Unwinding Call Center Data Shows Ongoing Problems

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In August 2023, CMS issued letters to states regarding unwinding data metrics as of May 2023, including data on call center operations. The call center data tracks average wait times and call abandonment rates. These CMS letters flagged 16 states regarding concerns on their call center data. Frustratingly, the July 2023 data and August 2023 data show that most states have generally failed to improve on these call center operations metrics and some states have declined in performance.

Not only have the national averages of these call center operations metrics worsened, 9 out of the 16 states previously flagged by CMS for concerning call center data performed worse in one or both metrics in August relative to May. Of the remaining 7 states, Alaska, Florida, Maine, Missouri, and Utah still had higher wait times and call abandonment rates than the national averages in August. In July, 11 of the states previously flagged performed worse in one or both metrics relative to the May 2023 data. Several of the states previously flagged for call center metrics also do not offer callbacks, meaning people simply have to try to wait for an available representative when calling for assistance and hope their call is answered before closing. Although the average wait time data indicates many states have wait times under an hour, enrollees and advocates report wait times of multiple hours.

As seen in the chart below, some states that were not previously flagged for call center operations data also performed worse in the most recent August 2023 data. An additional 11 states had either or both higher wait times and call abandonment rates than the national averages in August. Note that data is missing for South Dakota, which does not operate a call center, and that 20 states in total do not offer callbacks from their call centers.

Reports from individual enrollee experiences indicate that call center wait times are often far longer than the averages indicate. In addition, many call centers use tier systems in which the initial call may be answered quickly, but then is directed to another tier that can answer questions or handle more complex tasks than the initial tier is trained to do. Therefore, the actual wait for the service needed is often far longer than the initial wait times indicate. For

example, in one state in which the data shows a wait time of less than 20 minutes, advocates report that many people wait multiple hours to have their issue addressed.

Call centers are frequently where people are directed when they have questions regarding the renewal process, do not understand their notice, or need to report changes that may help them remain eligible for Medicaid. This includes local offices directing people to the call centers. For the call center metrics to show worsening responsiveness is a serious problem. Many people are losing Medicaid coverage through procedural terminations, meaning their coverage is terminated because they failed to respond to a request from the Medicaid agency. This could be for a variety of reasons, including that they did not understand the notice, had questions, or tried to respond by phone and could not get through.

Importantly, the availability of call centers is not simply a function of customer service. Under Medicaid requirements, individuals must be able to submit information through a variety of mechanisms that cover most commonly used means, including by phone. Worsening call center performance may be leading to Medicaid terminations of eligible individuals and must be addressed.

State	Average Call Center Wait Times (min)			Average Call Abandonment Rate (%)			Data Notes
	May 2023	July 2023	August 2023	May 2023	July 2023	August 2023	Offers Callbacks
Nat'l Averages/Total States	9.92	12.68	11.94	13.38	16.06	15.92	31
Alabama	1	4	3	4	12	13	
Alaska	16	13	16	24	15	19	X
Arizona	21	35	31	18	24	21	
Arkansas	10	4	4	16	9	7	
California	2	3	4	4	1	1	
Colorado	4	14	12	8	28	23	X
Connecticut	1	2	4	3	5	8	X
Delaware	1	1	1	10	11	13	X
District of Columbia	1	1	1	5	4	4	X
Florida	32	41	29	38	42	31	X
Georgia	1	28	18	0	1	1	X

Hawaii	7	21	11	30	33	32	X
Idaho	34	52	46	7	7	8	X
Illinois	12	16	17	34	43	27	
Indiana	5	6	8	8	9	12	
Iowa	0	6	20	1	22	45	X
Kansas	23	11	2	32	17	3	X
Kentucky	1	15	8	1	11	1	X
Louisiana	1	2	2	2	4	4	X
Maine	35	44	29	27	25	19	
Maryland	1	3	15	7	12	38	X
Massachusetts	2	1	2	3	2	2	X
Michigan	1	2	1	1	3	2	
Minnesota	3	7	4	12	19	13	
Mississippi	1	1	0	5	7	7	
Missouri	48	27	17	44	44	40	
Montana	42	31	34	40	44	49	X
Nebraska	5	5	4	12	13	11	
Nevada	13	19	21	56	56	56	
New Hampshire	11	15	15	12	13	14	X
New Jersey	1	8	2	3	19	29	
New Mexico	20	25	35	19	21	22	X
New York	0	0	0	1	1	3	
North Carolina	0	0	0	1	0	1	
North Dakota	2	1	1	13	8	6	
Ohio	4	5	7	3	5	5	X
Oklahoma	0	0	3	1	1	8	
Oregon	15	28	27	24	33	41	X
Pennsylvania	6	15	13	12	25	21	X
Rhode Island	39	43	45	21	26	18	X
South Carolina	14	3	1	31	8	4	X
South Dakota	N/A -- Does not operate call center						
Tennessee	0	2	15	1	0	13	X

Texas	8	13	11	16	23	18	
Utah	35	29	25	26	25	23	X
Vermont	1	1	1	1	9	11	X
Virginia	1	1	1	1	9	6	X
Washington	0	0	1	4	6	6	X
West Virginia	9	12	11	19	26	19	X
Wisconsin	6	17	12	8	21	17	X
Wyoming	0	1	7	0	1	1	X

Key	Orange State received call center enforcement language in August 2023 CMS letters
	Yellow = New state with one or both metrics above national average in August 2023 (rounded)
	Red Metric above national average (rounded)
	Dark Red State received call center enforcement language in August 2023 CMS letters and performed worse in one or both metrics in July 2023 or August 2023 relative to May 2023

Relevant Links	August 2023 CMS Data Letters to States
	May 2023 CMS Call Center Operations Dataset (released August 2023)
	July 2023 CMS Call Center Operations Dataset (released October 2023)
	August 2023 CMS Call Center Operations Dataset (released November 2023)