



Center for
Prevention Programs
and Partnerships

Exploring the Use of Three-Digit Call Lines: A Prevention Resource

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Exploring the Use of Three-Digit Call Lines in Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention

A Synthesis of Current Research and Practice in the United States and Canada

Scope and Summary: This report provides an overview of current research and programming efforts to integrate targeted violence and terrorism prevention (TVTP) information and practice into three-digit call lines, such as 211 and 311 assistance and information telephone numbers, as well as 911 and 988 emergency and crisis support lines. The intended audience includes government policymakers, community leaders, public safety officials, and public health practitioners. Short descriptions of research and programs, primarily funded by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate and the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships' (CP3) TVTP Grant Program, are included in this guide. An example from Canada is included to demonstrate the emergence of this practice across North America. Together, these projects highlight several important opportunities to leverage three-digit calls lines for TVTP, including the need for specialized training for call line operators to identify cases of concern; the development of relevant referral information for call line operators to provide to callers; training for a broad range of first responders to ensure awareness of risk assessment and management options related to targeted violence and terrorism; and, in the long term, municipal planning efforts to map local resources, identify gaps, and offer solutions to address the full spectrum of intervention needs for individuals of concern. These programs also represent an opportunity to integrate TVTP efforts into existing public safety and community wellbeing programming.

Disclaimer: The following report is provided for informational purposes only to provide examples of how targeted violence and terrorism prevention information and practice has been incorporated into three-digit call lines in North America. Please consult local and state providers for the most current, up-to-date information about programming in specific locations. Programs and research that have received federal funding are noted in the references and the text. References to non-federal entities are for purposes of illustration and example only and do not constitute an endorsement of the non-federal entity by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or Federal Government.

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Terminology: In the context of the following Prevention Resource, three-digit helplines refer to call lines that offer informational and referral services to callers who are seeking resources for themselves or for a person of concern. Helplines may be distinguished from tip lines, which are more narrowly intended for suspicious activity reporting to law enforcement. All helplines provide some degree of crisis support.

Defining Targeted Violence and Terrorism: Targeted violence and terrorism pose threats to all communities. DHS defines targeted violence as premeditated acts of violence directed at a specific individual, group, or location, regardless of motivation, that violate the criminal laws of



the United States or of any State or subdivision of the United States. Targeted violence involves a degree of planning or a pre-identified target, such as an individual, a group of people, or property. These acts appear intended to intimidate, coerce, or otherwise impact a broader population besides the intended target, or they may be intended to generate publicity for a grievance.¹ Terrorism involves criminally unlawful acts dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources that appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence government policy by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.

Three-Digit Call Lines in the U.S.: Three-digit telephone helplines direct callers to community resources and assistance. There is extensive helpline infrastructure throughout the United States. 211, designated in 2000 by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as an information and referral services number, is a call line available in all 50 states that connects people with local resources for basic needs programs, like housing and employment information, as well as emergency information, disaster relief, and health services information. United Way Worldwide, a non-profit supporting 211, notes that the network responds to more than 20 million requests annually.² Other crisis helplines include the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, a network of local and state-funded crisis centers, launched in 2005 by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by the non-profit organization Vibrant Emotional Health.³ In 2022, the original 1-800 number transitioned to its current three-digit form, 988. Today, this line connects callers to trained crisis counselors and resources through call, text, and chat, and additionally provides a Veteran's Crisis Line. Another example is the Crisis Text Line, a global non-profit that provides 24/7 text-based mental health and crisis support.

Increasingly, emergency services and the call lines that support them have partnered with other agencies, such as social services and behavioral health services, to offer co-response programs comprised of police and clinicians for people in distress.⁴ Local governments may also operate other three-digit call lines, like a 311 non-emergency helpline⁵ or a separate three-digit service line for health access.⁶ When necessary, helplines coordinate with emergency lines like 911.⁷

There are also non-profit managed U.S. call lines that address TVTP. While these are not tied directly to municipal three-digit call lines, some offer referral services. The U.S.-based Parents for Peace, a public health non-profit that focuses on empowering communities and families to prevent targeted violence, has managed a confidential helpline since 2017 and received a TVTP

¹ See, e.g., [the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the 2024 Targeted Violence and Terrorism Grant Program](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/24_0415_cp3_tvtp-fy24-nofo.pdf), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/24_0415_cp3_tvtp-fy24-nofo.pdf.

² See [211 | United Way Worldwide](#)

³ See <https://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/press-announcements/202106161430>.

