

*U.S. launches mental health and
suicide prevention hotline*

STARTING **JULY 16,**
CALL OR TEXT

9888

TO REACH THE **SUICIDE
AND CRISIS LIFELINE**

 U.S. Representative
MARK POCAN
2ND DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

Potential patients are now able to call or send text messages to 9-8-8 starting Saturday [File: Jenny Kane/AP Photo]

Washington, July 16 (RHC)-- The United States is set to launch its first nationwide three-digit mental health crisis hotline that will connect people experiencing mental health emergencies or suicidal thoughts to trained counselors.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) said the 9-8-8 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which will go live on Saturday, aims “put crisis care more in reach for people in need.”

“988 is more than a number, it is a message: we’re there for you. Through this and other actions, we are treating mental health as a priority and putting crisis care in reach for more Americans,” Xavier Becerra, US secretary of health and human services, said in a statement on Friday.

“There is still much work to do. But what matters is that we’re launching, 988 will be live. We are looking to every governor and every state in the nation to do their part to make this a long-term success.”

The initiative is akin to 911, the U.S. number used for physical health and security emergencies nationwide. The new number came amid an continuing push to connect people experiencing mental health episodes to mental health professionals rather than dispatching armed police officers, which leads to possible violence and unnecessary arrests.

The new three-digit number for suicide and mental health crisis was authorised by Congress in a 2020 bill that was signed into law by then-President Donald Trump.

“Since January 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration has made unprecedented investments to support the 988 transition, investing \$432 million to scale crisis center capacity and ensure all Americans have access to help during mental health crises,” SAMHSA said.

The new system will build on an existing programme – the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – which has more than 200 crisis centres across the US. Calls to the old number, 1-800-273-8255, will still go through even after 988 comes online.

Potential patients will also be able to send text messages to 988. HHS Assistant Secretary Miriam Delphin-Rittmon said the agency is working to expand access to mental health services in cooperation with the states.

“Over time, the vision for 988 is to have additional crisis services available in communities across the country, much the way emergency medical services work,” Delphin-Rittmon said in a statement.

On Friday, several U.S. police departments, officials and lawmakers promoted the new initiative, urging constituents to use the new number if they need help. “On July 16, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number is changing to 988. If you are struggling with your mental health, text or call this number anytime from anywhere in the U.S. to be connected to a trained counselor,” Detroit Police Department said in a tweet. “Remember, you are not alone.”



Radio Habana Cuba