



**Agency Priority Goal** | Action Plan | FYs 2022–2023 | FY 2023 – Q1

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# Improve the National 800 Number Service

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Goal Leader: Erik Jones, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Office of Operations

Deputy Goal Leader: Yateesh Katyal, Deputy Associate Commissioner, Office of Systems Operations and Hardware Engineering

# Goal Overview

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## Goal statement

Improve the customer experience by reducing the average speed of answer<sup>1</sup> on the National 800 Number.

- By September 30, 2023, achieve an average speed of answer of under 12 minutes, including implementation of estimated wait time and call back options.<sup>2</sup>

## Problem to Be Solved

- Customers who contact our National 800 Number experience lengthy delays waiting to speak with an agent, particularly during our peak calling periods.<sup>3</sup>
- Our current National 800 Number systems experience regular disruptions and the temporary loss of self-service and management information tools while we estimate transitioning to a new phone system by the end of the third quarter of FY 2023.

## What Success Looks Like<sup>4</sup>

- Improved capacity for answering calls by maintaining staffing levels and improved training for agents and supervisors.

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<sup>1</sup> Average speed of answer (ASA) is measured from the time the call enters the queue until the call is answered by an agent. It does not include time spent in self-service.

<sup>2</sup> This target is also a budgeted workload measure.

<sup>3</sup> Peak calling periods are typically October through March and from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Eastern time.

<sup>4</sup> Demonstrates progress towards achieving our Agency Strategic Plan's Build a Customer-Focused Organization and Improving the Accuracy and Administration of Our Programs strategic objectives.

- Improved customer experience by providing timely and accurate service when calling our 800 number and increasing our ability to resolve caller questions during their initial interaction with us.
- Fully implementing our new phone system resulting in consistent systems performance, enhanced self-help options, and improved access to real-time management information capabilities.

## Goal target(s)

Achievement statement Repeat the achievement statement from the goal statement on the previous slide		Key indicator(s) A "key performance indicator" measures progress toward a goal target	Quantify progress These values enable us (and you!) to calculate % complete for <u>any</u> type of target			Frequency When is there new data?
By...	We will...	Name of indicator	Target value	Starting value*	Current value <sup>5</sup>	Update cycle
09/30/23	Achieve an average speed of answer less than 12 minutes	National 800 Number Average Speed of Answer <sup>6</sup>	12 minutes	13.5 minutes	35.5 minutes	Monthly
09/30/23		National 800 Number Agent Busy Rate <sup>8</sup>	15%	0.2%	4.4%	Monthly
09/30/23		National 800 Number Agent Calls Handled <sup>7</sup>	26,000,000	0	6,308,904	Monthly

\*Fiscal year ending 09/30/2021

<sup>5</sup> Value represents fiscal year to date performance as of the end of the most recent quarter.

<sup>6</sup> Our FY 2023 Congressional Operating Plan includes planned performance based on our FY 2023 appropriation. Please visit [www.ssa.gov/budget](http://www.ssa.gov/budget) for more information. Average Speed of Answer (ASA) resets at the beginning of each fiscal year. Our FY 2022 annual ASA was 32.7 minutes.

<sup>7</sup> Target revised based on our FY 2023 Congressional Operating Plan. The initial estimated FY 2023 targets in the FY 2022 Action Plans were 1 percent for the National 800 Number Busy Rate and 36,000,000 Agent Calls Handled by 09/30/23. Agent Calls Handled is a subset of Total Calls Handled, a budgeted workload measure.

# Goal Team

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## Leadership Team

**Erik Jones**, *Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Office of Operations*  
Goal Leader

**Yateesh Katyal**, *Deputy Associate Commissioner, Office of Systems Operations and Hardware Engineering* – Deputy Goal Leader

*Associate Commissioner (Office of Operations)*  
Office of Customer Service

*Associate Commissioner (Office of Systems)*  
Office of Systems Operations and Hardware Engineering

*Division Director (Office of Operations)*  
Office of Customer Service, Division for Contact Center Services

*Regional Commissioners (Office of Operations)*  
Regional Offices (excluding Boston and Denver)



## Implementation Team

# Goal Strategies

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## **Implementation Strategies**

