

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Minimum Standards for Crisis Contact Centers Applying To Join the 988 Lifeline Network

The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988 Lifeline)** is a network of independently operated crisis contact centers. The network is comprised of 200+ individual crisis contact centers across the country. Crisis contact centers work with their state or territory agencies to set their hours and geographic coverage areas for 988 Lifeline voice calls and chat & texts. There is no application fee or membership fee.

Crisis contacts to the 988 Lifeline, originating from the United States and U.S. Territories, are routed to the nearest available 988 Lifeline member crisis contact center 24 hours a day/seven days a week. Currently, voice calls are routed based on a help-seeker's approximate location, also known as georouting. Chat & text interactions are routed by state or territory based on the help-seeker's location. When a local crisis contact center cannot answer a contact, the 988 Lifeline re-routes the contact into a network of backup crisis contact centers. As there is no local service for Videophone, Videophone calls are routed as a part of a national service, administered directly by Vibrant with subrecipient centers.

The 988 Lifeline is administered by Vibrant Emotional Health (formerly the Mental Health Association of New York City), through a grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Vibrant's role as the administrator of 988 includes building, maintaining, and expanding the 988 Lifeline's technology infrastructure and platforms, providing clinical training for all network crisis center counselors, educational outreach, and evaluating the effectiveness of the 988 Lifeline. Crisis contact centers interested in joining the 988 network are required to fill out an application and submit supporting materials. This document outlines the minimum requirements crisis contact centers must meet.

Becoming a 988 Lifeline Network Center

Crisis contact centers joining the 988 Lifeline Network will participate in a multi-phase process over approximately six to eight months to ensure compliance with 988 Lifeline requirements. The exact timeline can vary depending on factors such as the center's readiness, capacity, and level of engagement throughout the process.

Application Review

Accreditation

All 988 Lifeline Network Centers must demonstrate that they meet organizational and operational standards by obtaining and maintaining an external accreditation in the helpline industry or a closely related field. Centers without certification/licensure may still be able to join the network, assuming there is a demonstrable need for a center in that area, and the center signs the provisional status amendment, by which it agrees to obtain certification within one year of signing the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Network Agreement.

Chat & Text and Videophone Considerations

Within six months of starting as a 988 Lifeline Crisis Chat and Text Center, the center shall obtain, or begin the process to, and maintain specific Online Emotional Support (OES) accreditation from one of the approved accrediting bodies listed below.

Accrediting Organizations:

- American Association of Suicidology (AAS)
- International Council of Helplines (ICH) (formerly known as ContactUSA)
- Council on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities [inclusive of suicide assessment] (CARF)
- Inform USA (formerly the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems)
- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- Utilization Review Accreditation Commission (URAC)
- Joint Commission
- State/county Licensure (if approved by Vibrant Emotional Health)

Insurance

988 Lifeline Network Centers must submit proof of liability insurance that covers directors and officers, as well as staff and volunteers who respond to crisis contacts in the amount of at least \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$3,000,000 aggregate, unless otherwise approved by the Lifeline. Centers will also need to name Vibrant as a certificate holder for their liability insurance.

Coverage Capacity

988 Lifeline Network Centers must be able to consistently cover a specific geographic region, determined in collaboration with the Administrator (Vibrant) and State or Territory Funders, as designated by county, state, or territory. Chat & text coverage is specific to the state or territory, and covered by all centers in a shared queue within the state. Centers do not need to provide 24/7 coverage for 988 Lifeline calls, chats, or texts, although 24/7 coverage is preferred.

Dedicated Staff & Guidelines

988 Lifeline Network Centers are required to have a distinctive crisis contact center operation with the capacity to identify, receive, and respond to their selected modalities from individuals in distress (preferably 24/7). The crisis contact center operation must utilize its own policies, procedures, and training protocols, and have identified staff and an administration responsible for the operation's oversight.

Network Participation

988 Lifeline Network Centers must be willing to engage in a contractual agreement with the Administrator by signing and complying with the Network Agreement.

Quality Assurance

988 Lifeline Network Centers may not practice any of the following in order to manage incoming 988 Lifeline calls:

- Utilize an answering service or cellular telephones;
- Utilize an automated attendant or any other system that requires a caller to press a telephone key in order to be connected with center staff/volunteers;
- Forward incoming 988 Lifeline calls to a third party; or
- Allow a receptionist or any center staff/volunteers who have not been trained to assist help-seekers to answer/triage contacts.

Crisis Contact Center Liaison

988 Lifeline Network Centers must provide at least three organizational contacts to serve as a liaison to the 988 Lifeline.

Contact Routing & Platform Requirements

988 Lifeline Network Centers must pass 988 Lifeline tests of their telephony system to ensure compatibility with 988's routing system. Centers using automatic call distribution queuing technologies must have DTMF functionality.

988 Lifeline Network Centers providing 988 chat and text services must utilize either the Unified Platform administered by Vibrant Emotional Health or establish a State Centralized Platform in partnership with state/territory funders and Vibrant Emotional Health.

