

# America's 988 suicide and crisis lifeline launches Saturday

July 15 2022, by Denise Mann

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Starting Saturday, if you or someone you know is contemplating [suicide](#)

or having a mental health crisis, you can dial just three numbers—988—to get help.

Callers will be connected to a trained counselor at a local call center and ultimately routed to potentially lifesaving support services. The three-digit code for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline replaces the 10-digit number for what was formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

The new three-digit number is easy to remember, free, available 24/7 and confidential, said Thea Gallagher, a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at NYU Langone Health in New York City.

"If 988 becomes just as ubiquitous as 911, we are saying that mental health and [physical health](#) are on the same level, and that breaks stigma," she said.

The need for such access and services has never been greater, Gallagher said.

"With the ongoing [pandemic](#), we have seen an increase in depression, anxiety and [suicidal thoughts](#) and behavior, so we know mental health has never been more negatively impacted," she said.

In 2020, more than 47,000 Americans died by suicide, a 33% increase from 2000, [according](#) to The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The new number will also accept texts, and live chat is available, said Dr. May Lau. She is a pediatrician at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and the medical director of the Adolescent and Young Adult Clinic at Children's Medical Center Dallas.

Crisis counselors speak multiple languages and are culturally competent

at counseling members of the LGBTQ community. There are also resources available for people who are deaf or hearing-impaired, Lau said.

"The text function is only in English for now, but most of the people who feel comfortable texting are younger, and many of them are bilingual," Lau noted.

The new line is not just for people who are contemplating suicide. Counselors are also skilled in discussing [self-harm](#), [addiction](#), [domestic violence](#) and other [mental health](#) issues. If a caller needs immediate medical attention, 988 will collaborate with local police or hospitals to dispatch services.

"We are trying to help people deal with crises before they become life-threatening," said Anthony Wood, interim CEO and COO of the American Association for Suicidology. The group has been calling for a three-digit [suicide](#) hotline for years.

And while a three-digit number is a big step forward, there are still some kinks to work out, Wood said.

For starters, local crisis centers will need more counselors to handle the expected surge in calls, he said.

"Member centers are gearing up for more volume and accountability to their communities, and while funding has been expanded, we are still in a situation where there are not enough dollars to cover the cost for every part of the country," Wood said. "Every state is struggling with how to fund the program."

The existing number, 1-800-273-8255, will still be available after July 16.

**More information:** Learn more about the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#).

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