

Gov. Beshear: New 988 Mental Health Crisis Lifeline Here to Help Save Lives

Crystal Staley or Scottie Ellis [502-564-2611https://governor.ky.gov](https://governor.ky.gov)

Office of the Governor

700 Capitol AvenueFrankfortKY40601

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 18, 2022) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear announced that Kentucky has launched the easy-to-remember three-digit mental health crisis hotline, 988, which connects Kentuckians facing a risk of suicide, mental health distress or an addiction crisis to compassionate and trained counselors who can help.

The 988 suicide and crisis lifeline is available every hour of every day, and counselors respond to calls, chats or text messages directly from Kentuckians in need as well as those who are concerned about a loved one who may need crisis support.

“My administration has always prioritized mental health the same as physical health,” **Gov. Beshear** said. “And with the launch of 988, we have made it easier for Kentuckians to reach out and get the help they need and deserve.”

Officials anticipate an increase in calls due to the new easier-to-use number and text capabilities, and because of the many Kentuckians struggling with their mental health, especially youth. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for youth and young adults in Kentucky. According to the [Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) released in September 2021, 15% of Kentucky high school students reported having seriously considered suicide during the previous year. In addition, 17.4% of Kentucky middle school students, or nearly 1 in 5, reported that they had seriously considered taking their own life at some point.

“The implementation of this new number comes during a time when Kentuckians are burdened with emotional strains and stressors in our communities,” said **Eric Friedlander, secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services**. “The 988 lifeline helps us to build stronger more resilient communities, and this new number will help ensure adequate access for all to mental health care, including residents of all ages living in all communities, as well as the underserved.”

The 988 lifeline is part of a nationwide departure from the 10-digit National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which remains available during the transition. The Governor noted that Kentucky has worked for over a year to prepare for the launch, which was made possible by a two-year, \$1.16 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, sourced from American Rescue Plan Act funding. The upcoming state budget also included \$19.6 million over a two-year period to support increased capacity and infrastructure for 988, as well as to fund mobile crisis services.

Funding from Kentucky’s Mental Health Block Grant has been added to support call capacity in anticipation of call volume that is forecast to quadruple by the end of June 2023. Over the last three months, the 10-digit lifeline has received an average of 1,935 calls each month in Kentucky. Last year, Vibrant Emotional Health, the nonprofit administrator of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline also awarded \$340,000 in grant funding to assist the commonwealth with planning and logistics for the 988 transition.

Secretary Friedlander also recognized an agency of the cabinet – the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID) – for initiating work in the 2000s that brought Community Mental Health Centers online with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This ensured that all residents have access to local services. Thirteen sites across the state are accredited as National Suicide Prevention Lifeline call centers.

“Our goal is to get all Kentuckians – especially our youth – connected with the mental health services they need,” **DBHDID Commissioner Wendy Morris** said. “When someone contacts 988, they will reach a compassionate, highly trained counselor who can help address their issue in the least intrusive way possible.”

“Ensuring that every resident in every county has the opportunity to have their calls and texts answered as close to home as possible has been a vital driver of the 988 implementation,” said **Beck Whipple, state suicide prevention coordinator and 988 project director**.

Angela Roberts, 988 program administrator, noted that the 13 centers provide primary coverage for all 120 counties and backup coverage for 80% of those areas.

“Backup coverage is essential to quickly responding to individuals in crisis, and we are positioned to handle these calls, even as they increase,” Roberts said. She noted that if a center in Kentucky is unable to take a call, it automatically rolls over to a national backup center in Florida or New York, according to the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).

“988 is not just a number, it’s a health system,” **Marcie Timmerman, executive director of Mental Health America of Kentucky**. “In Kentucky, you’re going to reach a Kentucky community health center most of the time. There’s no barrier for you. 988 doesn’t charge for the phone call. These are ways to help on the ground that is fairly unique to Kentucky. We have those on-the-ground services being built up so that the right person comes and intervenes when it is needed.”

“988 crisis counselors are superheroes and they play an integral part in saving lives,” **Audra Hall, coordinator of emergency services for Pennyroyal Center in Hopkinsville**, said. “It is beneficial for calls to be answered locally as often as possible because, in addition to providing emotional support and listening, counselors can link individuals to other mental health and substance use services. Knowing those local resources and being able to make those direct connections in the community can provide a strong safety net.”

“I want to thank our Governor for all he has done around mental health. The more we learn about adverse childhood effects and experiences, the more we understand why children have some of these mental health challenges,” **Carol Cecil, executive director at Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children Inc. (KPFC)**, said. “Our staff at KPFC bring lived expertise to the forefront. We’ve been there, done that, and we’re helping those who are there, doing that. The 988 number is just a miracle for so many of our families and our youth.”

“These centers are certified and trained. But for me, more significantly, these are Kentuckians reaching out, speaking to Kentuckians and accessing services by Kentuckians. 988 is a national number, but it is a local response,” said **Steve Shannon, executive director of the Kentucky Association of Regional Programs, the non-profit representing the commonwealth’s 14 Community Mental Health Centers**. “Family members, coworkers, neighbors, classmates all have an opportunity to call 988. My hope is that someday soon 988 is as common as 911. There shall be no reluctance, there shall be no shame or stigma in calling 988 and asking for help for mental health, substance abuse, self-harm or even suicide.”

“What Gov. Beshear has done in giving us new funding, in being able to support and talk about how important mental health is, that’s normalizing it, that’s saying that it’s ok to reach out for help,” said **Geneva Robinson, crisis and information center director at Seven Counties Services**. “I am

living proof that when we make services accessible to people, when we make it easy for them to get those services that they need, we save lives. Thank you because we know that that's what this line is going to do. It's going to mean that more people in our commonwealth live."

For more information, visit the new 988 website at 988.ky.gov.

###