

Active in Indian Country: 988 and the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline



Is 988 working?

The new 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is already reaching more Americans in distress – and connecting them to help faster – than the old 10-digit suicide prevention line it replaced. In August of 2022, the Lifeline saw a 45% increase in overall volume of calls, texts, and chats compared with August 2021. Answer time is faster as well; in August of 2022, the average answer time was 42 seconds, while the previous year was around 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

The Lifeline is effective in reducing suicidal and emotional distress. Since it's inception in 2005:

- the Lifeline has served over 10 million people;
- call centers in the Lifeline divert hundreds of thousands of calls from 911 every year and;
- independent evaluations demonstrate that Lifeline centers are effective in reducing emotional distress and suicidality.



How does 988 call routing work?

When a caller dials 988, they will hear a recorded introduction message providing details on 988 services. Callers then have the option to self-identify for connection to a specific call center – for instance, pressing 1 to identify as a veteran and speak with the Veteran crisis center. If a caller does not self-identify, they will be connected to their local crisis call center. 988 technology uses the caller's area code to route the caller to the closest call center. Crisis centers can transfer calls to other centers as needed.

Does 988 involve the police?

988 crisis counselors are trained to de-escalate mental health crises with minimal involvement of emergency services. In rare instances where a caller is in immediate danger and the crisis counselor cannot de-escalate over the phone, 988 may contact emergency services. **Less than 3% of calls to 988 result in dispatching emergency services**, and less than 1% of calls result in involuntary dispatch.



Does 988 require personal information?

When a caller reaches out to 988, the Lifeline crisis counselor who responds will know their phone number if they call/text, or their IP address if they use chat. Beyond that, the Lifeline will not know who the caller is or where they are located. Callers are not required to provide any personal information to receive support from the 988 Lifeline.

988 call centers may use geolocation if emergency services are dispatched. Geolocation is only used when a caller's safety cannot be secured over the phone and geolocation software is not available at all call centers. 988 decreases the number of calls to 911 and is an effective way to get help while rarely involving emergency services.

988 Messaging and Promotion

988 messaging should be factual, positive, and non-inflammatory. Messaging can be tailored for different cultural and geographic communities. A variety of resources are available to help with 988 messaging on numerous platforms:

- Social media graphics for Native communities: <https://npaihborg.box.com/s/4wo260zxc9kqkn55oanqbig2mdgylofg>
- Social media shareables from SAMHSA: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit/social-media-shareables>
- The official 988 messaging framework: <https://suicidepreventionmessaging.org/988messaging/framework>
- How to report on 988: <files/2022-03/988%20Messaging%20Framework%20-%20Media%20Toolkit.pdf>

Anti-988 messaging is rare but can be damaging. The majority of anti-988 messages spread misinformation that can discourage people from calling the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline when they need it. Luckily, this misinformation has been largely outweighed by more accurate content and organic community correcting. It is still important to be vigilant of trends toward anti-988 messaging and to respond carefully using the resources above.

To help prevent anti-988 messaging, work with local news organizations to ensure they know how to report on suicide and where to find factual information about 988. The resources above can be used to publish accurate and positive messages about 988.

The Future of 988: Mobile Crisis Units and Local Crisis Centers

SAMHSA's longer-term vision is that the transition to 988, which began in July 2022, will spur the growth of a robust crisis care system across the country that links callers to community-based providers who can deliver a full range of crisis care services (like mobile crisis teams or stabilization centers). This vision has been supported by an increase in public mental health infrastructure funding from federal entities. Currently, these crisis care services do not exist in all areas of the country, and it will take time and sustained support to for this crisis care system to evolve.

While progress toward this robust crisis care system varies from community to community, 988 is connected to existing crisis care resources all across the nation. In partnership with the Lifeline, state and territorial agencies are required to ensure Lifeline member centers in their region have systems in place to maintain local resource and referral listings, as well as assure linkages to local community crisis services, including 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) , mobile crisis teams, and other outreach alternatives to law enforcement and emergency medical services (EMS) response.

Movement in Indian Country: Native & Strong Lifeline

The Native & Strong Lifeline is a crisis call center operated entirely by Native staff and is available 24/7 in **Washington State**. To connect with the Native & Strong Lifeline from a Washington State area code, dial 988 and press "4". The Native crisis counselor who answers will help with mental health crises in an empathetic and culturally connected way.

The Native & Strong Lifeline currently employs 16 Indigenous counselors from all over the United States. In addition to the training all 988 crisis counselors receive, Native & Strong counselors are trained in cultural competency, traditional forms of healing, and Native slang and language. Counselors use cultural activities, traditional medicines, and connections with elders and Native healers as a part of self-care planning with callers, in addition to clinical and community resources.

Although Native & Strong is only available in Washington State, this crisis call center can serve as a model for Tribes that want to open their own crisis call centers nationwide. To learn more about how Native & Strong was created, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hleYKuADK70>.

How can Tribes partner with 988?

Tribes and Tribal communities can:

- Partner with local crisis service centers to provide culturally appropriate services. To get connected or learn more about your local crisis service center, visit the Lifeline's Network webpage: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/our-network/>
- Establish tribally specific crisis service centers to become part of the Lifeline network.
- Develop culturally aware mobile crisis response teams for their communities.