

Background & Supporting Data



988 Helpline

As of July 16, 2022, 988 is the new national three-digit helpline number for the National Suicide Prevention and Crisis Lifeline. 988 is a national network of local responders. Anyone who calls 988 will immediately be connected to counselors at local call centers for safe, supportive and confidential mental health services. Counselors provide free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

People can call 988 for help for themselves or a loved one. People call for a lot of reasons, including thoughts of suicide, feeling lonely, sad or depressed, relationship problems, drinking too much or drug use, feeling anxious, and many more reasons. 988 is free and confidential and counselors are ready to connect people with the help they need.

The long-term goal is for 988 to serve as an alternative to calling 911 or going to the Emergency Department for emergency emotional support and make access to care in the community easier.

CALL 988—Central Maryland’s Helpline

Behavioral Health System Baltimore, and its partners at state and local government, behavioral health care providers, and community residents have been working for two years to build an integrated regional 988 helpline that is ready to answer calls for help.

The CALL 988 Helpline is a regional call center for Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Howard County, and Carroll County. The helpline is operated in partnership between Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc., Affiliated Santé Group, and Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center, Inc.

Oversight for the helpline is provided by Behavioral Health System Baltimore and the local behavioral health authorities in Baltimore, Carroll, and Howard Counties.

Background Information and Data

- Local helplines have been providing access to mental health care in the community for more than 20 years.
- Helpline services have been shown to reduce depression and suicidal thoughts while increasing feelings of hope.¹
- It is estimated that Central Maryland’s CALL 988 Helpline may receive approximately 124,000 calls over the next year.
- Suicide rate has climbed 30% since 1999.²
- Suicide is the second leading cause of young people ages 10-14 and 25-34, and the tenth leading cause overall.³
- Suicide among Black youth is rising at the fastest rate of any group. Black youth under 13 are now twice as likely to die by suicide as other racial/ethnic groups.⁴

¹ Gould MS, Munfakh JLH, Kleinman M, Lake AM. National suicide prevention lifeline: enhancing mental health care for suicidal individuals and other people in crisis. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. 2012 Feb;42(1):22-35. ² Hedegaard H, Curtin SC, Warner M. Suicide mortality in the United States, 1999–2017. *NCHS Data Brief*, no 330. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2018. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention. Maryland’s State Suicide Prevention Plan 2020. Available at: <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Documents/2020%20Maryland%20State%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>