



The Countdown to 988: A New Number for a Well-Established Service

The countdown to 988 shines a spotlight on the national crisis response system in a new way during an unprecedented time. Support for our mental health is critically needed! The planning work to establish the move towards the 988 number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline started pre-pandemic. But the past two years have brought the value of crisis work to the forefront and we are thrilled to see the attention brought to crisis centers across the country as we support and save lives each day.

The most important thing to understand with the implementation of 988 later this summer is that the hotline care provided is not new, just how the number operates. Crisis Services' 24-Hour Hotline program is how our organization was born in 1968, starting with concerned citizens volunteering their time to help others in need. As we have evolved to meet the many needs of our help-seekers who make the call to our hotline, our team and their talents have also evolved.

Did you know on average 80% of all calls to a hotline, nationwide, start and end with the hotline counselor?

That means that amazing Crisis First Responder on the phone not only listens and supports the caller but is able to help provide immediate intervention, safety planning, connection to services and determine next steps with that caller, in that one call.

There will always be high-risk cases that result in pulling in our team members from our Mobile Outreach Program for face-to-face intervention, or that necessitate a call to law enforcement when safety risk outweighs response time. Our goal, however, is for our hotline counselors to intervene to limit further steps along the crisis response system when appropriate to do so.

The skill, talent and compassion of our Hotline Counselors as the gatekeepers to crisis care is extraordinary.

They are not just call-takers or dispatchers; they are skilled Counselors who deliver care through our crisis hotline. Our Counselors are specially trained in crisis intervention, suicide prevention, community systems of care, and response. Our Counselors hold amazing expertise and skills in listening to guide callers to find safety, help and hope.

We believe that Hotline Counselors are the backbone of the behavioral health response system throughout our country. We are proud of the role our experts in our 24-Hour Crisis Counseling Program serve to help so many each day in our community. As we get closer to 988's July launch, please continue to watch for our updates each month on understanding 988 and the pivotal role Crisis Services is serve in this initiative for our WNY community.