Mental Health FIRST AID
from 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**

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
Nationwide network to route calls	☒ **No**, 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.	☑ **Yes**, 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.
Assistance available via text	☒ **No national backup network**	☑ **Yes**
Assistance available via chat	☒ **No**	☑ **Yes**
Call centers with trained professionals	☑ **Yes**	☑ **Yes**
Provide de-escalating emotional support via phone, text or chat	☑ **Yes**, via dispatch until EMS personnel arrive	☑ **Yes, the contact is the intervention**
Provide referrals to community-based resources	☑ **Yes**	☑ **Yes**
Capacity to dispatch mobile emergency response personnel	☑ **Yes**	☒ **Not in all locations**
Capacity to provide emergency care	☑ **Yes**, throughout the dispatch and transport process	☒ **Not in all locations**
Capacity to connect to ongoing treatment	☒ **No**	☑ **Yes**, by providing referrals to local treatment providers, although the capacity of that local system may be limited.
Funding through fees assessed on phone bills	☑ **Yes**, well established	☒ **No**, 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.