Clinical Review

User Tenets

The 988 Lifeline User Tenets address foundational considerations regarding 988 Lifeline data collection, service delivery expectations, referrals to secondary services, contact privacy, data use, and cost expectations, including:

- No requirement to provide name, age, or date of birth, gender, race or ethnicity, citizenship status, or any other identifying information to receive crisis intervention services.
- Individuals have the right to receive emotional support and crisis intervention based on the 988 Lifeline Safety Assessment model. Conversations are centered on support, not as an intake or screening for another service or program.
- Identifying information will not be shared outside the 988 Lifeline, including with funders, without consent.
- Individuals are not charged for 988 Lifeline services except, in the relatively rare circumstances where a 988 Lifeline Center wishes to receive financial reimbursement for their services from Medicaid or other insurance programs to allow them to fund their service sufficiently, and then they must obtain and document consent from the person before attempting to do so and explicitly explain the reason behind any identifying information the center is collecting for this use.

988 Lifeline Suicide Safety Policy

988 Lifeline Network Centers must maintain policies and procedures that address actions to be undertaken by crisis counselors in working with those at risk of suicide, utilizing the least invasive intervention, in alignment with the [988 Lifeline Suicide Safety Policy](#).

Safety Assessment & Planning Tools

If the individual who contacts 988 Lifeline confirms thoughts of suicide, the crisis counselor must conduct a safety assessment. 988 Lifeline Network centers must maintain a safety assessment and safety planning tool consistent with the 988 Lifeline Safety Assessment Model.

Managing Center Capacity

988 Lifeline Network Centers must not implement capacity strategies that compromise clinical standards, delay immediate support, or triage based on risk, or divert, transfer, or multitask in ways that disrupt the integrity of a crisis conversation, while still ensuring that immediate safety is assessed.

Follow-up

988 Lifeline Network Centers must provide follow-up services for those experiencing current suicidal or homicidal ideation (within the past 24 hours). Two follow-up conversations must be offered, with at least three contact attempts made to reach the individual. The first follow-up contact should occur within 24-72 hours of the original contact.

Referrals & Warm Transfers

988 Lifeline Network Centers must maintain an up-to-date list of primary referral sources to which they may direct contacts, based on the needs identified during conversations. This list must be reviewed and updated at least annually. Individuals contacting the 988 Lifeline have the right to either consent to or decline any referrals to secondary services offered during their interaction. Additionally, centers must be capable of providing warm transfers, including those within the 988 Lifeline network, using the appropriate technical procedures. Centers must also be able to accept warm transfers from external organizations.

Violence & Threat Assessment

988 Lifeline Network Centers must directly ask about thoughts of violence and assess current safety when appropriate. Duty to warn considerations must be addressed in accordance with applicable local laws.

Familiar & Abusive Individuals

988 Lifeline Network Centers must maintain policies and procedures for supporting familiar and abusive individuals. These include listening to and acknowledging the individual's concerns, conducting an assessment, and determining an appropriate intervention.

Clinical Training

All current crisis counselors, supervisors, trainers, and administrative staff who respond to 988 Lifeline calls, chats, or texts (and those who supervise, support, or train those taking conversations) are required to complete and pass training that has been identified by 988 Lifeline as required. Centers must ensure all staff meet these training standards prior to independently handling 988 Lifeline conversations.

*For 988 Lifeline Chat & Text and Videophone onboarding, additional modality-specific requirements will be integrated into the onboarding process. These additional requirements serve as an acknowledgement of the nuances of different modalities.

Quality Improvement**Quality Assurance Evaluation**

988 Lifeline Network Centers must be willing to participate in periodic 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Network evaluation activities to promote quality assurance for network operations.

Quality Improvement Activities

988 Lifeline Network Centers must be willing to participate in routine 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Interaction Monitoring, Sentinel Event, and Complaint/Grievance activities to ensure alignment with 988 Lifeline best practices and procedures.

Contact Monitoring

988 Lifeline Network Centers must be willing to participate in routine 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Interaction Monitoring through silent or live monitoring to ensure adherence to 988 Lifeline best practices and procedures, utilizing the standards set forth by the 988 Lifeline Administrator.

Complaints

At times, 988 Lifeline Network Centers may receive complaints during an interaction, after an interaction, or from the 988 Lifeline Administrator. The crisis contact center is required to review complaints by reviewing interaction transcripts, interaction recordings, and documentation to ensure alignment with 988 Lifeline best practices and procedures.

Sentinel Events

At times, 988 Lifeline Network Centers may be notified of a sentinel event that occurred after an interaction with the 988 Lifeline. The crisis contact center is required to review sentinel events through reviewing interaction transcripts, interaction recordings, and documentation to ensure alignment with 988 Lifeline best practices and procedures.

Request for Records and Record Retention & Storage

988 Lifeline Network Centers should adopt essential practices consistent with [HHS Cybersecurity Performance Goals](#). Security Policy templates can be found at this [link](#).