⁴ Puntis S, Perfect D, Kirubarajan A, Bolton S, Davies F, Hayes A, Harriss E, Molodynski A. A systematic review of co-responder models of police mental health 'street' triage. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2018 Aug 15;18(1):256. doi: 10.1186/s12888-018-1836-2. PMID: 30111302; PMCID: PMC6094921.

⁵ [USE OF N11 CODES AND OTHER ABBREVIATED DIALING ARRANGEMENTS | Federal Communications Commission \(fcc.gov\)](#)

⁶ [Info-Santé 811 | Gouvernement du Québec \(quebec.ca\)](#)

⁷ Department of Homeland Security Science & Technology Directorate, "Text-Enabled Gatekeeper Intervention Helpline Referral System Policies and Procedures," 3.



grant in 2023 to support the expansion of the call line.⁸ Moonshot, a social impact business addressing violent extremism, also operates a 24/7 text helpline, set up in partnership with Crisis Text Line, which provides crisis counseling sessions to individuals considering violence.⁹ Parents for Peace and Moonshot have both received federal funding in support of their TVTP efforts outside of helpline expansion.

Bystander Reporting and Hesitancy: Family and friends, sometimes referred to as "intimate bystanders," are positioned to notice warning signs that someone may be on a pathway to violence. However, research has shown that intimate bystanders may be hesitant to report someone they are concerned about to law enforcement for fear of getting them into trouble, or fear that the person of concern might discover that the caller reported them.¹⁰ Research also indicates that concerned individuals may find it challenging and overwhelming to navigate TVTP resources, especially when determining whether to report.¹¹ A 2021 study funded by the National Institute of Justice found that bystanders tend to prefer reporting in person or over the phone, as opposed to reporting through web-based modalities.¹² In two studies on bystander reporting, respondents expressed a desire for increased access to prevention tools and information.¹³¹⁴ Taken together, three-digit helplines can provide intimate bystanders with an anonymous first step that can help them gain access to information on relevant and local intervention resources.

Integrating Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention into Three-Digit Call Lines: A small number of three-digit call lines have integrated support services for violence prevention; for example, Philadelphia's 211 line offers resources on conflict intervention, youth violence prevention, and referrals to violence prevention community organizations.¹⁵ A limited number of helplines provide referral and informational services directly related to TVTP. 211 LA in Los Angeles has incorporated TVTP services into its helpline to support the LA-ROC (Los Angeles Open, Resilient Communities) initiative. In conjunction with research supported by the DHS Science and Technology Directorate, Georgia State University supported 211 LA in implementing policies and procedures to refer callers to targeted violence and terrorism prevention resources. This effort also included a formative evaluation of the text-based helpline and a process evaluation of the program's expansion. The final report, published in 2022, identified opportunities and challenges for text-enabled helpline referrals, which are discussed in the conclusion of this paper.

The research highlights the importance of developing protocols for call line operators to address specific targeted violence and terrorism concerns, given that operators must address a wide variety of concerns from callers (e.g., homelessness, mental health, bullying). The study

⁸ Parents for Peace received DHS CP3 grant funding in FY22 and FY23.

⁹ Moonshot received DHS CP3 grant funding in FY20.

¹⁰ National Council for Mental Wellbeing, "Mass Violence in America: Causes, Impacts and Solutions," 38.

¹¹ Sara K. Thompson, Michele Grossman & Paul Thomas, "Needs, Rights and Systems: Increasing Canadian Intimate Bystander Reporting on Radicalizing to Violence, Terrorism and Political Violence," 7.

¹² David P. Eisenman, Stevan Weine, Paul Thomas, Michele Grossman, "Community Reporting Thresholds: Sharing Information with Authorities Concerning Terrorism and Targeted Violence," 3.

¹³ Elga Sikkens, Marion van San, Stijn Sieckelinck, Micha de Winter, "Parents' Perspectives on Radicalization: A Qualitative Study."

¹⁴ Thompson et al. "Needs, Rights and Systems," 7.