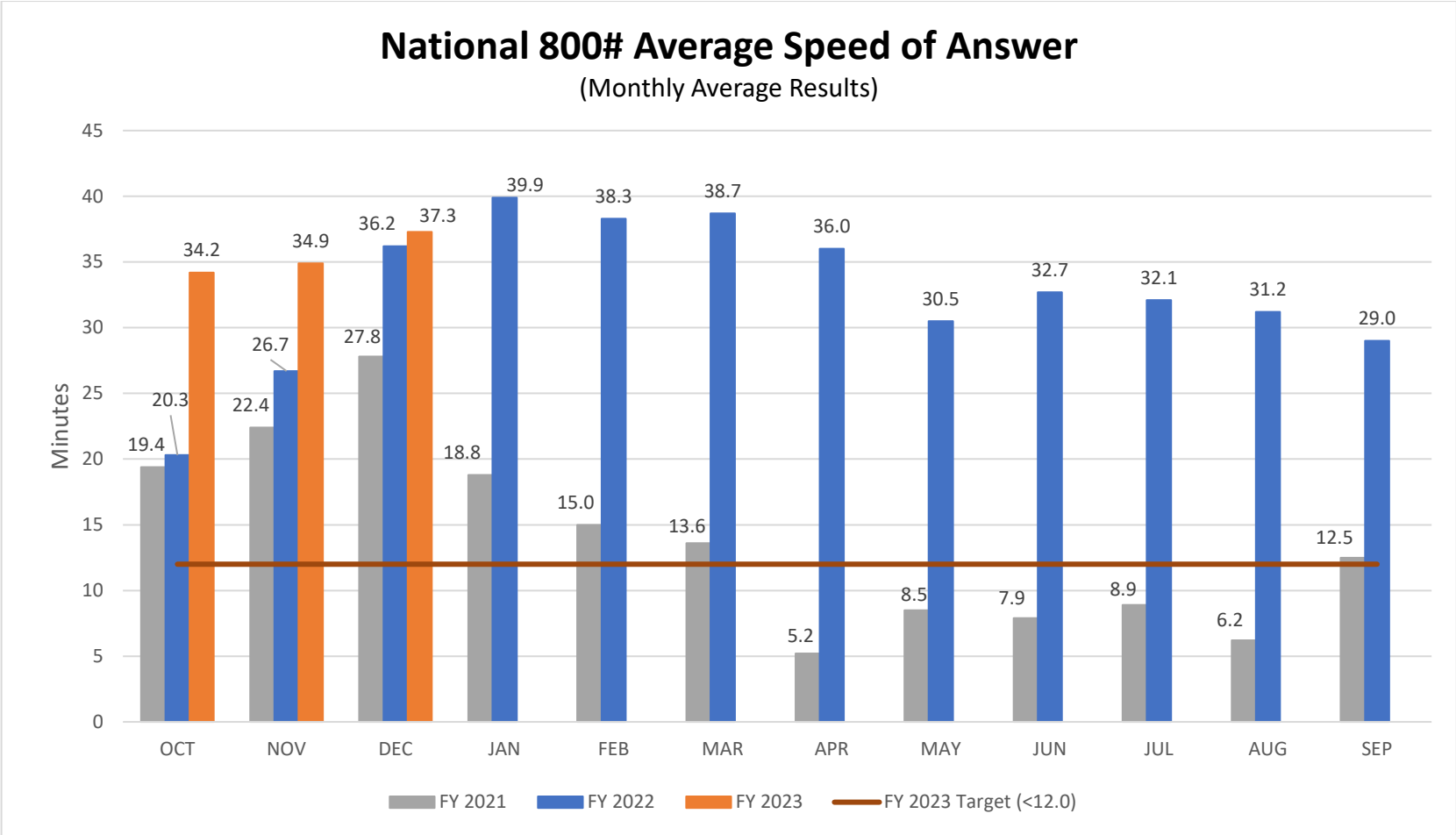
- Implement our new phone system, known as the Next Generation Telephony Project (NGTP) through continuous monitoring of vendor activities and milestones.
- Improve call handling by using an improved hiring process that recruits and retains quality candidates in a competitive labor market.
- Maximize agent performance with an improved and updated new agent training curriculum and improve supervisor support through a new training call center supervisor curriculum.
- Reduce scam-related call volumes through our public education campaign.

