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Pritzker Administration Announces 988 Suicide Prevention Lifeline to Strengthen Mental Health Support Across Illinois

American Rescue Plan Funding Will Support State Efforts to Transform Suicide and Mental Health Crisis Care in Illinois

CHICAGO – Governor JB Pritzker announced today that the Illinois Department of Human Services’ (IDHS) Division of Mental Health, in coordination with the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is expanding Illinois’ mental health safety net by rolling out 988, a new, nationwide suicide prevention and mental health crisis line. The code will be available nationally beginning July 16, 2022.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which has existed since 2005, is now available nationwide via a three-digit dialing code – 988 – making it easier for those in crisis to get the help they need. Converting to this easy-to-remember number offers the public increased access to potentially lifesaving, trained crisis counselors. State and federal funding have made it possible to increase staffing at Illinois’ six existing 988 call centers to ensure that calls are answered in-state.

“Thanks to the many incredible counselors answering the call to serve those in crisis, the expanded 988 Lifeline number will help save many lives,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “To any Illinois resident who might be struggling, know that you are not alone. We are here to support you. You can receive help by dialing or texting 988.”

The 988 call and text line is a crucial first step toward ensuring SAMSHA’s three-part aspiration for our country: that over time, all Americans experiencing mental health crises have *someone to call, someone to respond, and somewhere to go*. The new code is a first step toward transforming crisis care in America, a universal entry point to needed crisis services in line with access to other emergency medical services.

“The Governor was clear that we needed a stronger effort to support mental health in Illinois,” **said Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary Grace B. Hou.** “The launch of 988 will help people across the state prevent mental health crises from escalating into emergencies.”

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young adults ages 15-34 in Illinois and fourth leading cause of death for those ages 35-44. Overall, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the state.

“The pandemic has had an impact on stress levels and mental health across the board,” **said Dr. David Albert, Director, Division of Mental Health, IDHS.** “This is an effort to increase access to vital crisis services, improve the efficacy of suicide prevention efforts, and overcome the stigma around getting help. This will bolster the crisis care continuum in Illinois, better connecting people in crisis with call takers trained in suicide prevention, crisis de-escalation and stabilization.”

“The past two plus years have been an overwhelming time for many Illinoisans, and some feel like they are struggling alone,” **said Illinois State Senator Laura Fine.** “988 is an expanded resource to assist people experiencing mental health issues. I encourage anyone feeling anxious or depressed to dial 988 for local support. A caring voice or a listening ear can make all the difference during times of stress.”

“If you want to help someone experiencing a crisis- you can call or text 988 for free and confidential support,” **said Illinois State Representative Fran Hurley.** “Across Illinois, too many lives have been lost to suicide. 988 provides lifesaving support to individuals experiencing mental health crises and I’m proud to have co-sponsored the legislation that helped make this resource available for residents in urgent need.”

“This is good government doing the right thing for our citizens,” **said Illinois State Representative Deb Conroy.** “988 is an important step for Illinois to improve the accessibility of mental health help for the people of Illinois.”

In addition to funding from the federal government, Governor Pritzker committed nearly \$15 million to bolster Illinois’ statewide 988 Crisis Response Call Center. State investment in the Division of Mental Health, which is one aspect of the state’s mental health services, has significantly increased during the Pritzker administration, totaling up to \$830.3 million in the current FY23 budget. This is nearly a quarter billion-dollar difference from the previous administration.



JB Pritzker, Governor

Grace B. Hou, Secretary

People in mental health crisis or emotional distress can call or text 988 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Those who are not in crisis but who are seeking treatment options for mental health conditions can visit 988hotline.illinois.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

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