



PRESS RELEASE

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CALL 988 FOR NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTIVE LIFELINE

Former 10-digit number replaced with easier to remember three-digit number

MUSCATINE, Iowa - The United States transitioned from the 10-digit National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to 988 – an easy-to-remember three-digit number for 24/7 crisis care. The lifeline, which also links to the Veterans Crisis Line, follows a three-year joint effort by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to put crisis care more in reach for people in need.



“The idea behind the change was to make it easier for those in a mental health crisis to reach out and receive help,” Chris Jasper, Muscatine County Emergency Management Director, said. “It is easier to remember a three-digit number than a 10-digit number when you or a love one are suffering a crisis and need help.”

Jasper noted that even if those seeking help dial 911, they will receive help.



“We have been working on ways to seamlessly connect a caller who dials 911 with the support team available at 988,” Jasper said. “We will talk with them and/or send an officer to help but this takes away resources that may be needed for another emergency.”

Public education of this new resource is needed so that anyone can easily call for help when in a mental health crisis.

“This new hotline will provide individuals the help they need and it will also provide a place for family or friends to call if they have concerns about a love one,” Jasper said. “Dialing 988 will also help keep our local resources free for other emergencies.

The most important message, however, is that there are people on the other end of the 988 call who will listen and help.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act was signed into law in 2020, and authorized 988 as a new three-digit number for suicide and mental health crisis support. All telephone service and text providers in the U.S. and the five major U.S. territories were required by the FCC to activate 988 no later than July 16.

FCC staff first proposed 988 in a report to Congress in August 2019 as the nationwide, easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code for individuals in crisis to connect to suicide prevention and mental health crisis counselors with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. On July 16, 2020, the FCC adopted rules designating 988 for this purpose.

Recognizing the need to better support at-risk communities in crisis, including youth and individuals with disabilities, the FCC adopted additional rules in November 2021 to expand access to this important service by establishing the ability to also text 988. To ensure that calls to 988 reach the Lifeline, the FCC adopted rules that also required all covered providers to implement 10-digit dialing in areas that use seven-digit dialing with 988 as the first three numbers of the phone number, impacting 82 area codes across the country.



“All across our country, people are hurting,” said FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel. “They need help. The good news is that getting that help just got a lot easier. This cross-government effort has been years in the making and comes at a crucial point to help address the mental health crisis in our country, especially for our young people.”

[The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) is a network of more than 200 state and local call centers funded by HHS through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In 2021, the Lifeline received 3.6 million calls, chats, and texts. That number is expected to at least double within the first full year after the 988 transition.

The U.S. had one death by suicide every 11 minutes in 2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Suicide was the second leading cause of death for young people aged 10-14 and 25-34. From April 2020 to 2021, more than 100,000 people died from drug overdoses. Studies have shown that after speaking with a trained crisis counselor, most Lifeline callers are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful.

Federal investments in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline have increased 18-fold from \$24 million to \$432 million to scale up crisis centers and back-up center capacity, and to provide special services, including a sub-network for Spanish language speakers.

The \$432 million included \$105 million in grant funding to states and territories, provided by the American Rescue Plan, to improve response rates, increase capacity to meet future demand, and ensure calls initiated in their states or territories are first routed to local, regional, or state crisis call centers. Prior to this investment, the Lifeline, which has existed since 2005, had been historically unfunded and under-resourced.

VA administers the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) through the Lifeline’s national network. Because of VA’s partnership with the Lifeline, the Veterans Crisis Line is affected by this transition to a new



number. Veterans and their loved ones can now dial 988 then press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.

“988 has been a long time coming and will serve as a critical resource during a crisis when every second counts. The new, shorter number will help ensure Veterans have easier access to the Veterans Crisis Line,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “This launch is a whole-of-government approach in line with the President’s call to prioritize mental health by strengthening access to crisis services, and preventing Veteran suicide, our top clinical priority.”

The 10-digit Lifeline number 1-800-273-TALK (8255) will continue to be operational after July 16 and will route calls to 988 indefinitely. Veterans, service members, and their families can also still reach the Veterans Crisis Line with the current phone number 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, or by chat or text to 838255.

To learn more about the FCC’s role in the 988 transition, visit [fcc.gov/988](https://www.fcc.gov/988). More information on 988 is available at www.samhsa.gov/988 and <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/faqs>.

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