

## **NATIONAL CENTER ON LAW & ELDER RIGHTS**

### **New 988 Dialing Code for Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis**

988—the new universal three-digit dialing code for suicide prevention and mental health crisis—goes into effect nationwide on Saturday, July 16, 2022. SAMSHA (the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) will administer the new “988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline,” which will replace the current toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255). Importantly, the pre-existing 10-digit number will remain active and will connect callers to the new 988 Lifeline.

The 988 Lifeline is designed to become a simple alternative to both 911 and the existing 1-800 number. One of the goals of the new number is to reduce the use of 911 for suicide and mental health crises, because calling 911 in such situations too often results in inadequate or inappropriate intervention by the police, or unnecessary hospitalization or incarceration. Calling 988 instead will direct the caller to representatives specifically trained in the management of suicide risk and other mental health crises.

This new, simplified tool is critical for older adults and those living with a disability because such individuals are at greater risk for mental health crisis and suicide. As SAMSHA pointed out in its Appropriations Report for 988, suicide rates are higher among older adults. Among men, the suicide rate is highest for adults aged 75 and older, while among women, the suicide rate is highest among those aged 45 to 64. Likewise, a recent study found that people with disabilities were significantly more likely than those without disabilities to report suicidal ideation, planning, or attempt. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offers a simpler and more effective way for older adults and those living with disabilities to access help in the event of a mental health crisis.

### **Some helpful tips about using Lifeline:**

- After dialing 988, a caller in need of the Veterans Crisis Line can then press “1” to be routed to that resource, while a caller in need of assistance in Spanish can press “2.” Interpretation through Language Line Solutions is also available in over 250 other languages.
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing can access TTY by dialing 711 then 1-800-273-8255 or using their preferred relay service. Lifeline is in the process of expanding to video phone service.
- Lifeline also offers services through chat and text (in English only).
- For more information, please see the following resources:
- SAMSHA, “988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline ”
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline general information
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, “988 Planning Grants: A funding opportunity by Vibrant Emotional Health and the Lifeline to plan for the implementation of 988 ”
- Health Affairs, “Implementing The 988 Hotline: A Critical Window to Decriminalize Mental Health”