity of their jobs and the distinct and invaluable role they play.

Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs): Favored by many 911 professionals in lieu of the more traditional term, Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs).
The Game of Telephone
VIDEO 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSekdGHJTtwM

Stop at 1 minute 29 seconds
Five Things
America’s First 911 Call Made To This Phone On February 16, 1968
FIRST 9-1-1 CALL

The first 9-1-1 emergency services telephone call was made from the office of the mayor on February 16, 1968. Earlier in the year, AT&T, which had a near monopoly in the telephone industry at the time, had announced its plans for launching the service from an Indiana exchange. The Alabama Telephone Company, an independent entity, resolved to beat the telecommunications giant to the mark and chose the Haleyville exchange to launch its successful effort. With much fanfare, Alabama House Speaker Rankin Fite placed the first 9-1-1 call in the nation to U.S. Congressman Tom Bevill, who answered in the Haleyville police station.
Kerner Commission launched after 159 protests in summer of ‘67

Most remembered for
• Condemning white America’s racism as cause of protests
• Demanding investments in Black communities and action against discrimination

Suppressed early findings that riots are a logical, effective political response to white supremacy

Internal disagreement on best response to civil disorder
SUPPLEMENT ON CONTROL OF DISORDER

Focused on expanding police capacity to suppress protests
  • Riot control training and equipment
  • Infiltrate Black communities and movement spaces

Omitted from most report publications

1963 universal emergency services number used to aid US counterinsurgency efforts in Caracas, Venezuela

Arnold P. Sagalyn
FIRST 911 CALL

Alabama, 1968

AL Telephone Co. President B.W. Gallagher

AL Public Service Commission Director Eugene “Bull” Connor

US Representative Tom Bevill

Research Collaborator: Katrina Feldkamp
EARLY CONCERNS

February 1968: LBJ says 911 will decrease response times, increase arrests, and provide a “more immediate” solution to civil unrest.

Increases police deployment for non-emergency calls

- FCC’s Lee Loevinger warns LBJ
- NYC adopts 911 in July 1968 for police only
- Half of new calls for non-emergencies
- Deployment increased by 7.5%
PARALLELS: 1967 & 2020
911: Volume and Coverage

NO NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION!!

~ 240 million calls/year??

~ 96% of US??

~ 80%+ from cell phones??
911: Most Used Civic Engagement Tool and Benefit

911 (240M)

2020 Presidential Election (154.6)

Medicaid (90M)

988 (4.4M)

TANF (1.1M)
911: Call Factors, Types, and Outcomes

PROXIES AND LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

- ~75-85% default to police
  - >180 million/year
- Single most determinant of police contact
- Most calls < 10pm
- <3% behavioral health
- <2% violent crimes
- ~5% → arrest
- >65% fatal force incidents
... The 911 Workforce
THE 911 WORKFORCE

Despite the critical role they play:

- Professionally categorized as “administrative support”
  - Despite > 70% public perception

- Low pay, high trauma exposure, mandatory OT
  - 96% 40+ hours/week
  - 10% 60+ hours/week

- Staff burnout, turnover, chronic understaffing, limited training, and fatigue
  - < 35% vacancy rates 30% +
  - < 65% sleep deprived
PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL WELLNESS

Depression
- Sworn Law Enforcement: 6%
- Fire & Rescue: 10%
- Dispatch: 17%
- National Average: 8.4%

Anxiety
- Sworn Law Enforcement: 16%
- Fire & Rescue: 18%
- Dispatch: 30%
- National Average: 2.7%

PTSD
- Sworn Law Enforcement: 11%
- Fire & Rescue: 12%
- Dispatch: 18%
- National Average: 3.6%

Suicidal Ideation
- Sworn Law Enforcement: 7%
- Fire & Rescue: 10%
- Dispatch: 14%
- National Average: 4.9%
VIDEO 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJL_8kNFmTI

Stop at 2 minutes 27 seconds
Opportunity for Consensus
TRANSFORM 911

Innovate crisis response for public health, safety, equity, and justice
Process

- Convened 120+ diverse experts and community of practice for a national dialogue centered on 911 innovation
- Enhanced the 911 research base
- Achieved consensus on recommendations and evidence-based approaches
- Centered wellbeing
Transform911 Process and Recommendations

Transform911 Workgroups

1. (Re)Introducing 911
   Everyone knows the number, almost no one knows how it works.

2. Putting the People in 911
   Community partnership is essential to a 911 system that works for everyone.

3. Advancing the Workforce
   There’s no 911 without a recognized, supported, professional workforce.

4. Making 911 Independent and Equal
   ECCs that are independent and equal to other local first response systems help improve equitable outcomes.

