988: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for Mental Health Crises launches new 3-digit number

To reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for mental health crises, it now takes only three digits: 988.

Vibrant Emotional Health, the nonprofit that operates the lifeline on behalf of the US Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), launched the 988 dialing code available to everyone across the United States.

"One of the goals of 988 is to ensure that people get the help that they need when they need it, where they need it. And so, when a person calls 988, they can expect to have a conversation with a trained, compassionate crisis counselor who will talk with them about what they're experiencing. If it's the case that they need further intervention, then likely the crisis counselor will connect with a local mobile crisis team," Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, the administrator of SAMHSA, said earlier this month during a call with reporters.

In 2020, the US Federal Communications Commission's five leaders unanimously voted to finalize 988 as the three-digit number Americans can dial to be connected to the existing lifeline's network of trained counselors. That year, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 became law, amending the Communications Act of 1934 to designate 988 as "the universal telephone number for the purpose of the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system operating through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and through the Veterans Crisis Line, and for other purposes."

Veterans can now dial 988 and press 1 to reach the Veteran Crisis Line.