



News Release

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CALIFORNIA DEDICATES \$20 MILLION TO SUPPORT NEW MENTAL HEALTH “988” CRISIS HOTLINE

SACRAMENTO - The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) today announced it will invest \$20 million in California’s network of emergency call centers to support the launch of a new 988 hotline, an alternative to 911 for people seeking help during a mental health crisis. This federal grant funding will bolster call centers that will support 988.

“Expanded access to mental health services is a central focus of the California Comeback Plan,” said Governor Gavin Newsom. “This \$20 million investment is a critical first step to ensure crisis call centers have capacity and are equipped to help all callers so we can meet Californians where they are and expand resources and support during these difficult times.”

Currently, 13 call centers in California, both public and private, take calls that come from the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. Those centers will start receiving calls to 988 when the service starts in July 2022. Until then, anyone experiencing a suicidal crisis or emotional distress may call 1-800-273-8255.

“When people are in a mental health crisis, they need to get quick help from the right place at the right time,” said California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. “While the 911 system is dedicated to public safety emergencies, the launch of the 988 hotline next summer gives people an easy-to-remember number to call for focused support during behavioral health emergencies.”

Added DHCS Director Will Lightbourne: “There’s been a great need for 988 for years, but the need is all the more pressing now, after 18 months of a global pandemic and the personal, social, and economic stresses and anxieties that accompany it. We look forward to working with California’s call centers to ensure they’re dialed in to implement 988.”

The \$20 million investment is a first step toward building a robust statewide call center network to support 988. The Federal Communications Commission adopted rules to establish 988 as the new, nationwide 3-digit phone number for Americans in crisis to connect with suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis counselors.

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“I am incredibly grateful to Governor Newsom and our coalition of sponsors, advocates, and bipartisan legislators who have come together to begin the process of creating the 988 infrastructure that will provide an alternative to police response for those suffering from mental health crisis,” said Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan. “We are taking the first, important step in ensuring that California will set up a system that will save lives and provide critical mental health care to our communities.”

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