988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Key Messages

There are urgent realities driving the need for crisis service transformation across our country.

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These key messages are designed to cover the basics of 988 and provide a strong foundation from which partners can build for their audience-specific needs. The key messages work in coordination with the messaging guidance outlined in the 988 Messaging Framework developed by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and its messaging task force.

About 988

988 offers 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing mental health-related distress. That could be:

- Thoughts of suicide
- Mental health or substance use crisis, or
- Any other kind of emotion distress

People can call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org for themselves or if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support.

988 serves as a universal entry point so that no matter where you live in the United States, you can reach a trained crisis counselor who can help.

Need for 988

Too many people are experiencing suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress without the support and care they need, and sadly, the pandemic only made a bad situation worse when it comes to mental health and wellness in America.

There are urgent realities driving the need for crisis service transformation across our country. Some statistics:

- In 2020 alone, the U.S. had one death by suicide about every 11 minutes

- For people aged 10 – 34 years, suicide is a leading cause of death, and
- From April 2020 to 2021, over 100,000 individuals died from drug overdoses.

Yet, there is hope. The 988 Lifeline helps thousands of struggling people overcome suicidal crisis or mental-health related distress every day.

Vision for 988

The 988 dialing code operates through what was formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It is a network of over 200 locally operated and funded crisis centers around the country.

Congress designated 988 in 2020 and the Lifeline transitioned to the 3-digit number in July 2022. As a part of the federal government's commitment to addressing the mental health crisis in America, unprecedented federal resources have been invested to scale up crisis centers in support of 988.

Transition to 988 is an important step forward and offers an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen and transform crisis care in our country.

While this is an exciting time to reimagine how we provide crisis services in the U.S., the full vision of a transformed crisis care system with 988 at its core will not be built overnight. Transformation of this scale will take time. That success depends heavily on state and territory support, so states and the federal government must all work together.

Transformation of this scale is never easy. The sustainable success of 988 depends heavily on the willingness of state, territorial, and local leaders to make additional investments in shoring up their crisis care systems. The federal government cannot do this alone.

We anticipate that 988 will continue to grow and evolve over the years, much the way 911 and emergency medical services have grown over the past five decades. We do expect a more rapid 988 transition to occur to meet the expected demand for 24/7 access to trained counselors who can help people experiencing suicidal, substance use and other mental health crises.

In the longer term, the vision for 988 is to build a robust crisis care response system across the country that links callers to community-based providers who can deliver a full range of crisis care services, if needed (like mobile crisis teams or stabilization centers), in addition to connecting callers to tools and resources that will help prevent future crisis situations. This more robust system will be essential to meeting crisis care needs across the nation. We envision a day when everyone across our country has someone to call, someone to respond, and a safe place to go for crisis care.

Working for the Lifeline

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is funded by SAMHSA and has been administered by Vibrant

Emotional Health since it began as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in 2005 (see Lifeline Timeline).

The 988 Lifeline is a national network of over 200 local, independent crisis centers equipped to help people in mental health-related distress or experiencing a suicidal crisis via call, chat, or text. The 988 Lifeline provides free and confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the U.S.

Numerous studies have shown that most callers are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to a 988 Lifeline crisis counselor.

988 Lifeline crisis counselors are an essential element of our crisis care system to save lives. These crisis counselors are superheroes, and local crisis centers around the country are regularly hiring staff and volunteers. For those interested in being a part of this live-saving work, visit SAMHSA's 988 jobs page.

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