

The State of 988

In October 2020, the federal *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* (**S.2661**) became law. This was a historic victory for the suicide prevention community and a national recognition of the importance of responding to mental health and suicide crises.

Below you will see an outline with important information and talking points on Where We Have Been, Where We Are, and Where We Are Going on the implementation of 988 and the future of crisis services.

Where We Have Been

- August 2018: *The National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act* (**H.R.2345**) became law. This initial legislation called on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to report on the feasibility of designating a three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline ("Lifeline," 1-800-273-8255).
- August 2019: The FCC, in conjunction with SAMHSA, indicated that the 988 dialing code would be the optimal three-digit number for the Lifeline and that additional resources would be necessary to support crisis call centers responding to 988 callers.
- October 2019: *The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* (**S.2661**) was introduced to support the designation and implementation of the 988 dialing code and strengthen local crisis response capacity to adequately meet 988 service demand. Local crisis call centers are chronically underfunded and under-resourced; many localities are not equipped to respond to current crisis call volume, much less any projected increases once 988 becomes widely available.
- July 2020: The FCC officially designated 988 as the three-digit dialing code for the Lifeline – to be nationally available by July 2022.
- September-October 2020: During September Suicide Prevention Month, the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* passed through Congress unanimously. It was signed into law by the President in October 2020.

Where We Are

Efforts to support the development and implementation of 988 at both the federal and state levels are ongoing.

Federal advocacy efforts include:

- Increasing funding for the Lifeline through the Congressional appropriations process. The Lifeline is federally funded at \$24 million – this is for administration and oversight of the national Lifeline system. Limited federal funding does flow to states through small stipends for crisis centers, State Capacity Building Grants, and 988 Planning Grants.

- Aiding the passage of authorizing legislation to further support the Lifeline, local crisis call centers, and state crisis capacity, which includes the:
 - *Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act* to increase funding for the Lifeline to ensure high quality service provisions.
 - *Campaign to Prevent Suicide Act* to implement a multi-media campaign to promote the 988 number and encourage help seeking.
 - *CAHOOTS Act* to secure Medicaid support for state crisis services.

State advocacy efforts include:

- Passing legislation in all 50 states and D.C. to support 988 implementation and establish a sustainable funding mechanism for the 988 crisis response system as allowed for in federal law.
 - The (federal) *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act* included language allowing each state to pass their own legislation funding 988 the same way as 911, through state-managed monthly customer service fees.
 - The federal law allows for the revenue generated by these fees to go toward funding local crisis centers and supporting the development and implementation of wraparound crisis care services. Current 911 fees vary by state and may be anywhere between \$0.25 - \$5.00; some state fees are charged on a percentage basis.
 - Ideally, fees will be collected across all wireless and wireline providers in each state.

Where We Are Going

The 988 dialing code will become nationally available by July 2022. State planning efforts should be well underway by now, including plans to address funding for the 988 crisis response system, as the transition has already begun with several wireless service providers currently connecting customers to the Lifeline through 988. The work that we do now to support the implementation of 988, fortify the Lifeline's network of local crisis call centers, and strengthen state crisis service capacity will set this new system up for success.

An ideal 988 system will consist of:

- Well-resourced crisis call centers in communities across the country that are able to answer callers quickly and effectively in-state 24/7/365 and follow up as needed.
- Mobile crisis outreach teams and crisis stabilization centers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia that work together with crisis call centers to provide the full continuum of crisis care.
- Flexible and sustainable funding options – including federal appropriations, state appropriations, grants, and service fees that ensure standard quality and delivery of services across the country.
- Public education and awareness campaigns that promote the new 988 number and the availability of crisis services and that encourage and normalize seeking help for mental health and suicide crises.
- Robust administration and reporting of 988 services. Oversight of services provided and populations served will facilitate greater understanding of the 988 crisis care continuum and support a quality, standardized service for callers in need.

PLEASE NOTE: We should continue to encourage our networks and the general public to reach the Lifeline through the 10-digit number 1-800-273-8255 until 988 is nationally available in July 2022. This will reduce confusion and ensure all those in crisis are able to reach help, regardless of where they are located geographically or whether their phone carrier has already made the switch.