## **External Considerations**

- The vendor's ability to implement NGTP timely and maintain quality systems performance is key to our ability to meet our goal, and we are closely monitoring implementation.
- Following NGTP implementation, the vendor must provide us with fully functioning caller management features such as call-back assistance, estimated wait time, express routing of calls and more comprehensive automated self-service options.
- Labor market factors outside our control could result in staffing shortages in our call centers and challenges in answering calls.
- An unanticipated increase in the number of calls may affect our average speed of answer.

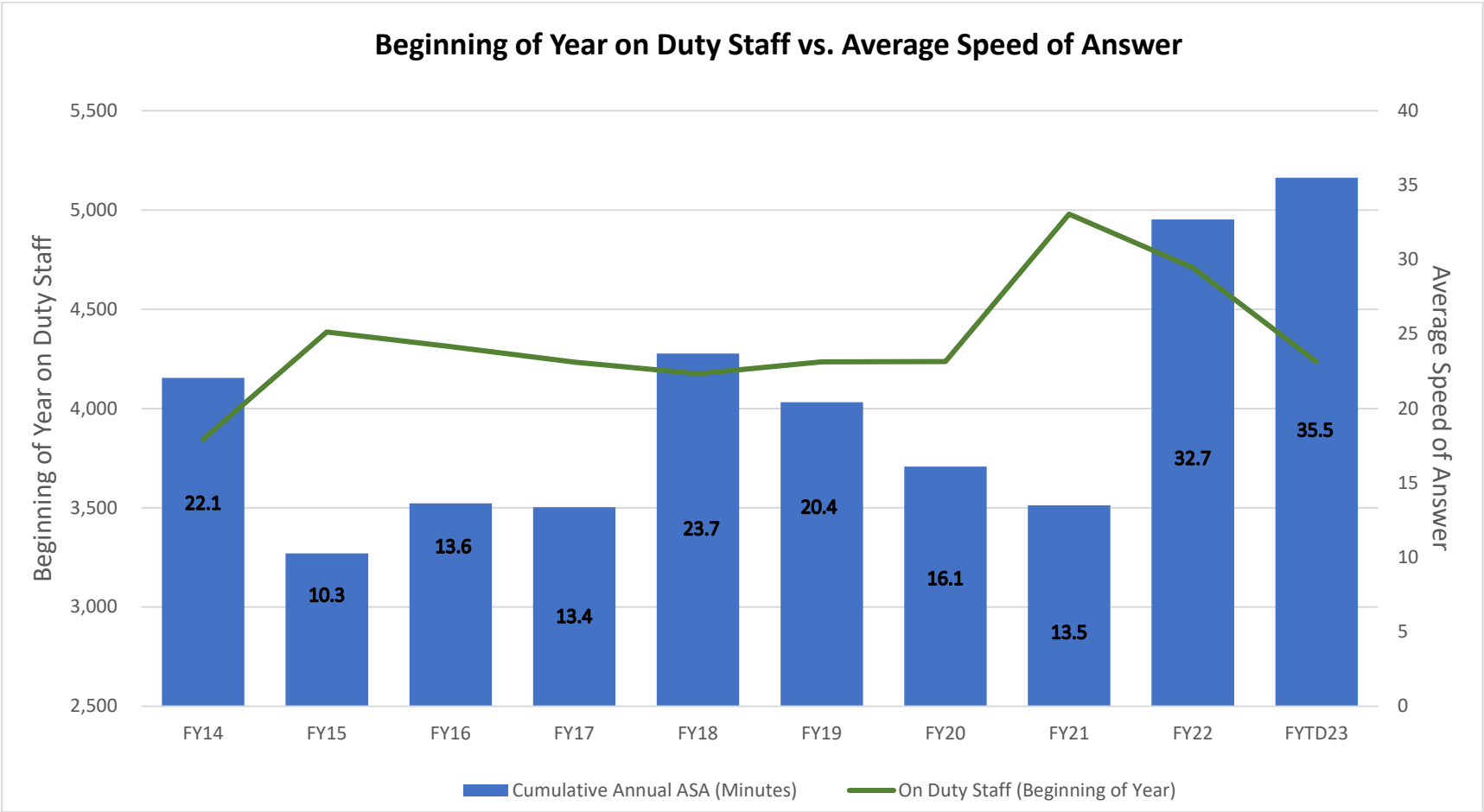
# Key indicators

**Primary Indicator:** Average Speed of Answer



# Key Indicators

## Historical Data<sup>8</sup>

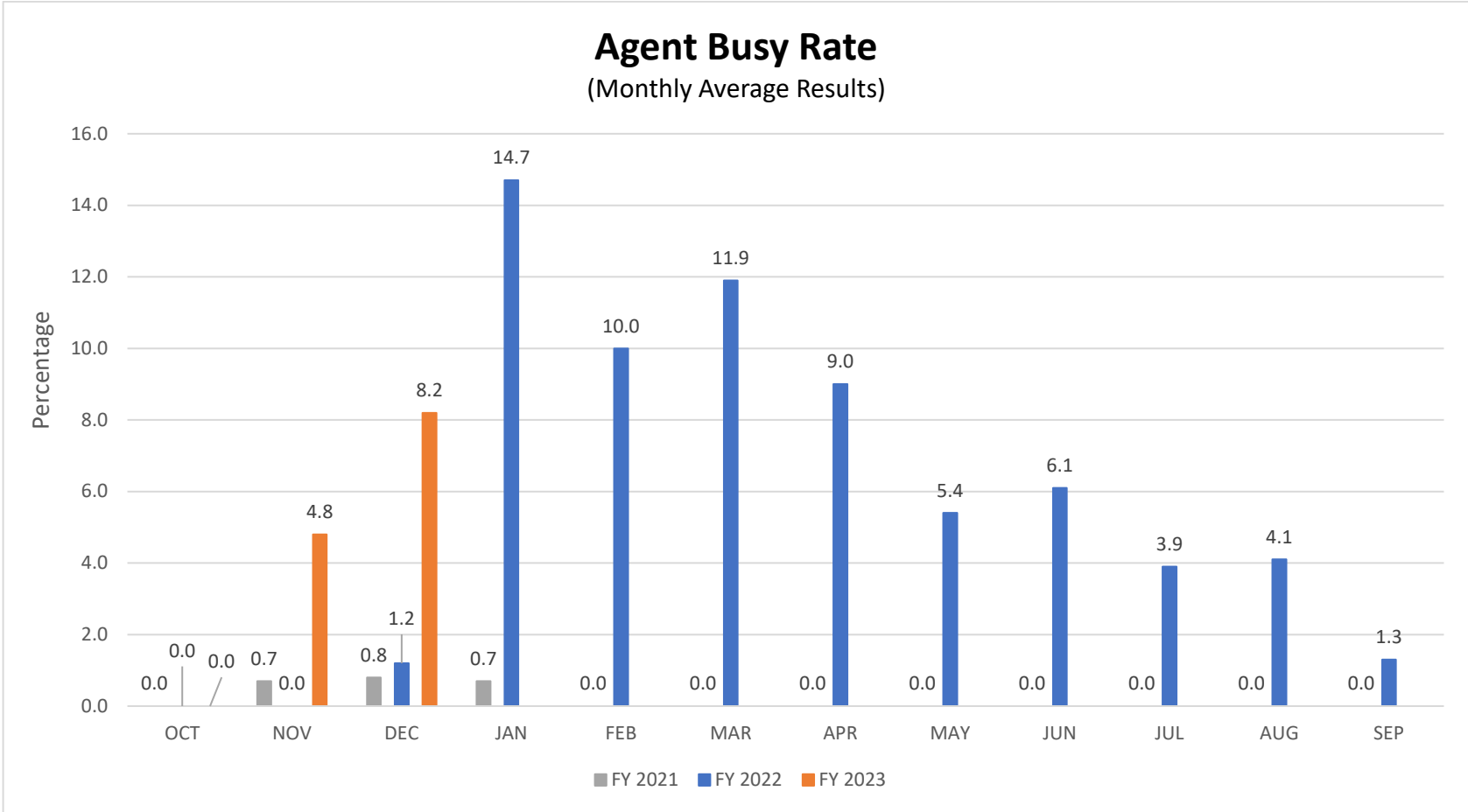


<sup>8</sup> FY 2021 shows increased 800 Number agents and continued improvement in the average speed of answer.