¹⁵ See [Call the City's 24-hour Violence Prevention Hotline | Office of Criminal Justice | City of Philadelphia](#)



conducted by Georgia State University recommends text-based options to help direct callers to relevant resources, depending on the nature of their inquiries, as well as helping operators distinguish crisis versus non-crisis cases more clearly.¹⁶

DHS Targeted Violence and Terrorism (TVTP) Grant Programs Addressing Three-digit Call Lines

TVTP Grant Program Overview: The DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships solicits applications for an annual grant program addressing targeted violence and terrorism prevention.¹⁷ Through this public grant competition, several successful applications proposed programming incorporating elements of three-digit call lines, briefly described here:

Palm Beach County, Florida (Award years 21-23 and 23-25): The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (PBSO), in collaboration with a multi-disciplinary, cross sector group of community stakeholders, created the Palm Beach County School and Community Violence Prevention Project and expanded the project as part of their FY21 TVTP grant. The project aimed to improve coordination in Palm Beach County's mass violence prevention capabilities. The County's 211 Helpline, which also takes calls from the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, was integrated into these broader efforts including the [Aware and Care Palm Beach County](#) community awareness and outreach project, and training and technical assistance for community providers.

PBSO and project partners from the County's 211 Helpline and the Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network (SEFBHN) achieved several critical outcomes. PBSO hired two (2) grant funded detectives to increase the capacity of their Threat Assessment Teams; PBSO's Threat Assessment Teams respond to reports of individuals who may be at risk of committing future acts of violence in the community. PBSO Threat Assessment Team staff conducted four training sessions for 32 staff from the 211 Helpline, equipping them with the requisite knowledge to identify potential risk indicators for mass violence and related intervention and reporting options. Over 164 community members and behavioral health professionals completed bystander training and 14 individuals were certified to provide bystander training in the community. PBSO's Threat Assessment Teams referred individuals at risk for potential violence to project partner SEFBHN, the managing entity for behavioral healthcare services in Palm Beach County. SEFBHN is an evidence-based practice and provides care coordination, directly connecting individuals to community providers. SEFBHN referred 75 individuals for services during the project period. Finally, PBSO now has Memoranda of Understanding with cross-sector partners, including law enforcement and behavioral health providers, which outline roles and responsibilities further enhancing collaboration and coordination strategies.

With some of the funding received from an FY23 TVTP Grant Program award, the Palm Beach County School and Community Violence Prevention Project plans to expand to include co-responder interventions for individuals identified earlier on the pathway to violence. PBSO will continue to partner with SEFBHN, the 211-Helpline, and newly identified project partners,

¹⁶ The full report from Georgia State University is held at DHS and available to the public by request.

¹⁷ [Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Applicant Grant Program Applicant Resources | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#)



including the Palm Beach County Healthcare District. These efforts are based on lessons learned in earlier TVTP Grant Program cycles as well as trust that has been built with mental and behavioral health providers, their 211 Helpline, SEFBHN, and the community through their Aware and Care Palm Beach County project.

Charleston County, South Carolina (Award years 22-24): Charleston County is working to improve its local prevention capabilities by training 463 first responders and mental health professionals in Targeted Violence and Terrorism awareness and risk assessment. This shared training is intended to create a common knowledge base, language and understanding of roles in effective targeted violence prevention. A multi-disciplinary team is guiding this work and engaging their staff in the training. Agencies currently involved include local law enforcement, Charleston County Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Charleston County Consolidated 911 Center, Charleston Dorchester Mental Health Center, and the Charleston Center (Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services). Through this funding, Charleston County aims to equip first responders and clinicians with the ability to:

1. Identify behavioral health clients who may exhibit indicators of risk for targeted violence;
2. Conduct assessments of behavioral health clients to determine the degree of risk present;
3. Implement safety plans to provide the appropriate care and services at risk individuals may need to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors.

In addition, the grant includes an assessment of current protocols and practices used by partners to identify current strengths and gaps. Charleston County Consolidated Emergency Communications Center (911) is serving in the coordinating role of this multi-disciplinary work. This assessment will inform an improved implementation plan to create stronger collaboration and referral protocols. This work builds on a strong local history of public safety and mental health providers working together to provide the best care for individuals, while ensuring the safety of responders and the community at large.

Washington, D.C. (Award years 22-24): The District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) is committed to providing a safe and secure community for all residents by supporting efforts to address and prevent targeted violence. HSEMA established [Protect DC](#), a city-wide multidisciplinary threat assessment and management program that utilizes a public health approach to assess an individual's risk of violence or serious harm, share information, and coordinate resources and services.¹⁸

The program is working to implement behavioral threat assessment and management training for dispatchers and operators and establish protocols with the city's existing three-digit call line diversion services, such as 311 and 911, to assist callers with identifying and reporting behavior or communication indicative of targeted violence. The program also aims to streamline the tip process for suspicious activity, ensuring swift access to threat assessment and management resources or services for referrals where those resources may be required.

