



Fulfilling the Promise of 988

BOTTOM LINE

With a July 2022 transition date for 988 implementation fast approaching, significant investments are needed to improve and bolster the suicide prevention, mental health and substance use crisis care continuum.

THE ASK

Cosponsor and support the passage of the [9-8-8 Implementation Act of 2022 \(H.R.7116\)](#).

In July 2022, our country will officially transition to a new three-digit dialing code for individuals experiencing a suicidal, mental health, or substance use related crisis, moving us into a new era of more equitable and accessible crisis services. As the universal dialing code bridging the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline)—a network of local crisis centers across the country—988 will increase the accessibility of life-saving interventions and resources. The adoption of 988 shifts the Lifeline to an easy to remember three-digit dialing, texting, and chat code, while maintaining the ability to connect to trained crisis counselors 24/7/365. This transition brings new challenges and opportunities to enhance and further improve our response to individuals experiencing mental health or substance use crises.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing and its Hill Day partners commend Congress for its attention to the crisis response continuum. For 988 to fulfill its promise, we must ensure a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated care system that prevents individuals from falling through the cracks during crisis.¹ Critical investments in 988 are still needed to bolster the crisis care continuum, facilitate Lifeline and mobile crisis response systems, and enhance coverage of crisis services throughout our health care systems.

THE 9-8-8 IMPLEMENTATION ACT OF 2022 (H.R.7116) WOULD MEET THIS GOAL IN THREE WAYS:

1. Fund Lifeline Call Centers and Crisis Response Programs

Since its creation in December 2004, the Lifeline has fielded more than 20 million calls from people in distress. Vibrant Emotional Health, administrator of the Lifeline, estimates that more than 9 million calls will be made to the Lifeline in the first full year of 988 being available. If we are to meet the growing need for suicide prevention, mental health, and substance use crisis services, Congress must provide the necessary resources for the Lifeline, its call centers, and services that fund the crisis care continuum. The 9-8-8 Implementation Act includes key provisions that:

- **Create a Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office** to support technical assistance and coordination across federal agencies to inform crisis care system development and improvement.
- **Provide resources to Lifeline crisis centers and Lifeline network operations** to build the capacity needed to provide specialized services for high-risk and underserved populations and expand technology, training and operations across the network.
- **Fund crisis services in states and communities** through the Mental Health Block Grant set-aside and the newly created Mental Health Crisis Response Partnership Pilot Program to create and/or enhance existing mobile crisis response teams.

2. Invest in the Physical and Human Infrastructure Needed for the Crisis Care Continuum

The mental health and substance use treatment workforce is already experiencing catastrophic shortages and the influx of need that comes with creating a universal, easy-to-remember three digit dialing code will only further pressure the field. Congress must invest in both the physical and human infrastructure needed to respond to this transition. The 9-8-8 Implementation Act includes key provisions to:

- **Broaden capital development grants** through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).
- **Expand behavioral health workforce** training programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and HRSA, including the National Health Service Corps.

3. Incentivize Funding Mobile Outreach, Crisis Services and Innovative Care Models

We must coordinate and integrate physical and behavioral health crisis response networks to ensure that when people dial 988, they have someone to talk to and somewhere to go to access treatment and services. This requires promoting new integrated and comprehensive care models, increasing coverage for crisis services and incentivizing states to adopt more robust crisis care models and programs. The 9-8-8 Implementation Act includes these key provisions:

- **Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Act (S. 2069/H.R. 4323)** to expand the existing 10-state Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic demonstration to allow any state to participate and partner with 988 Lifeline networks and crisis call centers.
- **Behavioral Health Crisis Services Expansion Act (S. 1902)** to develop national standards for a continuum of crisis services and provide coverage of those services across a variety of health coverage plans, leveling the playing field and facilitating diversified funding of crisis services.
- **Build off investments in the American Rescue Plan** to bolster mobile crisis care operations and programs.

¹ National Council for Mental Wellbeing. (2021, March). Roadmap to the Ideal Crisis System. Committee on Psychiatry and the Community for the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry. <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/resources/roadmap-to-the-ideal-crisis-system/>