# Key Indicators

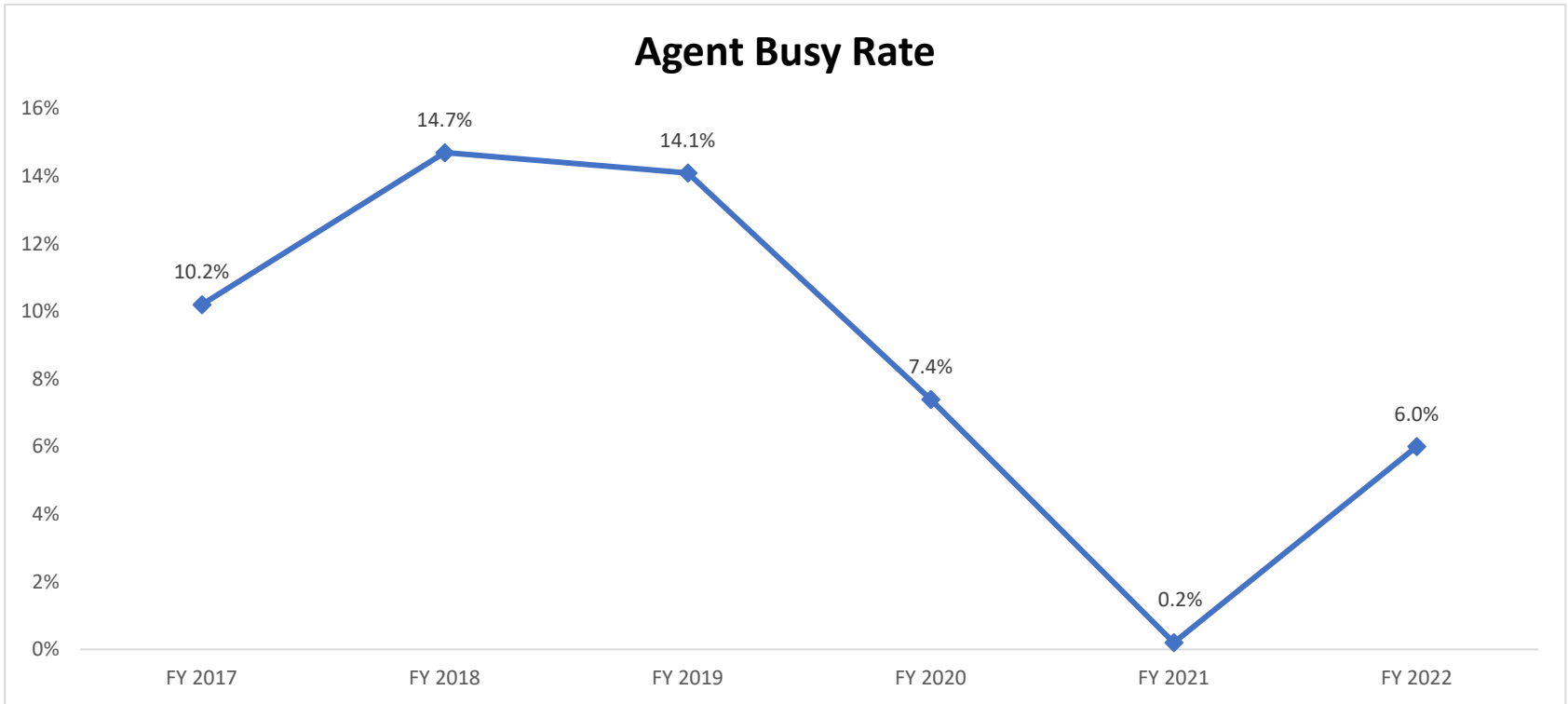
## Secondary Indicator: Agent Busy Rate<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> This is a budgeted workload measure. Agent attrition and hiring challenges also impacted agent productivity in FY 2022 and FYTD 2023.

