

## Background

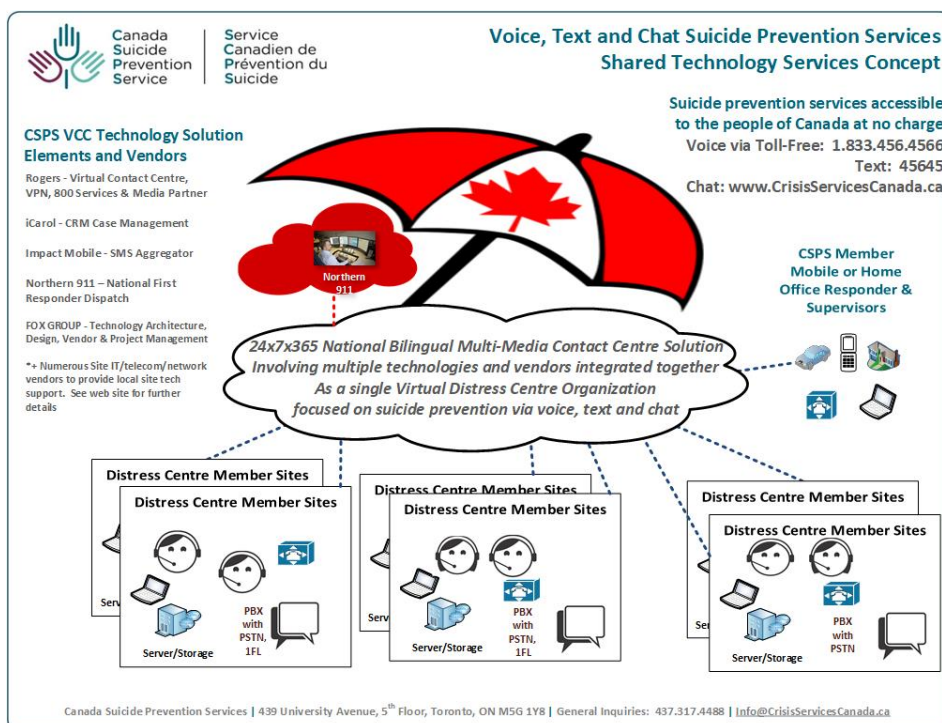
Approximately 11 people in Canada die by suicide every day. This adds up to over 4,000 per year, thus making suicide the leading cause of death in Canada. It does not discriminate and can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, income, race, religion or culture. The tragic result can be devastating to families, friends and communities.

Canada Suicide Prevention Services (a div. of Crisis Services Canada Inc.) evolved out of the Canadian Distress Line Network (CDLN) – a pan-national network of existing distress, crisis and suicide prevention services that has been engaging members since 2002.

In recent years, the network has formalized its organizational structure with a focus on strengthening regional service delivery and ensuring that nation-wide gaps in service are addressed. In 2017 the organization incorporated under the name Crisis Services Canada (CSC), and launched the Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS) to provide suicide prevention and support to the people of Canada.

## Technology

When someone in crisis reaches out, help needs to be immediate. It was with this goal in mind that in November 2016, the Honourable Jane Philpott, Minister of Health, announced the Government of Canada’s support for the development of a national suicide prevention service. The service would use text, chat and phone technology, integrating and linking existing regional distress and crisis line services across Canada.



Roberta J. Fox-Lawson, Chief Innovation Officer of FOX GROUP, was contracted by CSC to tackle this tough challenge.

With 33 years of experience in designing, installing, managing and developing complex technology environments (for firms like Citibank Canada, Hewlett-Packard, AT&T Corp and Deloitte Consulting), Roberta was the perfect

choice. Unbeknownst initially to the CSC team, she had also been the virtual volunteer CIO for the Brampton Spectra Helpline distress centres for three years (one of the CSC pilot site members).

The biggest technology challenge was how to integrate regional crisis services (that had different legacy IT, telecom and network communication technologies), to a new virtual multi-media contact centre and case management environment – all the while keeping costs down and not reinventing the complete system....and do it quickly.

There were seven sites in the initial pilot, provided by four organizations from British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. In late March 2017, 11 technology vendors and over 125 business and technology professionals came together to become a cohesive and committed national team. This dedicated team effectively designed and deployed the state-of-art multi-media virtual contact centre solution. This pilot solution successfully went live on November 28, 2017 on schedule, and under budget!

What is unique about this project is that it brought together leading-edge ‘cloud’ IP-based multi-media contact centre solutions overlaid and integrated with legacy local contact centre technologies including their various types of networks, PCs, operating systems and applications. This is significant because not only has something of this complexity not been done in the distress centre sector, this complex of a multi-vendor cloud/customer solution has not been done before anywhere else in the world.

### **Building national suicide support through best practices and processes**

The pilot members also worked together to develop common practices, procedures and methods to ensure consistent suicide support across all locations; establishing and building best-in-class suicide prevention services leveraging their various experts in suicidology. This is also a unique approach, and has not been done to this extent anywhere in North America.

### **The Impact**

Crisis Services Canada is proud to say that the technology is working as designed. For example, the life of an 11-year old child in Ontario was saved on their very first night of service! This tremendous suicide support was provided via Chat by a volunteer working from a CSPA member distress centre in Calgary. This effort has been reflected every day since launch, with lives continuing to be saved by the dedicated team of volunteers and staff using the CSPA suite of technologies and practices.

### **Conclusion**

The new CSPA multi-media virtual contact centre solution will enable Canadians to access suicide prevention and crisis support through the technology of their choosing – phone, text or chat in both English or French – by calling toll-free at 1-833-456-4566, texting 45645, or chatting online at [www.crisisservicescanada.ca](http://www.crisisservicescanada.ca)

### **Next Steps**

Over the next few years, CSC will be expanding the number of distress centres and professionals to grow the capacity required to support Canada’s need for a coast-to-coast suicide prevention support service. They will also be adding additional technological capabilities such as social media integration and are even investigating leading-edge technologies such as video conference and speech recognition. The goal is to continuously evolve the CSPA platform thereby enabling Canadians to be engaged by their communications media of choice.

For further information, send an email to [Roberta.Fox@CrisisServicesCanada.ca](mailto:Roberta.Fox@CrisisServicesCanada.ca) or call 289.648.1981.