



988 Initiative

In July 2020, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted rules designating 988 as the 3-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crises. On October 17, 2020, the National Hotline Designation Act (Public Law 116-172) was signed into law, incorporating 988 as the new National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline) and Veterans Crisis Line number. This new number will become available using any cell phone, land line, or voice-over internet device by July 16, 2022.

The new 3-digit hotline (988) builds directly on the original Lifeline established in 2005. The Lifeline operates 24 hours, 7 days per week and is currently accessible by calling the toll-free number 1-800-273-TALK. The Lifeline program contains three primary elements:

- A network of over 180 independently operated and funded local call centers, including 38 chat/text centers and three Spanish language call centers;
- Nine national backup call centers; and
- A single national system administrator.

988 is designated as the universal telephone number within the U.S. for the purpose of the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system operated through Lifeline.

The Lifeline system provides:

- Centralized network routing
- Backups and efficiencies
- Centralized quality assurance and operating standards
- Crisis services
- Effective reduction of emotional distress and suicidality (free and accessible to all, 24/7)
- Link to care, outreach services, and follow-up
- Care grounded in using the least restrictive intervention possible

HHSC received a 988 Planning Grant from Vibrant Emotional Health (Vibrant), the administrator of Lifeline. In partnership with HHSC, Texas Suicide Prevention Council convened a statewide stakeholder workgroup to assist with developing the Texas 988 implementation plan. As submitted to Vibrant January 21, 2022, the report focuses on meeting expectations for the in-state answer rates and adding chat and messaging capabilities. HHSC expects to address the need for additional funding, the process for referrals to outpatient services when needed and mobile crisis outreach team (MCOT) response in the next planning phase, over the upcoming year.

In December 2021, SAMHSA announced a \$282 million investment to help transition the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) to 988. The 988 code is the first step in creating an

easily recognized 3-digit number for the public and in line with other nationally recognized three-digit numbers such as 911. The federal agency also released a [report on 988-related appropriations](#) in December 2021, including updated data on suicide rates and attempts, data regarding current and future projections for Lifeline call volume, and an assessment of funding needs for the 988 transition.

Additionally, the Texas Council and NAMI Texas engaged extensively during the 87th Regular Session to successfully advance rider direction (Rider 58, Article II General Appropriations Act) requiring HHSC to submit the outcomes of the 988 planning process to the legislature. The two organizations are also engaging legislators to seek support for an interim charge that would provide opportunity for public hearings in anticipation of the next legislative session.

Implementation in Texas

Across the nation there is wide variation in mental health crisis response systems, with some states having little to no organized crisis response services, and other states having comprehensive crisis response services.

Due to a series of investments first initiated by the Texas legislature in 2007, Texas has a statewide crisis response infrastructure that includes the availability of certain services in every area of the state, such as local mental health crisis hotlines and mobile crisis outreach teams. The state-funded mental health crisis hotlines are accredited by the American Association of Suicidology. [Learn more.](#)

While Texas is fortunate to have statewide crisis infrastructure, the system has been challenged to keep pace with the demands of rapid population growth, vast geographic expanses, and lack of psychiatric inpatient care. When 988 is implemented in Texas, the new 3-digit number will augment and intersect with the established statewide crisis system and is expected to increase demands on the system. At the community level, Local Mental Health and Behavioral Health Authorities will work in partnership with 988 Call Centers to leverage local crisis response partnerships and the established arrangements they have developed with hospitals, law enforcement, social service agencies, and other community organizations.

As identified by HHSC in the [Behavioral Health Strategic Plan](#), gaps in services and variation in resource availability remain an obstacle throughout the state. There is increased pressure to address the gaps and ensure every Texan has access to the right service, at the right time and place when psychiatric and substance use conditions emerge.

By aligning federal, state, and local interest in expanding access to crisis response services, the 988 initiative provides opportunity to strengthen access to treatment by leveraging the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model of care. Ready access to crisis response, mobile crisis outreach, and comprehensive care is critically important and will be a priority during the 88th Texas legislative session.