

Standards, Training and Practices Committee Conference Call Meeting Minutes August 20, 2020/2:30pm – 5pm (ET)

Attendees: L. Langford, D. Jobes (co-chairs), R. McKeon, M. Cornette (SAMHSA), J. Draper, S. Sinwelski, G. Murphy, S. Louis, M. Stone, J. Smith, L. Zapata, E. Piette, A. Goldstein, R. Filler (Lifeline), S. Rowe, J. Battle, L. Harris, E. Vera (guests), A. Martinez, B. Andrews, B. Patterson, B. Mishara, M. Gould, K. Hallstrom, L. Chandler, L. Wick, R. Fitzgerald, R. White, T. Pisani, J. Rozel, S. Heath, M. Cassidy, L. Turbeville (members)

Imminent Risk Policy Revision

- Brief background on Imminent Risk Policy (2011) (Full document and summary distributed and also accessible on Lifeline website) was provided that included an overview of:
 - Values Underlying Imminent Risk Policy
 - Three Core Principles of Assessment
 - Definition of Imminent Risk
 - Additional Requirements: Center using least invasive intervention
- The need to begin to revise the document was raised with a particular focus on the fact of law enforcement presence when an individual at risk requires intervention and the use of the term “Active Rescue.” The goal for revision of the document was presented as follows:
 - *Enhance use of active engagement and less invasive approaches to reducing risk in callers assessed to be at imminent risk of suicide, and reduce unnecessary use of law enforcement interventions with callers/chat visitors/texters.*
 - Based on the current IR Policy, the question was asked of the committee where there could be areas of the policy that could be developed further or where we could provide greater guidance to enhance the use of active engagement at Lifeline crisis centers.

IR Discussion

- Four representatives from the Lifeline’s Lived Experience Committee (LEC) were invited to join the STPC to participate in review of the imminent risk policy towards enhancing use of active engagement and reduce unnecessary use of law enforcement interventions.
- Discussion focused on the following:
 - To illustrate potential harms of police response to persons in suicidal crisis, Trans Lifeline representative reviewed the traumatizing and victimizing experiences of trans individuals in law enforcement encounters. The representative noted that trans individuals would not seek help from a hotline service where they could feel threatened by a potential police encounter. The representative noted that Lifeline counselors must be educated about the potential harms that could occur when 911 is contacted for certain populations that have been historically marginalized and/or victimized by law enforcement and mental health systems, including LGBTQ and BIPOC communities.
 - In addressing ways in which the existing IR policy has impacted those with lived experience, LEC Guest Members focused the discussion on both acknowledging the benefit and lifesaving goal as well as the inherent trauma that can be associated with an involuntary experience. One committee member (an attempt survivor) highlighted the experience of having police come to the home for what is a mental health issue and the importance of removing police involvement entirely. The issue with police going into the homes of black and brown individuals in mental health crisis and potential dangers of brutalization, violence, and criminalization as a result of law enforcement

response are examples of why the term “active rescue” needs to be changed. While “rescue” and keeping a person “safe” may be the intent of the counselor, the actual result could create additional unintended harms and risks to the individual.

- One model from Houston, Texas was reviewed - Crisis Center removed term “Active Rescue” and changed it to “Sending Law Enforcement” to more clearly indicate action taken and to move away from terms like “Welfare Check” too when in fact police are going to a person’s home. The center reinforced systematic training and ongoing supervision on maintaining safety and since this change was made in language and policy (no more “welfare checks”), there’s been a 65% decrease in the amount of times law enforcement has been called since last October. This model illustrated the impact of educating counselors on potential unintended harm of activating a law enforcement response for individuals assessed to be at risk of suicide, and effectively reduced unnecessary 911 dispatch.
- Group further discussed the term “Active Rescue” and agreed that it does not accurately represent the actual process or outcome of the action being taken, from the perspective of the person in crisis. A number of alternative terms that were more descriptive of the intervention. As the Committee agreed that the “Active Rescue” phrase needs to be replaced, options of alternative terms will be distributed to the committee for a vote.
- Whether or not the individual consents to 911 being contacted is an important distinction for center counselors and their supervisors to track on; to better assure that counselors use “active rescue” as a last resort, center supervisors should review all incidences to explore if less invasive alternatives were feasible, and integrate lessons learned into counselor supervision and training efforts. Further, Lifeline administrators have begun to collect data from centers showing the frequency of using active engagement vs. “active rescue” interventions for persons at imminent risk, and the Committee agreed that these data could be used by Lifeline administrators to apply approaches from centers with lower rates of active rescue to assist centers with higher rates of activating involuntary emergency services.
- Final area of discussion focused on crisis center education of counselors on unintended impacts of involuntary interventions, ranging from the potential dangers to LGBTQ/BIPOC communities, stigma and discouraging future help seeking, as well as potential financial hardships (unexpected “emergency service bills”) and impact of police response exacerbating conflicted family relationships.

Next Steps

- Summary of suggested changes to the IR policy to be distributed for comment
- Changes to the term “active rescue” to be further discussed
- Update to be provided to the LEC at the upcoming meeting to get input