

| 988 FAQ

1. Q: What is 988?

A: 988 the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. 988 Lifeline is an easy to remember three-digit number that anyone can call to receive support when experiencing a suicidal, mental health and/or substance use- related crisis. To reach the Lifeline, people can call or text 988 or chat at Lifeline (988lifeline.org). People who are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support may also use 988 to receive guidance and support.

California is building the capacity of its crisis lines to be prepared for any increases in demand for crisis support. While efforts are underway to build a broader continuum of crisis response and stabilization services, the 988 Lifeline is one aspect of the continuum that those in need can utilize for mental health and substance-use support.

2. Q: Will the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (1-800-273-8255) go away when we switch to 988?

A: After July 16, 2022, California residents can call 988 to receive support for mental health- and/or substance use-related crises. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSLP) (1-800-273-8255) will remain operable and will route calls to California Lifeline call centers based on the caller's area code, just as it always has. Dialing either number will connect callers to the same services.

3. Q: What happens when I call 988?

A: When Californians dial 988, they will be directed to one of 13 Lifeline crisis call centers, just as they would have been when calling the NSPL. The call will be routed based on the caller's area code. California's call centers are part of the broader Lifeline crisis center network - if a local crisis center is unable to take the call, the caller is automatically routed to a national backup crisis center, which might be another call center in California.

California's crisis call centers are staffed with trained crisis counselors who listen to how your problem is affecting you, provide support, and share resources if needed. Services are provided in both English and Spanish. Additionally, the Lifeline uses Language Line Solutions to provide translation services in over 250 additional languages.

4. Q: How is 988 different from 911?

A: When callers dial 988, they are accessing suicide and mental health-related crisis support through the Lifeline. The 988 Lifeline is an easier to remember number that connects callers to existing Lifeline services. 911 is focused on addressing public safety concerns and emergencies (e.g., dispatching Emergency Medical Services, fire department, and law enforcement).

5. Q: Will 988 calls be referred to 911?

A: Lifeline call center counselors are trained to provide person-centered mental health and substance use support in the least restrictive manner as possible. However, in situations where there is imminent risk to someone's life that is beyond counselor intervention, crisis counselors may share information with 911 in order to save the caller's life, or someone else's.

6. Q: Will 988 accommodate those who are hard of hearing or blind?

A: The 988 Lifeline currently serves TTY users either through their preferred relay service or by dialing 711 then 1-800-273-8255. The 988 Lifeline also offers services through chat and text. The 988 Lifeline is in the process of expanding to video phone service to better serve deaf or hard of hearing individuals seeking help through the 988 Lifeline.

7. Q: What will be in place to protect the data privacy of 988 callers?

A: People contacting the 988 Lifeline are not required to provide any personal data to receive services. View the [Lifeline's privacy policy](#).

When counselors seek to obtain demographic information from 988 callers, this information is used to:

- a. save lives/provide information to emergency services if the caller is in imminent danger
- b. to connect callers to ongoing supports, and
- c. to evaluate system needs and performance and ensure that the 988 Lifeline system is adequately serving the diverse needs of callers

8. Q: Will everyone have the same access to services provided via 988?

A: Starting July 16, 2022, anyone experiencing a mental health and/or substance use-related crisis, or who has a loved one in crisis can receive support from a trained counselor by calling, chatting, or texting 988 (as long as the caller has the telephone, cellular, or internet services available to them).

California envisions a crisis care continuum where all people have access to preventative mental health and substance use behavioral health services, 24/7 crisis response services, and stabilization services to provide follow-up behavioral health care. Achieving this cannot happen overnight, but is possible overtime through leveraging and coordinating federal, state and local public and private resources and efforts.

9. Q: What is the existing National Suicide prevention Lifeline?

A: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. California has 13 existing Lifeline centers. Callers that dial 988 will receive services through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

10. Q: Does the Lifeline work – does it really help?

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

11. Q: Are all mental health/suicide prevention crisis centers part of the Lifeline network?

A: No. California has several county/local warm lines and crisis lines that operate independently of the Lifeline network. Additionally, there are a many independently operated national resources that people in crisis may utilize.

Additional Resources

For more information about 988, visit [SAMHSA 988 Resources](#)

For communication resources and SAMHSA Points of Contact:

- [988 Partner Toolkit](#)
- [988 Messaging Framework](#)
- To Contact SAMHSA for 988 information:
988Team@samhsa.hhs.gov.