

Call or text the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988

Struggling in

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number recently changed to 988, which was launched nationwide, including in Tennessee, on July 16. To reach the Lifeline, people can call or text 988 or chat online at 988lifeline.org.

“988 is more than a number; it is a message: We’re there for you,” said U.S. Department of Health and Safety Secretary Xavier Becerra in a news release. “Through this and other actions, we are treating mental health as a priority and putting crisis care in reach for more Americans.”

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline’s website states that 988 is an easier number for people to remember to access help. The previous number, 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), remains available for those needing help and reroutes to 988.

More people die by suicide than in car accidents each year in the U.S., according to a “by the numbers” section at 988lifeline.org. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death in young people and was the 10th-leading cause of death in the U.S. prepandemic. There was one death by suicide every 11 minutes in 2020.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline has a network of more than 200 call centers across the nation. Six are in Tennessee, with

a few more providers in pursuit of Lifeline certification. Nationwide, the Lifeline has received over 23 million calls since it began operation in 2005, and 2.5 million calls were received in 2021 alone.

In Tennessee, there were 162,161 calls to different crisis and suicide prevention lines in state between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022. Of those, 35,000 were placed to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and 20,000 to the Tennessee Statewide Crisis Line (855-CRISIS-1); the rest of the calls were to community-based crisis providers.

Tennessee has been working on building capacity through grant funding for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline since October 2019 and was well prepared in July 2022 for the phone number change to 988.

“The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline really is a game-changer for Tennessee,” said Matt Yancey, deputy commissioner





Silence

Story by Nicole Christensen

for community behavioral health programs at the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. “Our state has an amazing network of crisis services and community mental health providers, and 988 is going to unlock the door to mental health help that so many people need right now.”

What happens when someone calls 988? Each county in Tennessee is designated a local primary call center to which all calls from the area are routed, and counties are also assigned backup call centers in case a call is not answered. If neither center answers within the specified time period, calls are routed to the Lifeline’s nationwide backup call center. This design reflects one of the Lifeline’s goals, which is to be locally based so call centers can provide local services and support to those who need them.

There are three crisis centers that cover 988 texting and chatting options 24/7 for Tennessee’s 95 counties. Someone texting 988 or starting a chat on 988lifeline.org is first given a quick survey and then connected with a trained crisis counselor who can provide helpful information and resources along with support.

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“People call or text 988 with any number of things going on in their lives,” Yancey said. “It can be anything from stress at school or work to feelings of depression or thoughts of suicide. 988 call takers are caring and compassionate trained professionals who want to help and have the local resources to make a difference.”

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat online at 988lifeline.org. Visit that website for more information about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and see tn.gov/988 to find Tennessee-specific resources and more information on 988 in Tennessee. ■