

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



What is 988 in Illinois?

The Illinois Department of Human Services/Division of Mental Health (IDHS/DMH) was awarded a grant from Vibrant, operator of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline) to plan for the implementation of 988, a national three-digit dialing code for the Lifeline. It is intended for calls from individuals experiencing a crisis or any other kind of emotional distress - whether that is related to suicide, mental health and/or substance use crisis. It can also be used by family, friends, and caregivers seeking information and/or support. 988 will be a direct access point to compassionate care by trained professionals. IDHS/DMH's vision for 988 includes partnering with the six existing Lifeline call centers in Illinois, as well as building upon the existing crisis care continuum into a robust system that links callers to community-based providers who can deliver a full range of crisis care services. 988 is just the beginning, and not the final solution.

How does it work?

Currently, all callers have access to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) network by dialing 800-273-8255. Starting on July 16, 2022, 988 will be launched as the three-digit dialing code. 988 will be a direct access point, providing greater access to life-saving services and compassionate care. At the beginning of the call, callers have the option to select the Veterans Crisis Line or the Spanish language Crisis Line. If the caller with an Illinois area code does not select either of those options, they will be routed to an Illinois Lifeline Call Center. If after 3 minutes, the call is not answered by a live person, the caller is routed to the NSPL backup affiliate network, which includes call centers that operate in other states.

Why do we need 988?

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young adults ages 15-34 in Illinois and fourth leading cause of death for those ages 35-44. Overall, suicide is the 11th cause of death in the state. David Albert, Director, Division of Mental Health, IDHS, spoke on the state of mental health in Illinois, "The pandemic has had an impact on stress levels and mental health across the board. This is an effort to increase access to vital crisis services, improve the efficacy of suicide prevention efforts, and overcome the stigma around getting help."

Last year, Governor JB Pritzker signed into law the Community Emergency Services and Supports Act (CESSA)—legislation that requires emergency response operators, such as those at 911 centers, to refer calls seeking mental and behavioral health support to a service that can dispatch a team of mental health professionals instead of police. CESSA, in coordination with 988, aims to reduce the number of individuals in crisis that end up in emergency rooms or the criminal justice system.

What to expect from 988

Calls placed to 988 will follow the same methods described above, with an additional text and chat service that will be added at a later date. Callers who are connected with the Illinois Lifeline will receive specialized, individualized support by Certified Crisis Workers trained in suicide prevention, de-escalation and stabilization, and resources. Planning is underway to coordinate the Illinois Lifeline with existing community resources, including "Program 590" which is an IDHS/DMH grant that supports the community based crisis continuum, including development of mobile crisis response teams across the state, which will support anybody who needs in-person intervention by teams that include crisis counselors and individuals with lived expertise.