



988 Implementation: A guide for MHA affiliates

The 988 line officially becomes the nationwide number for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline on July 16. MHA affiliates and partners may receive inquiries from the media and public. While all calls will be answered 24/7 (as they are now), not all services will immediately be in place everywhere, and not all calls will be answered locally at this point. States are in the process of expanding and staffing local call centers, in addition to setting up or expanding local services and resources. States are also in varying stages of putting in place, or studying mechanisms, for sustainable funding.

We have compiled the following resources to provide some guidance.

SAMHSA, the Action Alliance, and others involved are asking organizations to not send press releases or announcements related to 988 until on or after July 16 in order to have unified messaging.

General topline messages

Note: Use “coming July 16” until the number goes into effect to avoid confusion.

- The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) is a network of more than 200 state and local call centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by MHA affiliate Vibrant Emotional Health.
- The intent of 988 is to offer 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicidal, substance use, and other mental health crises.
- This 988 line will also serve as an intervention before the presence of a crisis.
- Over time, the vision for 988 is to have expanded crisis services, including mobile crisis and crisis receiving facilities available in all communities across the country.
- It is anticipated that 988 will continue to grow and evolve over the years, and there is still much work to be done at the federal, state, and local levels.
- In 2021, the Lifeline received 3.6 million calls, chats, and texts, which included over 540,000 calls routed to the Veterans Crisis Line. It is expected that the number of calls will at least double within the first full year after the 988 transition.
- Historically, the Lifeline has been massively underfunded and under-resourced.
- State and territory engagement is critical in building crisis center capacity, as well as developing local, sustainable funding commitments to support 988 crisis response over time.

“How it will work” messages

(Note: Only use if you are comfortable with your area’s ability to implement and provide these services)

- Call: When you call 988, you will first hear a greeting message with the options to press 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line, 2 for Spanish, or stay on the line while your call is routed to your local Lifeline network crisis center. Then a trained crisis counselor will answer the phone, provide support, and share resources if needed.



- Text: When you text 988, you will complete a short survey letting the crisis counselor know a little about your situation. You will be connected with a trained crisis counselor in a crisis center, who will answer the text, provide support, and share resources if needed.
- Chat: Visit 988lifeline.org and find the chat button in the top right-hand corner of the screen. You will complete a short survey letting the crisis counselor know a little bit about your current situation. Then you'll see a wait-time message while you are connected with a trained crisis counselor who will answer the chat, provide support, and share resources if needed.
- Calls are answered locally if there is a local call center. When/if local call centers are not staffed, calls are routed to nearby states or the national office at Vibrant.

Social media, graphics, and video shareables

SAMHSA has created a series of images and videos for use as social media posts, stories, and threads. These videos and static graphics can be used as-is or customized with your logo. Each post also includes sample accompanying copy, which can also be customized.

- [SAMHSA 988 social media shareables](#)

Where to send reporters if you don't feel comfortable discussing 988

Don't feel like you need to have all the answers, or even give an answer if you aren't comfortable talking about the 988 transition. Instead, point media inquiries to one of the following.

- SAMHSA: media@samhsa.hhs.gov
- Vibrant Emotional Health: hcollins@vibrant.org
- Action Alliance: miselin@edc.org
- Mental Health America: editor@mhanational.org

Links and other resources

The following resources contain more information that you may find useful to your community.

- [SAMHSA 988 toolkit](#)
- [Action Alliance 988 messaging framework](#)
- [MHA and Vibrant FAQ: Understanding 988 and how it can help with behavioral health crises](#)
- [FCC 988 fact sheet](#)
- [NAMI Reimagine Crisis Response](#)
- [The Kennedy Forum call-to-action toolkit](#)

Calls to action to state leaders

- Find out what legislation has been passed for funding in your state using this [interactive map](#).
- Advocate for sustainable funding.
- Join or start a 988 coalition to coordinate and build out services in your community.