

Response to Questions on the FY 2009 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Supervisor Smyth

Question: How does CrisisLink route incoming calls? How does the routing for an Information and Referral (I&R) call differ from that of a suicide inquiry? What specifically does the 211 Contract with the Commonwealth pay for?

Response: CrisisLink currently provides answering service for the Regional 211 I&R Hotline funded through a state contract, and three major crisis hotlines funded through private contributions and support from local jurisdictions (i.e. Fairfax and Arlington Counties and the City of Alexandria). The routing structure for I&R and crisis calls is similar from the start and is modified as the individual's specific needs are identified by the CrisisLink operator. Generally speaking, there is a natural sorting process that occurs on the part of the caller. Callers who seek I&R information tend to call the general 211 number, whereas individuals who are seeking serious crisis-oriented information tend to call one of the other hotline numbers published by CrisisLink (703-527-4077; 1-800-273-TALK; 1-800-SUICIDE). Though the 211 operators at CrisisLink are specifically trained to handle I&R calls, and the hotline operators at CrisisLink are specifically trained to handle the serious and critical nature of crisis calls, both divisions work closely together and have a seamless process that transfers the caller to the appropriate specialist without placing the caller on hold. The specific routing technique used with each call is directed by the situation of the caller and the operator's assessment of the situation. During the recent test period of the Regional 211 hotline (January–March 2008), CrisisLink received 2 suicide-related calls out of 735 total calls. During FY 2007, CrisisLink received approximately 27,500 calls on the crisis hotlines, 2,100 of which were broadly-defined suicide-related calls (including intervention and situational de-escalation). Of these 2,100 suicide-related callers, 580 were Fairfax County residents.

In FY 2008, CrisisLink received \$320,000 from the Commonwealth to fund the Regional 211 I&R hotline. Of the total award, CrisisLink allocated \$270,000 to direct and indirect personnel costs including: five direct salaried staff positions (including benefits) and indirect management and administrative support expenses. The remaining \$50,000 was allocated across various operating program expenses associated with 211 including: telephone, supplies, outreach and travel expenses. Additionally, as part of its matching contribution, CrisisLink provided \$72,000 in cash and in-kind contributions for the 211 contract including: rent, utilities, four new computers, telephone head sets, maintenance contracts, annual audit and insurance.