# Key Indicators

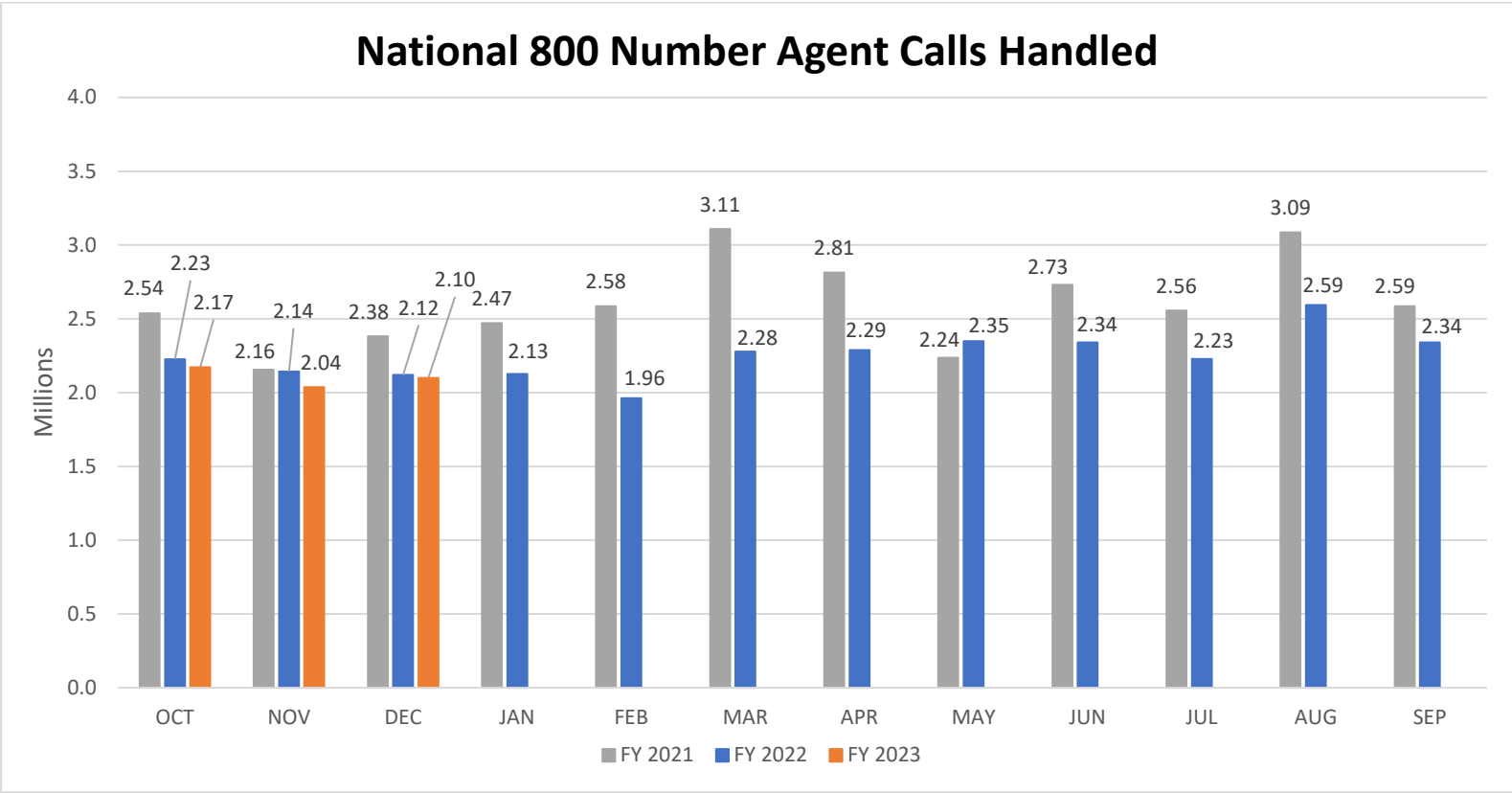
## Historical Data<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> In FY 2021 while operating on the CARE 800 Number Platform, we were able to largely eliminate the use of a busy signal and allow all calls onto the platform. In FY 2022 the National 800 Number transitioned to an interim phone infrastructure (Unification Platform) that proved to be unstable, causing repeated outages and prevented us from answering as many calls as we did in FY 2021. Agent attrition and hiring challenges also impacted agent productivity in FY 2022.

