

News Item

The Real Harm of Crisis Text Line's Data Sharing | WIRED

By Keith Porcaro February 3, 2022

Another week, another privacy horror show: Crisis Text Line, a nonprofit text message service for people experiencing serious mental health crises, has been using "anonymized" conversation data to power a for-profit machine learning tool for customer support teams. (After backlash, CTL announced it would stop.) Crisis Text Line's response to the backlash focused on the data itself and whether it included personally identifiable information. But that response uses data as a distraction. Imagine this: Say you texted Crisis Text Line and got back a message that said "Hey, just so you know, we'll use this conversation to help our for-profit subsidiary build a tool for companies who do customer support." Would you keep texting?

That's the real travesty—when the price of obtaining mental health help in a crisis is becoming grist for the profit mill. And it's not just users of CTL who pay; it's everyone who goes looking for help when they need it most.

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