

## How to Report on 988: America's Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Lifeline

In July of 2022, our country enters a new era of crisis services as the [National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020](#) is implemented nationwide. This officially ushers in 988 as the easy to remember three-digit dialing, texting, and chat code for anyone experiencing a suicidal or mental health crisis and will connect users with the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network of crisis call centers.

### Media Contact

Please direct any media inquiries about 988 to the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention at [info@theActionAlliance.org](mailto:info@theActionAlliance.org). We will triage your request to the appropriate partner/expert.

This exciting development will understandably be the topic of considerable public attention and news coverage. Given the life-saving nature of 988 and the important role news media will play in educating audiences about it, it is essential that all reporting is accurate, effective, and safe. To help members of the media effectively report about 988, we encourage all reporters to use this media toolkit, which is part of a larger 988 Messaging Framework. To learn more about the framework, visit [988messaging.org](http://988messaging.org).

### Reporting on Suicide, Suicide Prevention, and Mental Health

News coverage can play a key role in shaping public behaviors and discourse, especially when it comes to important health topics like suicide prevention and mental health. For example, research has found that the way media covers suicide can either influence behavior negatively. Reporting on these topics should always be informed by best practices, like those listed in the [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#) and [Words Matter: Reporting on Mental Health Conditions](#), including the following recommendations:

- **Share prevention stories.** Including stories about those people who were able to find hope and healing may reduce the risk of contagion and encourage help-seeking in others.
- **Include helpful, action-oriented resources.** Provide information, such as the warning signs, risk factors, and protective factors for suicide. Also always include hotline and treatment resources, like the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) and [Crisis Text Line](#), or local crisis phone numbers. Only include 988 as a resource after the transition occurs on July 16, 2022.



- **Use appropriate language and images.** Certain phrases and images can stigmatize mental health and suicide and undermine prevention objectives. For example:
  - Instead of “committed suicide” use “died by suicide” or “killed him/herself” and refer to someone as “a person with schizophrenia” rather than “schizophrenic.”
  - Instead of using dark images of people alone in despair use images of people support one another or seeking professional help.
  - Use photos with diverse age, gender, race, and ethnicity representations in stories about 988 to ensure the story conveys that the service is for everyone.
- **Ask an expert.** Interview suicide prevention or mental health experts to ensure that you're sharing verified information about suicide and mental health as well as providing the most accurate local supports that meets your outlet’s audience(s).

### Reporting on 988

In addition to best practices for reporting on suicide and mental health, please consider the following key messages when covering 988:

- On July 16, 2022, the country will transition to using the 988 dialing code, and it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to strengthen and expand the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and change how crisis services are delivered nationwide.
- 988 is more than just an easy-to-remember number—it is a direct connection to compassionate, accessible care and support for anyone experiencing mental health related distress—whether that is thoughts of suicide, symptoms of mental illness or substance use disorder, or other factors. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need these types of crisis supports.
- The 988 dialing code is just a first step toward strengthening and transforming crisis care in this country. For that to happen, the transition to 988 requires additional policy changes and funding support from federal and state governments.
- Over time, the vision for 988 is to have additional crisis services available in communities across the nation, much the way emergency medical services work.
- The 988 dialing code will be available nationwide for call, text, or chat on July 16, 2022. Until then, those experiencing a mental health or suicide-related crisis, or those looking to help a loved one through a crisis, should continue to call the Lifeline at its current number, 1-800-273-8255.

For media inquiries or to connect with an expert, please contact the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention at [info@theActionAlliance.org](mailto:info@theActionAlliance.org). To learn more about 988, please visit the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) and [Vibrant Emotional Health](#)—who serve as the national leads for 988 rollout and implementation.