

## 988 Implementation and Why We Need 988 Legislation in Our State

In 2020, the Federal Communications Commission and Congress acted to make 988 the universal, three-digit number for mental health crises and suicide prevention, routed through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. While 988 will “go-live” nationwide by July 2022, it is up to our state to ensure there are crisis services so 988 callers actually receive the help they need.

**The idea behind 988 is simple: *mental health crises need a mental health response.***

The goal of 988 implementation legislation is to change the way our community responds to people in a mental health crisis, including reducing the role of law enforcement. With strong crisis services behind 988, we can end the revolving door of ER visits, arrests and incarceration, and, instead, build a system that can de-escalate mental health crises and connect individuals to care.

## Three Pillars to an Ideal 988 Crisis Response System

1. **Crisis Call Centers** that are fully funded to provide 24/7 expertise with trained staff who can offer immediate support and connect people in crisis – and their families – with local services when they need it.
2. **Mobile Crisis Teams** that can be dispatched when a person needs more support than can be provided over the phone. Mobile crisis teams with experienced mental health professionals meet people where they are and should be available to de-escalate crisis situations and connect people to additional care, if needed. Mobile crisis teams should collaborate closely with law enforcement but include police as co-responders only in high-risk situations.
3. **Crisis Stabilization Programs** that can help stabilize a person in crisis in a home-like environment, identify long-term treatment needs, keep a person from needing more intensive care and ensure a warm hand-off to follow-up care.

## How 988 Implementation Legislation Supports Crisis Care

1. **Sets requirements for 988 crisis call centers and crisis response services that will be available statewide.**  
To ensure a high-quality, consistent response, the bill outlines requirements for statewide 988 crisis call center, mobile crisis team and crisis stabilization program availability.
2. **Provides a way to fund 988 and crisis services.**  
The legislation creates a monthly fee on all phone lines to ensure our communities can both route 988 calls to centers with trained counselors and also deploy mobile crisis teams when a person needs more support than can be provided over the phone, in accordance with the intent of federal law. To protect 988 fees from being diverted, 988 fee revenue will be deposited in a 988 fund that can only be used in support of the 988 crisis response system.
3. **Creates 988 system oversight.**  
The design of a 988 system will be complex and require careful planning across multiple state agencies and rely upon several funding streams. The legislation will create an implementation body that is dedicated to bringing together all stakeholders, data and budget information to provide for a smooth rollout and ongoing operation of an effective 988 system.

Ensuring there is a strong crisis response system available when people dial 988 will impact our entire community. It will reduce demand on law enforcement so they are freed up to address their primary responsibility to protect public safety. It will also help the state reduce what it spends on more expensive and less effective methods of responding to mental health crises, namely with arrest and incarceration, emergency room visits and reoccurring psychiatric hospitalizations. Most importantly, it will help avoid tragic outcomes and allow people in mental health crisis get the help they need.