



NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for Mental Wellbeing

**988** SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE

## What is 988?

988 is the new, easy to remember three-digit dialing code connecting people to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), where support from trained crisis counselors is available 24/7 nationwide for anyone experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis or any other emotional distress.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, administered by Vibrant Emotional Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is active across the United States as of July 16, 2022.

### THREE WAYS TO ACCESS SUPPORT:



**Call 988**



**Text 988**



**Chat [988lifeline.org/chat](https://988lifeline.org/chat)**

*The pre-existing Lifeline number, 800-273-8255 (TALK), will continue to function indefinitely. If a life-threatening crisis is underway (such as a suicide attempt in progress), call 911.*

Numerous studies have shown that most **988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE** callers feel significantly less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed and more hopeful after speaking to a Lifeline crisis counselor.


More than **98%** of Lifeline interactions are resolved without involving 911.

## What do I need to know about 988?

- When you call 988, your call gets routed to a local Lifeline network crisis center based on your area code. If the local crisis center is unable to take the call, you'll be automatically routed to a national backup crisis center.
- Trained crisis counselors help you through the crisis, and if appropriate, connect you with resources in their community.
- Veterans, active military and their families can call 988 and press option 1. This process is the same as it has been in the past for Veterans; however, it's now simpler with the shortened 988 number.
- When you reach out to 988, the Lifeline crisis counselor who responds to you will know your phone number if you call/text, or your IP address if you use chat. Beyond that, they will not know who you are or where you are located. You are not required to provide any personal information to receive support from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.
- Currently, text and chat functionality are only available in English. Phone service is available in English and Spanish, with translation services available in 250 additional languages.
- The long-term vision of 988 is to expand access to comprehensive crisis care services, offering people someone to talk to, someone to come to them and somewhere to go, as needed.
- Similar to how the 911 infrastructure developed over many years, the capacity of 988 to deploy mobile mental health crisis teams in the near term will be based on each community's current crisis care infrastructure.
- Establishment of the 988 number was an important first step, and although much work remains, 988 is already expanding access to services. The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline saw a 45% increase in overall Lifeline volume (calls, texts, chats) in August 2022 compared to August 2021.

## How does 988 compare to 911?

- 988 was established to improve access to crisis services in a way that specifically meets our country's growing needs related suicide and mental health crises.
- 988 provides easy access to the Lifeline, a network of over 200 local, independent and state-funded crisis centers and related resources equipped to help people in emotional distress. This objective is distinct from the public safety purposes of 911, where the focus is on dispatching emergency medical services, fire and police as needed.



	911	988
<b>Nationwide network to route calls</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> , calls to 911 only go to the single public safety answering point in any specified area. There is no backup network or other routing to ensure calls are answered.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> , calls to 988 are routed through a central administrator to regional crisis centers and, if needed, a national backup network to ensure calls are answered quickly.
<b>Assistance available via text</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No national backup network</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>
<b>Assistance available via chat</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>
<b>Call centers with trained professionals</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>
<b>Provide de-escalating emotional support via phone, text or chat</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> , via dispatch until EMS personnel arrive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes, the contact is the intervention</b>
<b>Provide referrals to community-based resources</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>
<b>Capacity to dispatch mobile emergency response personnel</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Not in all locations</b>
<b>Capacity to provide emergency care</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> , throughout the dispatch and transport process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Not in all locations</b>
<b>Capacity to connect to ongoing treatment</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> , by providing referrals to local treatment providers, although the capacity of that local system may be limited.
<b>Funding through fees assessed on phone bills</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Yes</b> , well established	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> , not yet well established

## References

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (n.d.). 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/988-factsheet.pdf>.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2022, Sept. 2). 988 Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/faqs#about-988>.
- The National Council for Mental Wellbeing. (2022, July 13). 988 Implementation and Future Priorities. <https://www.thenationalcouncilorg/resources/988-implementation-and-future-priorities>.

## What will it take to ensure 988 can reach its full potential?

Establishment of the 988 number is an important transition from the current 10-digit number of the Lifeline. It serves as the point of entry – the front door – to a larger continuum of care. But it is just the beginning; work must continue to build out a broader crisis services system. The National Council for Mental Wellbeing has identified six elements that will be key to ensuring a robust crisis care continuum:



1. **Crisis Call Centers** – personnel, data systems and technology platforms

2. **24/7 Mobile Crisis Teams** – personnel, transportation and transport, mobile technology

3. **Robust Continuum of Care** – stabilization programs (inpatient and outpatient), diversion network, follow up care and community supports

4. **Essential Crisis Care Principles and Practices** – best practices, training, evaluation and analysis

5. **Public Awareness and Support** – engagement with key community partners and especially with vulnerable communities

6. **Federal and State Accountability** – financing, quality metrics, tracking and evaluation

The National Council supports a number of policy initiatives designed to ensure 988 can reach its full potential as a well-functioning crisis response resource.

At the federal level, a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced the **9-8-8 Implementation Act** (H.R. 7116) in March, 2022. If enacted, the bill would expand community-based mental health and substance use treatment services and dedicate resources for regional and local call centers and mobile crisis response programs. This is an important step toward ensuring that anyone who is in need of care and dials 988 has someone to talk to, someone to come to them and somewhere to go.

Similarly, states and counties will play a critical role in funding and coordinating what is currently a very fragmented system. With 988 serving as the catalyst for change, states and counties have the opportunity to develop a more coordinated crisis response system, one that appropriately diverts people from the criminal justice system and hospital emergency departments while maximizing the impact of community-based mental health and substance use treatment providers.

***The promise of 988 is extraordinary. The foundation has been laid, the proverbial front door has been opened and now policymakers and communities must come together to make that promise a reality.***



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