

Highlights of [GAO-25-107182](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate.

## Why This Matters

An average of 17.6 U.S. veterans died by suicide per day in 2022—the most recent data available. This was more than double the rate for nonveterans. Preventing suicide is a top stated priority of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA runs the Veterans Crisis Line: a 24/7 phone, chat, and text service, staffed by crisis responders who support veterans and their family and friends (i.e., customers).

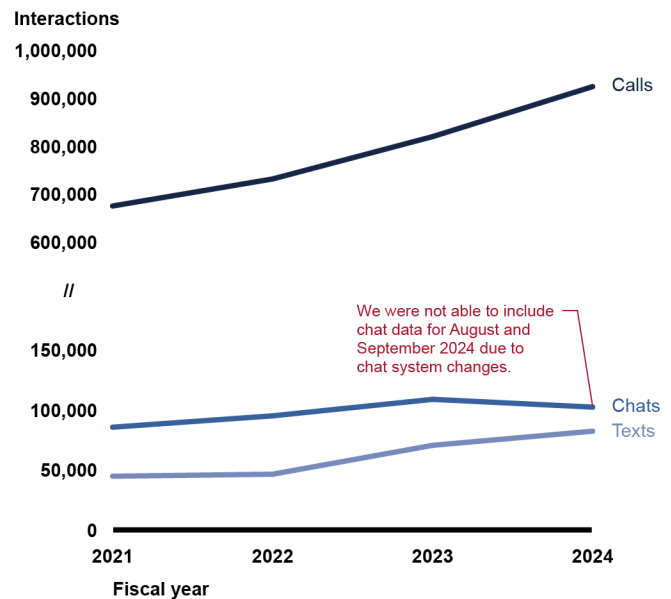
## GAO Key Takeaways

Crisis line data show it had about 3.8 million customer interactions from fiscal year 2021 through 2024, with the number increasing each year (see figure). We found the crisis line faces challenges:

- **Customers with complex needs.** The crisis line provides specialized training to responders in a unit that addresses complex callers. However, these callers are increasingly being routed to responders who may not have received the training, raising service quality and staffing concerns that could put customers at risk.
- **Chat and text.** Procedures for staff in this unit—such as responding to more than one customer at once—as well as how the unit is staffed may have adverse effects, including increased customer wait times and responder burnout, which could also put customers at risk.

Further, in July 2024, VA determined that, as a non-clinical service, the procedure the crisis line was using to disclose incidents to customers or their representatives in cases when actions or inactions created a significant risk of harm to the customer was not applicable. The crisis line withdrew the procedure and a new one has not been established. This runs counter to VA's goal of building trust with stakeholders through transparency and accountability.

## Number of Veterans Crisis Line Customer Interactions, Fiscal Years 2021-2024



Source: GAO analysis of Veterans Crisis Line data. | GAO-25-107182

## How GAO Did This Study

We obtained, reviewed, and analyzed crisis line documents as well as data from fiscal years 2021 through 2024; interviewed crisis line officials; surveyed all crisis line responders and conducted interviews with a non-generalizable sample of eight responders.

## What GAO Recommends

VA should ensure the crisis line more comprehensively assesses risks of adverse effects for its customers with complex needs and those using chat and text, making adjustments to procedures and staffing, as needed; and ensure that it has a procedure for disclosing incidents. VA agreed with GAO's recommendations and identified steps VHA plans to take to implement them.

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