

Adam Crum
Commissioner

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Department of Health

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Clinton Bennett, DOH, 907-269-4996, clinton.bennett@alaska.gov

988: the three-digit dialing code for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline goes live this week

July 13, 2022, ANCHORAGE – In Alaska and across the nation, callers can soon dial 988, an easy-to-remember three-digit dialing code, to connect to the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s network of highly trained and compassionate call center professionals.

The implementation of this dialing code becomes operational across Alaska and nationwide on July 16, 2022, and is the result of a 2020 congressional decision designating 988 as the dialing code to operate through the existing [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(the Lifeline\)](#).

Callers in Alaska who dial 988 from a 907 area code will be connected to [Careline Alaska](#) where a trained crisis counselor will provide confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone of any age, including non-English speakers and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Counselors are trained to respond to crisis, provide emotional support and connect callers with local resources.

Efforts to implement 988 in Alaska began in April 2021, with the Alaska Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) leading a collaborative statewide planning process.

“Engagement from stakeholders across our diverse state has shaped Alaska’s 988 implementation, ensuring that Alaskans experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, thoughts of suicide or emotional distress, can easily access help. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need support,” said Leah Van Kirk, statewide suicide prevention coordinator with DBH. “Numerous partners contributed to planning for 988, including behavioral health service providers, law enforcement, tribal organizations, telecommunications companies, suicide prevention organizations and advocates, Alaska’s crisis call center, and state and local government agencies. Our collaborative work will continue as we implement this national initiative, strengthening our current resources to meet the unique needs of all Alaskans.”

“We’re excited to announce 988 will soon be available to Alaskans statewide. Careline Crisis Intervention, Inc. will answer 988 calls, texts and chats, and continue to answer Alaska Careline calls

(877-266-HELP),” said Alaska Department of Health Commissioner Adam Crum. “Please help us spread the word that 988 will soon be available. You can call 988 or Careline; there is no wrong door to seek help. The Alaska Careline is a member of the Lifeline and will continue to serve as both a crisis line and the ‘someone to talk to’ line for Alaskans. 988 will be an easy-to-remember number for Alaskans in crisis.”

Nationally, the suicide rate has climbed nearly 30% since 1999 and Alaska continues to have among the highest per capita suicide rates in the nation. 988 will help prevent suicide by expanding existing resources; its implementation is happening alongside large-scale system reform efforts in Alaska and nationwide to improve crisis response systems, mental health and substance misuse supports, as well as suicide prevention efforts.

“Alaska is joining states and territories across the nation in transition to the easy-to-remember, three-digit number for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. This is a top priority for me and our entire leadership here at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS),” said HHS Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use and SAMHSA Administrator Miriam Delphin-Rittmon. “I am committed to continued work with our national partners to achieve a smooth transition, and I greatly appreciate the partnership with our state and tribal leaders in Alaska. Thank you to the crisis center and behavioral health professionals who are working hard at the local level to support people, prevent suicides and save lives.”

“The goal of 988 is to provide a simple and direct way for Alaskans to immediately access professional mental health support in a time of need,” added Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Chief Executive Officer Steve Williams. “An effectively resourced 988 Lifeline can truly save lives; it connects a person in a mental health crisis or contemplating suicide to a trained counselor who can address their immediate needs and help connect them to ongoing care. In addition, by promoting 988 and talking about the importance of the Lifeline we can also help end the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.”

To learn more about the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in Alaska, [visit 988.alaska.gov](https://988.alaska.gov). At this site you can find videos, fact sheets and other resources about 988 in Alaska, as well as information about suicide warning signs and suicide prevention resources.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, call the Lifeline at 800-273-8255 or the [Alaska Careline](https://alaskacareline.org) at 877-266-HELP and starting July 16, you can also dial 988.

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