

Gov. Evers, Dept. of Health Services: Announce Wisconsin is ready to transition to 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) today announced the state is ready for the July 16, 2022, transition to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The new calling code of 988 will allow people of all ages who are experiencing a crisis—whether that is thoughts of suicide, a mental health concern or substance use issue, or any other kind of emotional distress—to get help for themselves or a loved one by connecting them with a trained crisis counselor. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a free and confidential service that is available 24/7, and anyone can access the Lifeline by calling 988 (multiple languages available), texting a message to 988 (English only), or using the chat feature at 988lifeline.org (English only).

“Talking about mental and behavioral health is an important part of reducing stigma and making sure folks know they can get the support they need when they need it. In our state, nobody carries their worries alone, and it’s important for Wisconsinites to know that help and hope are only a phone call away,” said Gov. Evers. “The nationwide transition to 988, an easy-to-remember 3-digit number, will provide greater access to counseling services across our state and country and will undoubtedly save lives.”

Individuals who call 988 will reach the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which is being renamed the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. While 988 will provide an easy-to-remember number, the 10-digit National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) will also remain in effect even with the transition. Individuals in

Wisconsin who contact 988 will be routed to the Wisconsin Lifeline, the only National Suicide Prevention Lifeline affiliated call center in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Lifeline is funded by DHS and operated by Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin. For more information, including a list of frequently asked questions, visit the DHS website [here](#). If you or someone you know is in imminent danger, please call 911.

“A person experiencing a behavioral health crisis does not need to manage alone,” said DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. “Just call, text, or chat 988. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is here and ready to help all Wisconsin residents handle stressful situations.”

Congress designated the 988-calling code in 2020. Soon after, the Wisconsin Lifeline opened to accept Wisconsin contacts from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Concurrently, DHS convened a coalition to develop Wisconsin’s 988 implementation plan. This coalition includes representatives from county and municipal agencies focused on behavioral health, law enforcement, emergency services providers, behavioral health services providers, and people who have experienced behavioral health crisis situations. This group continues to meet regularly to provide guidance on integrating the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline into Wisconsin’s behavioral healthcare system.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a network of more than 200 support centers around the country. Contacts not answered by in-state partners roll over to a national backup system. The Wisconsin Lifeline has helped ensure that as many contacts as possible are answered by Wisconsin-based counselors who have the best understanding of local communities, cultures, and resources.

In 2021, approximately 29,000 calls from Wisconsin were answered by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is part of a larger transformation of Wisconsin’s system for behavioral health crisis care focused on ensuring everyone who needs help has someone to talk to and a place to go. In addition to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, DHS has invested in the creation of a statewide warmline. This warmline phone service is being developed and will offer care and peer support from individuals who have themselves experienced a behavioral health crisis. Additionally, there is a new focus on providing mobile behavioral health crisis response, a service that provides care when and where a person needs it in their community, whether at home, work, school, or another location. Finally, regional

crisis stabilization facilities are also under development. Crisis stabilization facilities will offer an alternative to hospitalization for adults who need the safety and security of facility-based care, but not intensive inpatient services. Wisconsin already has two youth crisis stabilization facilities that offer similar services, and two more are under development. Gov. Evers and DHS are also working with partners to develop a proposal for an additional \$10 million investment to support regional crisis response system grants to alleviate strains on the state's crisis services system infrastructure.

An online version of this release is available.