

Washington COVID-19 hotline helps seniors book vaccine appointments

A call center for the state's COVID-19 Assistance Hotline has hundreds of trained agents who can now book vaccine appointments over the phone.



Author: Ted Land

Published: 9:47 PM PST February 1, 2021

Updated: 4:19 PM PST February 2, 2021

SEATTLE — Many older people are having difficulty signing up for [COVID-19 vaccines](#) because they don't have the technology skills to snag a rare appointment, but help is on the way after several weeks of frustration.

“We've got a group of people that are older, and we're expecting them to use the internet, basically, blindly,” said Jamie Evans, of Everett, who has been trying to help her 95-year-old grandmother, Laura Schirmann, find a vaccine appointment.

Evans said it makes no sense that the state and clinics are primarily relying on older people to use websites and online sign-up forms to book appointments.

“She barely works her DVD player,” Evans said about Schirmann.

The systems that are the backbone of Washington's vaccine infrastructure require a degree of tech-savvy and patience. In some cities, vaccination teams are visiting people in assisted living communities, but if someone lives independently, they're mostly on their own.

Help is arriving, though. [Crisis Connections](#), which works with the state to run the [COVID-19 Assistance Hotline](#), said it's been hiring and training hundreds of call-takers.

RELATED: [Tech-savvy seniors in Tacoma help those with limited internet access find COVID-19 vaccine](#)

Lauren Rigert, senior director of development and community relations for Crisis Connections, said call volumes soared in recent weeks, as people look for help finding vaccines.

“I think the busiest day we had, on Wednesday, was 12,000 (phone calls),” Rigert said, Friday. “We have gone from 60 agents answering the line to now we have 283 trained and ready to go.”

She said they plan to eventually have 400 agents assigned to the hotline.

Rigert said callers have been waiting two to four hours to speak to an agent in recent weeks. She encouraged people to use a callback feature, so they aren't waiting on hold for hours.

The state and Crisis Connections have also streamlined the sign-up process for vaccines. Until last week, the hotline's agents could not book vaccine appointments over the phone – now they can.

RELATED: [How to use Washington's PhaseFinder tool to determine your COVID-19 vaccine eligibility](#)

Rigert said it was a significant change that will help callers “tremendously.” It can still take 20-30 minutes to walk a single caller through the sign-up process, she said.

Rigert said anyone who can use the internet to register for vaccine appointments should do that before calling the hotline.

The state said it's relying on senior centers, nonprofits, family members, and neighbors to guide people through their sign-ups.

“A significant part of the rescue is by individuals; it's by us. It's taking care of our neighbors or relatives, extending a hand,” Gov. Jay Inslee said last week. “This is a moment in time where all of us can step up and help people.”

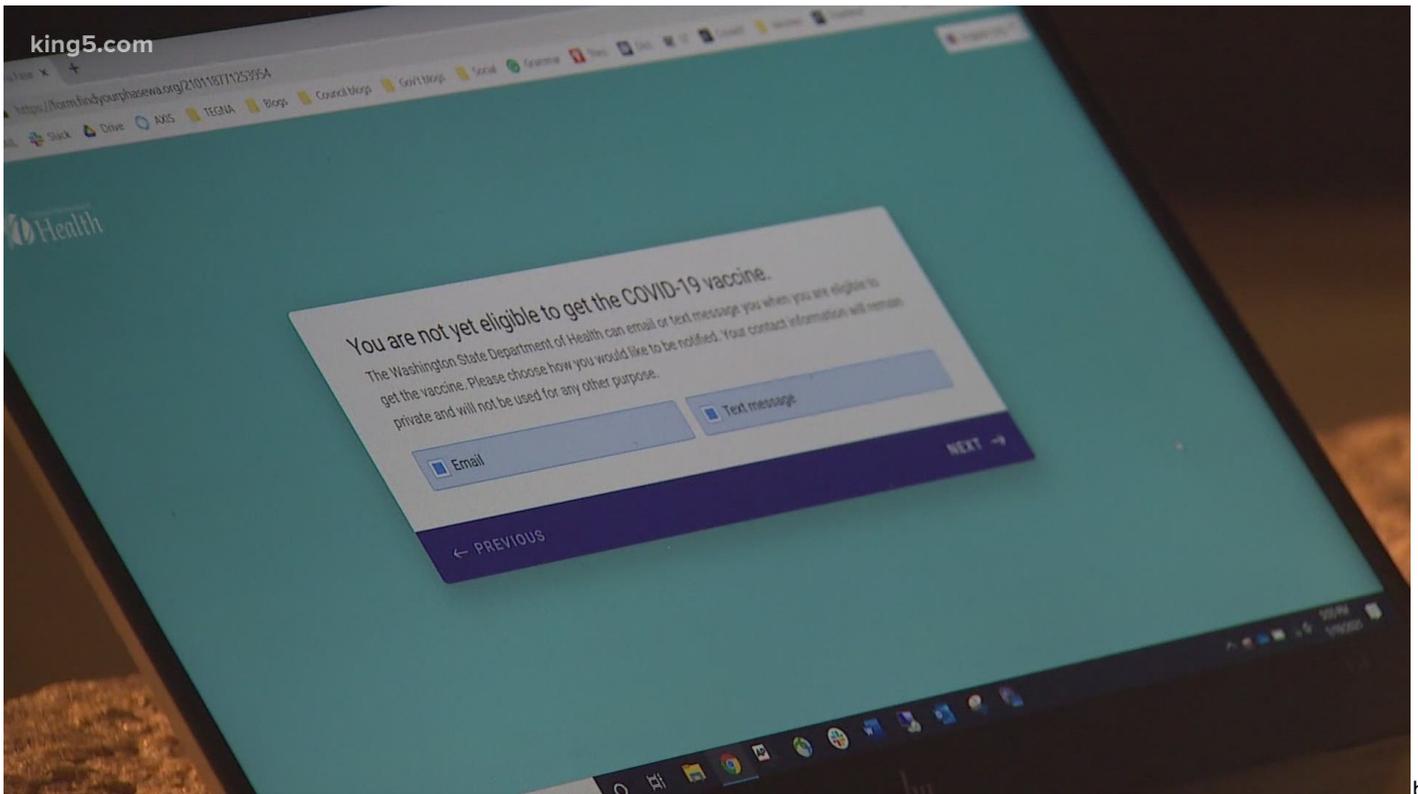
Evans said she'll keep checking for appointments, hoping she finds an available slot soon.

“It has been really frustrating,” she said. “I now almost feel like grandma's life's in my hands.”

To reach the state's COVID-19 Assistance Hotline:

Dial 1-800-525-0127, then press #. If you can't reach the hotline via the regular number, the states says to call their alternate number, 888-856-5816 (a Spanish option is available). The call center is staffed Monday-Friday 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., and on weekends from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

- [New mass COVID-19 vaccination sites open in Kent, Auburn](#)
- [38% of US nursing home staff getting first COVID shots, CDC says](#)



Taboola
Sponsored Links

by