# Key Indicators

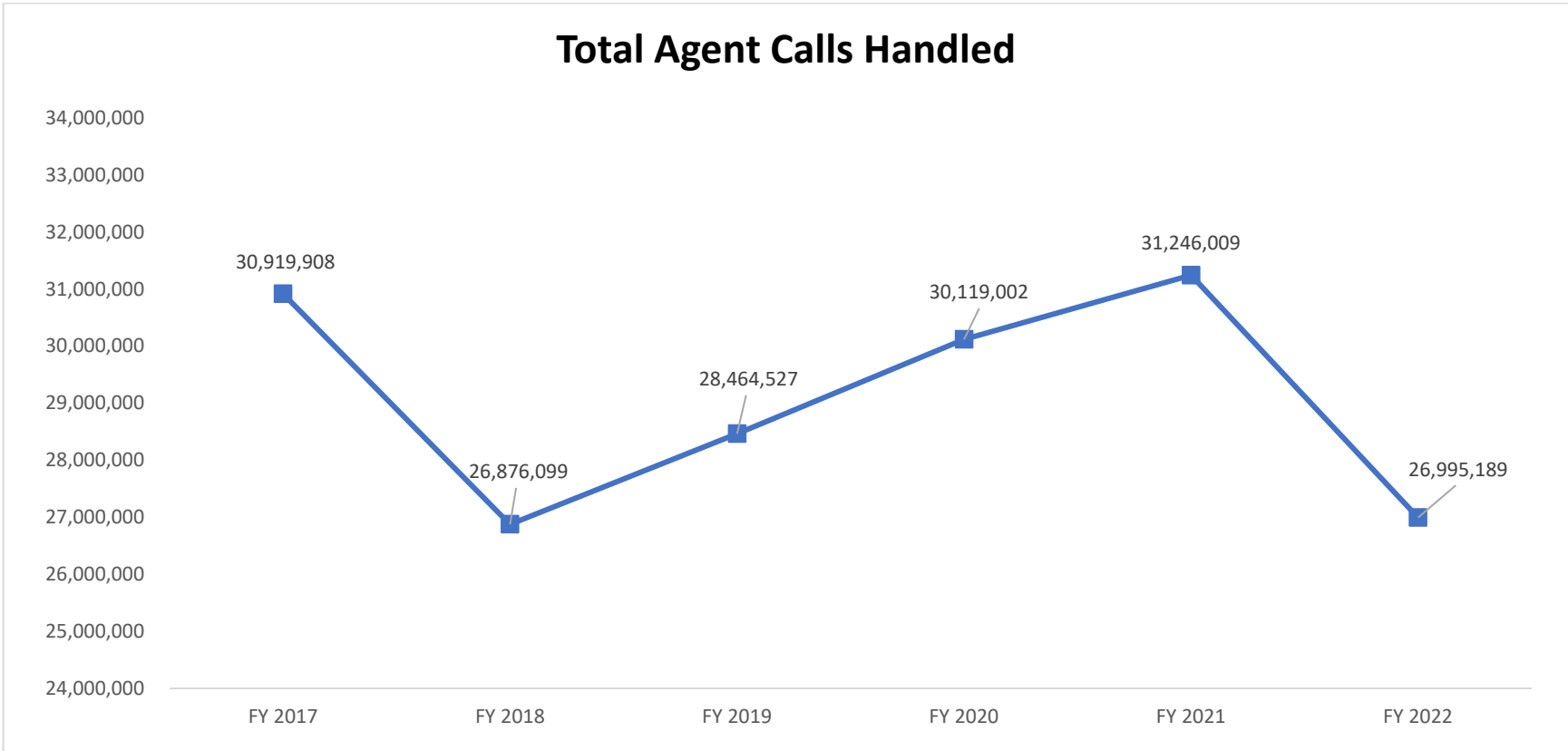
**Secondary Indicator:** Agent Calls Handled<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Agent attrition and difficulty in hiring also impacted agent productivity in FY 2022 and FYTD 2023.

# Key Indicators

## Historical Data<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> In FY 2022 the National 800 Number transitioned to an interim phone infrastructure (Unification Platform) that proved to be unstable, causing repeated outages and prevented us from answering as many calls as we did in FY 2021. Agent attrition and difficulty in hiring also impacted agent productivity in FY 2022.

# Key milestones

## Milestone Summary

Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
Complete transition to Unification Platform	Q1, FY 2022	Not Met	The transition to the Unification Platform was completed in Q1 FY 2023. For limited periods, we returned agents to the prior platform for stability purposes.
On-board latest round of agent hires (~ 280)	Q2, FY 2022	Met	273 new agents on-boarded
Complete New Agent Training Rollout	Q3, FY 2022	Not Met	Currently adjusting training in response to feedback from field offices. Revised rollout now planned by Q4 FY 2023.
Complete New Supervisor Training Rollout	Q4, FY 2022	Not Met	Supervisor training is being refined to incorporate feedback from our regional offices. We plan to roll out the training in Q2 and Q3, FY 2023.
NGTP Implementation	Q1, FY 2023	Not Met	NGTP implementation has been delayed to Q3, FY 2023.
Reimplement Customer Satisfaction Survey	Q2, FY 2023	Not On-Track	NGTP implementation has been delayed to Q3, FY 2023.
Integrate Customer Engagement Tools	Q3, FY 2023		
Implement Interactive Voice Response	Q4, FY 2023		
Reimplement Agent Scorecards	Q4, FY 2023		

## Narrative – FY 2023 Q1

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We continue to experience significant challenges in our National 800 Number performance. Our Average Speed of Answer (ASA) and Agent Busy Rate (ABR) both continue to increase, while the number of calls handled has decreased.

