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Mental Health Crisis Call Diversion Initiative Pilot

Quick facts about the MHCCDI pilot

In July 2022, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline launched nationwide, and 988 became the 3-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crisis support via call, text, or chat. The 988 Lifeline is an essential resource for people experiencing a mental health crisis, including thoughts of suicide, substance use concerns, and other emotional distress.

People who don't yet know about the 988 Lifeline or the services it provides may continue to contact 911 for thoughts of suicide and other mental health concerns. In most cases, however, trained 988 Lifeline crisis counselors can provide more appropriate support during a mental health crisis.

The Mental Health Crisis Call Diversion Initiative aims to help people in crisis connect quickly and easily to trained 988 Lifeline counselors. A small-scale pilot of this initiative will run from January to December 2024. During the small pilot, 911 dispatchers will divert crisis calls made to 911 to 988 Lifeline crisis counselors, with the goal of improving support for callers.

This pilot involves just 3 of Washington's 65 public safety answering points (PSAPs), also called 911 centers. The Washington State Department of Health has partnered with these PSAPs and Washington's 988 Lifeline crisis centers: Frontier Behavioral Health, Crisis Connections, and Volunteers of America Western Washington.

What will happen during the pilot?

During the MHCCDI pilot, 988 Lifeline crisis counselors will work with 3 of Washington's 65 PSAPs to answer mental health crisis calls made to 911.

Crisis counselors may take calls at the PSAP location or work with the PSAPs to answer calls from a different location. They will provide support with calls that don't involve a life-threatening emergency but the caller wants support for thoughts of suicide, substance use concerns, or other emotional distress.

People who call 911 for a mental health crisis or substance use concern may be connected to a 988

Lifeline crisis counselor if they reach one of the 3 PSAPs participating in the pilot.

988 Lifeline crisis counselors and PSAPs are working to provide a *no wrong door* experience for people dealing with mental health crises and substance use concerns. Because only 3 of Washington's PSAPs are participating in the pilot during limited hours, not everyone who contacts 911 with mental health concerns will reach one of the participating PSAPs.

For this reason, 988 is the preferred number for mental health and substance use concerns that don't involve an immediate risk to someone's life. 911 remains the number to call for an overdose or suicide attempt in progress. However, if you contact the 988 Lifeline when you or someone else is at risk of immediate danger, 988 Lifeline crisis counselors can still get you help. You can contact the 988 Lifeline 24/7, 365 days a year.

Goals of the pilot

This initiative offers the chance for Washington to develop a more efficient and compassionate system that supports people experiencing a mental health crisis.

A 911 response is right for physical emergencies that threaten lives, including car accidents, fires, home invasions, and other acts of violence. However, emergency responders may not have training to provide mental health crisis support. Many people in crisis who receive a 911 response experience further harm.

Connecting people experiencing thoughts of suicide or substance use concerns to counselors trained to assist with these crises can help everyone get the right kind of support when they need it. Diverting mental health crisis calls in this way will also help reduce the strain on emergency services, allowing them to focus on safety emergencies that do need 911 dispatch.

The data gathered from the pilot will help the Department of Health and collaborators:

- Determine how this type of crisis call diversion can help people in Washington people get crisis support when they need it.
- Engage crisis system partners, community members, regional partners, and 911 statewide to develop *no wrong door* efforts and create warm transfer protocols.
- Decide how to expand Washington 988 Lifeline services to include ongoing crisis call diversion.



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