

## Why GAO Did This Study

Wireless E911 service refers to the capability of 911 call takers to automatically receive location information from 911 callers using mobile phones. The current E911 system is not designed to accommodate emergency communications from the range of new technologies in common use today that support text, data, and video. Although deploying wireless E911 and NG911 is the responsibility of state and local governments, FCC is required by law to report annually on the funds states collect to provide 911 services such as E911. The Next Generation 911 Advancement Act of 2012 required GAO to review states' collection and use of 911 funds. In this report, GAO presents information on (1) progress implementing wireless E911 in the last decade, (2) states' collection and use of 911 funds and the usefulness of FCC's reporting on this issue, and (3) challenges to implementing NG911 services and federal efforts to facilitate its deployment. GAO reviewed FCC's annual reports, states' responses to FCC's information-collecting efforts, and documents from FCC and DOT regarding E911 and NG911. GAO reviewed best practices for collecting and analyzing data and interviewed federal and state officials and other stakeholders.

## What GAO Recommends

FCC should follow best practices for data collection and analysis to improve its current method of collecting and reporting information on state 911 funds. In response, FCC concurred with GAO's recommendation and agreed to take action to address it.

View [GAO-13-376](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or [goldsteinm@gao.gov](mailto:goldsteinm@gao.gov).

## 911 SERVICES

### Most States Used 911 Funds for Intended Purposes, but FCC Could Improve Its Reporting on States' Use of Funds

## What GAO Found

Although states faced challenges and delays in the past, states have made significant progress implementing wireless Enhanced 911 (E911) since 2003. Wireless E911 deployment usually proceeds through two phases: Phase I provides general caller location information by identifying the cell tower or cell site that is receiving the wireless call; Phase II provides more precise caller-location information, usually within 50 to 300 meters. Currently, according to the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), nearly 98 percent of 911 call centers, known as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), are capable of receiving Phase I location information, and 97 percent have implemented Phase II for at least one wireless carrier. This represents a significant improvement since 2003 when implementation of Phase I was 65 percent and Phase II was 18 percent. According to NENA's current data, 142 U.S. counties (representing roughly 3 percent of the U.S. population) do not have some level of wireless E911 service. The areas that lack wireless E911 are primarily rural and tribal areas that face special implementation challenges, according to federal and association officials.

According to data collected by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), all 50 states and the District of Columbia reported collecting—or authorizing local entities to collect—funds for wireless E911 implementation, and most states reported using these funds for their intended purpose. Six states—Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, New York, and Rhode Island—reported using a total of almost \$77 million of funds collected for 911 implementation for other purposes (e.g., transferring 911 funds to the general fund) in 2011. Using funds in this way is permissible by state law in these states, but it creates the risk of undermining the credibility of 911 fees in those states. The manner in which FCC collects and reports information on state 911 funds limits the usefulness of its annual report. In particular, contrary to best practices for collecting and analyzing data, FCC uses only open-ended questions to solicit information from states, lacks written guidelines for interpreting states' responses and ensuring that results can be reproduced, and does not describe the methodology used to analyze the data it collects. As a result, FCC is missing an opportunity to analyze trends and to provide more detailed aggregated information that would be useful to decision makers.

Next Generation (NG911) will enable the public to reach PSAPs through voice and data, such as text messages, but stakeholders have identified a variety of technical, regulatory, and funding challenges to implementing it. For example, many of the existing state and federal regulations governing 911 were written before the technological capabilities of NG911 existed. The federal government is taking steps to help states address challenges. In particular, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has focused on research through the NG911 Initiative, and FCC released a 5-point plan to encourage NG911 implementation. FCC's plan includes (1) developing location accuracy mechanisms for NG911; (2) enabling consumers to send text, photos, and videos to PSAPs; (3) facilitating the completion and implementation of NG911 technical standards; (4) developing a governance framework for NG911; and (5) developing a funding model for NG911. FCC also released a report in March 2013 that detailed specific recommendations to Congress for a legal and regulatory framework for NG911.