At the end of the first quarter, our ASA was 35.5 minutes, an increase of 4.8 minutes compared to FY 2022 quarter four. Several factors contributed to the ASA increase, including technical issues our vendor experienced, leading to delays in implementing the Next Generation Telephony Project (NGTP), planned for the third quarter of FY 2023. Another factor is the loss of Call Back Assistance (CBA) since April 2020 when we moved platforms. When CBA was an option for callers, many took advantage of it and did not have to wait on hold to speak to an agent. Our prior experience suggests that CBA can reduce wait times by up to 50 percent. The CBA feature cannot be supported by the current temporary telephone platform, but it will be reinstated in FY 2024 following the implementation of NGTP.

To improve the stability of the Unification Platform during our high call-volume months, we reduced our caller queue. While this change increased stability, more callers encounter a busy signal and the agency's polite disconnect message. As a result, our Agent Busy Rate (ABR) increased to 4.4 percent for the first quarter of FY 2023, from 3.2 percent in the previous quarter.

We were able to handle 6.3 million calls through the end of the first quarter, which represents a decrease of 160,000 calls from the same quarter in the previous fiscal year, and 800,000 fewer than the fourth quarter of FY 2022.

Another factor that has affected performance is our ongoing hiring difficulties, which began in FY 2021 and continue into FY 2023. High attrition among our telephone agents continues to be a concern, along with challenges in recruiting, hiring, and retaining new agents. We remain more than 1,000 agents short of our staffing goal of 5,220. We remain focused on achieving improved staffing levels among our National 800 Number agents and are confident the recently approved Direct Hire Authority will help us reach our staffing goals.

In the first quarter of FY 2023, we transitioned our employees with disabilities to the Unification Platform so that all employees are using a consolidated system. We also expect both revamped agent and supervisor training to be deployed later in FY 2023.

# Data accuracy & reliability

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Our National 800 Number data combines data management tools from two vendors. There are data and system limitations while operating in a dual environment, including data reliability issues. Our data reliability will greatly improve once we fully transition to the NGTP in FY 2023.

Within the Office of Operations, the Office of Customer Service monitors daily data and performance. Due to short data retention periods, we are working to collect and preserve historical data on a regular basis.

We are working to restore our National 800 Number scorecards to highlight efficiency and effectiveness for the agents and at the site. Some of the metrics include:

- Customer Satisfaction
- First call resolution
- Avg Logon hours (agent)
- Avg Calls Handled per hour (agent)
- After Call work Time
- Hold Time Percentage
- Aux time (off phone time)



# Additional information

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## **Stakeholder / Congressional Consultations**

### **Internal Stakeholders:**

**Employees:** Our National 800 Number Network Agents are dedicated public servants committed to providing accurate and timely service to the public.

**Office of Human Resources (OHR):** We work with OHR to hire new employees and develop and deliver training.

**Office of Acquisitions and Grants (OAG):** We collaborate with OAG to address acquisition planning and procurement needs, including purchasing major information technology services and products to support our communication platforms.

**Office of the Inspector General (OIG):** We collaborate with OIG to address spoofing and fraudulent Social Security schemes targeting our callers.

**Office of Systems (OS):** We work closely with OS to execute the NGTP contract and task order to manage vendor activities for development and deployment of the NGTP solution, including N8NN.

# Additional information

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## **External Stakeholders**

**The Public:** The public should have a positive customer experience when calling the National 800 Number. Existing customer feedback surveys continue to show that wait time is one of the biggest drivers of customer satisfaction.

**Congress:** Congress maintains an interest in service delivery options for the public—the National 800 Number, face-to-face, and online services.

**Labor Union Organization:** The American Federation of Government Employees represents our National 800 Number agents and provides input to leadership.

**Advocacy Groups:** These organizations advocate for the rights of people seeking our services and encourage secure and convenient service delivery options such as National 800 Number services.