5. Ensuring the Right Response at the Right Time
   A diverse ecosystem of responses reduces reliance on the police by default.

6. Strengthening Data and Tech Standards
   Reliable and ethical data and tech improves responses.

7. Securing National-Level Support (for 911)
   Effective, equitable emergency response locally requires unequivocal support federally.

911 Hotline Alternatives
911 Governance
911 Technology & Infrastructure
911 Professional Career & Supports
Alternative First Response
Identified 100+ Research Questions

*Six questions Transform911 research delegates deemed critical to progress:*

1. How many people are calling 911, and what are they calling about?
2. What do we know about the implementation of new call-coding standards and the degree to which they are followed with fidelity?
3. What is the prevalence and impact of bias by proxy, passed from caller to call taker to responding officer, and how does it inform officer action?
4. Where are the alternative strategies currently being implemented?
5. Survey 911 professionals to understand challenges and develop new career progression and retention strategies.
6. Develop a living system for digesting data in a standardized way for later AI analysis.
Resources

Transform911 Blueprint for Change
https://www.transform911.org/blueprint/

Review of the Literature

Resource Hub
https://www.transform911.org/resource-hub/
Thank you!

For Comments or Questions Contact

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Appendix
(Re)Introducing 911

Everyone knows the number, almost no one knows how it works.

We are calling for a multi-part national outreach, education, and visibility campaign to reintroduce 911 and introduce 988 as a system, and as a profession that is an essential gateway to the care infrastructure of America.
Recommendation 2

Putting the People in 911 and 988

Community partnership is essential to a 911 system that works for everyone.

We are calling for structures and practices that create deeper and more transparent partnerships between Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) and the communities they serve, with particular attention to demographic or identity communities who may have differential experiences and understandings of emergency response systems (including but not exclusively 911). We are calling for intentional, integrated community voice, and leadership at critical points in the system to facilitate shared, though inherently not equally weighted, responsibility in system outcomes.
Recommendation 3

Advancing the Workforce

There’s no 911 or 988 without a recognized, supported, professional workforce.

We are calling for 911 professionals—who are critical to the functioning of the entire 911 ecosystem, from call-taking to field responses—to have access to high-quality consistent minimum training, wellbeing support, compensation, and career paths, commensurate with the reality that they are professionals and the first, first responders. This requires reclassifying 911 professionals from “administrative support” to “protective service,” and addressing local and regional barriers to recruitment and retention, including factors that impact attracting and retaining diverse staff reflective of the communities they serve. This also requires building response networks to understand and fill out the ecosystem of needed responses, including hiring people with lived crisis experience and preparing them adequately for the work.
Recommendation 4

Making 911 Independent and Equal

*ECCs that are independent and equal to other local first response systems help improve equitable outcomes.*

We are calling for local 911 Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) to be independent and equal public safety departments equipped to tap a diverse range of responses to best match the response to each emergency. This requires removing the default to police or another system common in many communities when ECCs are housed within law enforcement or another emergency response agency.
Recommendation 5

Ensuring the Right Response at the Right Time

*A diverse ecosystem of responses reduces reliance on the police default.*

We are calling for significant investment in a diverse ecosystem of response options, so that callers can be met with the right response at the right time. These response options can and should include availability of experts in triaging crises in the ECCs as well as connections that enable 911 and 988 professionals to transfer calls to hotlines or virtual and on-scene responders skilled in managing a host of community needs, including homelessness, mental health crises, substance use crisis, and domestic violence.
Recommendation 6

Strengthening Data and Tech Standards

Reliable and ethical data and tech improves responses.

We are calling for uniform 911 and 988 minimum data standards and improved data collection practices, as well as the development and maintenance of transparent, consistent policies on the ethical use of technology and data in emergency response. This covers data privacy and algorithmic transparency for software systems built around emergency response data. Further, we are calling for the adoption of clear and specific guidelines for standardizing, sharing, and making available emergency response data across the nation.
Recommendation 7

Securing and Unified National-Level Support (for 911 and 988)

*Effective, equitable emergency response locally requires unequivocal support federally.*

We are calling for federal, executive branch leadership to embrace and advance the transformative changes outlined in these recommendations. Specifically, we are calling for the President to create a time-limited 911/988 center and directorship by December 31, 2022, along with a federal interagency taskforce—to also include the relevant federal agencies, as well as local 911, 988, and other related field leaders—and an NAS panel. The emphasis on time limitation is made because a permanent federal home for this center should be carefully examined and ultimately recommended by the panel to establish where it can best: serve the needs of callers and the workforce, coordinate complex processes between the many federal, state, and local partners, bolster federal support, and weather political leadership changes.