



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **State of Ohio Ready for Transition to New, Nationwide 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**

*Beginning July 16, Ohioans in all 88 counties can call, text or chat for free 24/7 crisis support*

(COLUMBUS, OH) – Following 18 months of careful preparation, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) is pleased to announce that Ohioans experiencing suicidal crisis, mental health or addiction-related distress will soon be able to call 988, an easy-to-remember three-digit number to access free, 24/7, confidential support for themselves or loved ones. The nationwide **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** goes live on Saturday, July 16.

“Mental health is just as important as physical health,” said Governor Mike DeWine. “988 is a statewide resource that will quickly connect anyone who needs immediate support or crisis treatment to a trained counselor who can listen and connect them with resources. I encourage Ohioans who are in crisis themselves, or helping someone who is, to call 988 for help.”

In 2020, Congress designated the new 988 dialing code to operate through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s (NSPL) network of more than 200 locally operated and funded crisis centers across the country. The service was established to improve access to crisis services in a way that meets the nation’s growing suicide and mental health related crisis care needs. The existing 10-digit National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) launched in 2005 and will remain active following the transition to 988, as will local helplines and hotlines, keeping important safety nets in place.

Too often Ohioans in crisis don’t know where to turn for help, and the stigma of asking can keep them from reaching out,” said OhioMHAS Director Lori Criss. “We are working to change all this in Ohio. Moving to a 3-digit crisis number helps increase the visibility of the help available to Ohioans experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis,” said Director Criss. “988 is more than just an easy-to-remember number—it is a direct connection to a compassionate person on the other line who is trained to provide support to anyone in distress – whether that is thoughts of suicide, emotional distress, or substance use crisis.”

To prepare for implementation, Ohio expanded the number of NSPL-affiliated call centers to 19, ensuring Ohioans in all 88 counties have access to coverage and support. Starting July 16 when Ohioans dial 988, they can expect to hear a greeting message while their call is routed to the local Lifeline network crisis center (based on the caller’s area code – [see map here](#)). A trained crisis counselor will answer the phone, listen to the caller, provide support, and connect them to additional resources if needed.

“Some may struggle with “should I call 911 or 988?” Director Criss explained, “The 988 number will become well known over time, just like 911. We want people to think about: 1. Is this a fire or police emergency or imminent danger to life? CALL 911. 2. Do I need help related to thoughts of suicide, mental health or addiction crisis? CALL 988.”

The Lifeline provides live crisis center phone services in English and Spanish and uses Language Line Solutions to provide translation services in over 250 additional languages for people who call 988. The 988 dialing code will also be available nationwide for text or chat (English only).

“The transition to 988 is another important step in strengthening and transforming crisis care in Ohio,” said RecoveryOhio Director Aimee Shadwick. “Governor DeWine has prioritized making person-centered care more visible, accessible, and effective, and 988 will serve as a front door into Ohio’s crisis care system.”

There are urgent realities driving the need for crisis service transformation across the United States. In 2020 alone, the U.S. had one death by suicide about every 11 minutes—and for people aged 10 – 34 years, suicide is a leading cause of death. Additionally, from April 2020 to 2021, over 100,000 individuals died from drug overdoses. Numerous studies have shown that most Lifeline callers are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to a Lifeline crisis counselor. Studies have shown that approximately 80 percent of calls made to a crisis line can be resolved through a phone conversation, alleviating burdens on local law enforcement and hospital systems.

OhioMHAS has identified federal funding to support the implementation and year one of operations for 988. During this first year of operations OhioMHAS will carefully monitor call volumes and system needs and continue working with the General Assembly to identify funding for long-term sustainability of 988.

In recent years, Ohio has prioritized \$69 million in state GRF dollars to strengthen and support [crisis services](#) in communities throughout the state. In March, Governor DeWine devoted a significant portion of his [State of the State Address](#) to his vision for the future of behavioral health in Ohio. In May, he [announced his proposal](#) to infuse \$85 million in federal resources to strengthen and expand Ohio’s behavioral health care workforce to help meet rising demand for mental health and substance use disorder treatment and recovery support services. Governor DeWine also announced an [\\$84 million Pediatric Behavioral Health Initiative](#). On July 1, Governor DeWine [announced the launch of OhioRISE](#) – a first-ever, highly-specialized behavioral health program for Ohio children with complex behavioral health needs.

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A national 988 public awareness campaign is not expected until 2023. OhioMHAS and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration have provided many resources to help Ohio communities understand the transition to 988 and communicate the change to residents.

Additional Resources:

[Ohio 988 Fact Sheet](#)

[Ohio 988 FAQ](#)

[When to Call 911/When to Call 988](#)

[Local Partner Toolkit](#) (logos and more)

[Ohio 988 Lifeline Providers Coverage Map](#)

[OhioMHAS 988 Resource Page](#)

[June 16, 2022 Media Briefing Slides](#)