

Dept. of Health Services: Wisconsin receives 988 State Planning Grant

Posted on Friday, Feb 12, 2021

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The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) has received a \$171,701 grant to develop Wisconsin's implementation plan for 988, the new calling code that will launch in July 2022 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a free service that helps people in emotional distress.

A coalition organized by DHS is expected to use the funding from Vibrant Emotional Health, the administrator of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, to establish a system in which everyone in Wisconsin has direct access through 988 to trained counselors offering effective suicide prevention and mental health crisis services. People needing support should continue to call 800-273-8255 until 988 is activated.

"A three-digit calling code will open the door for more people to seek the help they need, while sending the message that healing, hope, and help are happening every day," said DHS Interim Secretary Karen Timberlake. "This funding will make certain Wisconsin is prepared for the anticipated increase in calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline with a system that meets our needs and incorporates best practices for suicide prevention and mental health crisis services."

The coalition charged with developing Wisconsin's 988 implementation plan will include staff from DHS, the Wisconsin call centers that are currently affiliated with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, county programs that respond to mental health emergencies, providers of mental health crisis stabilization and peer support services, and mental health and suicide prevention advocacy groups. This group will also include people who have experienced thoughts of suicide, a suicide attempt, and suicide loss; law enforcement leaders; and representatives from the 911 system and 211 Wisconsin. The coalition will meet at least monthly beginning in April.

The plan produced by the coalition will ensure there is statewide coverage for 988 calls and sustainable funding and operational structures for Wisconsin's National Suicide Prevention Lifeline call centers to handle the current and projected volume for calls, including systems to maintain local resource and referral listings and provide follow-up care services. The plan will also include a framework for how 988 will be marketed within Wisconsin.

A draft of this plan is expected to be completed by August 30, 2021, with the final plan completed by December 31, 2021.