¹⁸ [TVTP Grantee Story: District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#)



A Canadian Example:

InfoSante Quebec: Efforts to leverage three-digit call lines for targeted violence and terrorism prevention are not unique to the United States. In Quebec, Canada, an 811-call line called [InfoSante](#) offers a free and confidential help line open to receiving a call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The line offers health advice and referral services for all, a pediatric health line for children ages 0 to 17, a psychosocial and mental health advice and referral line, and finally a referral line for people waiting for a family doctor. The 811 line is housed within the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and it is connected to a wide net of broader public health, mental health, social and community services which can support prevention efforts. InfoSante, The Montreal Social Polarization team and the Canadian Practitioners Network for the Prevention of Radicalization (CPN-PREV) formed a partnership after receiving calls from persons concerned about friends and loved ones who may have been radicalizing to violence. The Montreal Polarization team trains social workers from InfoSante and ensures that they have access to a wide variety of partners who support targeted violence and terrorism prevention efforts. InfoSante is now listed on CPN-PREV's directory of partners so that individuals know they can access referral services directly from InfoSante.

Conclusion: Although integration of TVTP information into three-digit call lines is an emerging practice, several programs in North America have reported encouraging results for including this information into existing call line protocols. Initial assessments of these programs point to the need for training, resourcing, and awareness-raising efforts in order to achieve impact. It is also important to acknowledge that research on the effectiveness of helplines in the context of TVTP is limited. However, in adjacent crisis prevention fields, research has indicated positive outcomes. For example, studies have shown that three-digit suicide prevention helplines can be beneficial in reducing suicide risk.¹⁹

Opportunities: Identifying relevant providers at the national and local levels and connecting call line services with those providers is central to establishing TVTP protocols within existing three-digit frameworks. The research team at Georgia State University noted in their work in Los Angeles that a significant challenge for call line operators was awareness of targeted violence or terrorism-specific prevention services, such as resources for concerned bystanders.²⁰ Another challenge facing three-digit call lines is community awareness and acceptance, which can be mitigated through marketing campaigns and information sharing through local partners. Funding, staffing, and proper personnel training are additional challenges to consider. Three-digit call lines must additionally weigh privacy concerns, especially in text-based lines, to ensure that individuals' rights are protected while threats of imminent violence are reported appropriately. Looking forward, opportunities for development include expanding coordination

¹⁹ Kelly Mazzer, Megan O'Riordan, Alan Woodward, and Debra Rickwood, "A systematic review of user expectations and outcomes of crisis support services," 465. See also Gould, M.S., Lake, A.M., Galfalvy, H., Kleinman, M., Munfakh, J.L., Wright, J. and McKeon, R. (2018), Follow-up with Callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Evaluation of Callers' Perceptions of Care. *Suicide Life Threat Behav*, 48: 75-86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12339>

²⁰ DHS S&T, "Text-Enabled Gatekeeper Intervention," 4.



between call lines, like 911 and 988, to ensure that the needs of those experiencing crisis are being met with the appropriate resources.²¹

Additional Resources: CP3 Resources

The Department of Homeland Security Center for Prevention Program and Partnerships (CP3) provides resources to prevent and mitigate acts of targeted violence and terrorism. Resources include nationwide staff support, grant funding, and training and educational materials to help keep your state safe.

Regional Prevention Coordinators support targeted violence and terrorism prevention efforts at the state and local levels. They share information, provide training, and help build networks for community partners who can engage in prevention. To learn more, visit www.dhs.gov/cp3 or to connect with a CP3 Regional Prevention Coordinator, email cp3field@hq.dhs.gov.

The **Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program** provides funding for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education to establish or enhance capabilities to prevent targeted violence and terrorism. Learn more and apply at www.dhs.gov/tvtpgrants or contact the grants team at terrorismprevention@hq.dhs.gov.

The **Prevention Resource Finder** provides public information on the resources needed to help prepare for and prevent targeted violence and terrorism across our country. Resources on the website include community support resources, grant funding opportunities, information sharing platforms, evidence-based research, and training opportunities to reduce the risk of targeted violence, including hate-based targeted violence. Find out more at: [Prevention Resource Finder | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](https://www.dhs.gov/prevention-resource-finder)

²¹ See <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/faqs#differences>; For more information on research into expanding coordination between crisis lines, see [Promoting 988 And 911 Coordination To Ensure Timely And Appropriate Mental Health Crisis Response | Health Affairs.](#)