

# Phone companies must allow texting new '988' suicide line

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U.S. communications regulators will require that phone companies allow people to text as well as call a new "988" number for the suicide-prevention hotline.

The Federal Communications Commission last summer voted to require [phone companies](#) support the 988 number for people to call to reach an existing suicide-prevention hotline. Recognizing that texting is critical to Americans, particularly young people and those who are deaf, have [hearing loss](#) or speech disabilities, the commission on Thursday voted 4-0 to require a texting option as well.

"For millions of us, especially [young people](#) and those with disabilities—they are more likely to text than they are to call when they are in crisis," said FCC Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel during the agency's meeting Thursday. "The bottom line is it should not matter when you make a voice call or send a [text message](#), because we should connect people in crisis to the resources they need, no matter how they communicate."

Currently, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline uses a 10-digit number, 800-273-TALK (8255), which routes calls to about 170 crisis centers. Phone companies have until July 2022 to implement the 988 number for both calling and texting. The FCC said Thursday that the country's largest cellphone companies AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon already support calling 988.

Suicide-prevention experts have said that the three-digit hotline could be a breakthrough that helps people in crisis. Suicide rates have largely been going up in the U.S. for the past two decades, although they dropped slightly last year, when nearly 45,000 people died by suicide.

"Texting to 988 is a huge step forward in improving how you address [mental health](#)," said Hannah Wesolowski, director of government relations for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. "Text messaging is a central part of how people communicate and for many individuals the primary way they communicate."

She said that that demand for the hotline "is going to skyrocket" next year when the 988 system is fully in place and people actually know about it, and that resources are going to have to increase as well so that people's calls and texts are answered.

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