

# Massachusetts Public Health Awards \$8.3 Million for 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Network

The Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that \$8.3 million in state and federal grant funding will be awarded to five community organizations to support the continuation of services for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Network. The funds will provide infrastructure, operational capacity, and staffing to these organizations so they can offer emotional support, and de-escalation to those who call the 988 Lifeline, seeking someone who will listen, understand, and be present.

“The 988 Lifeline is critical to ensuring that Massachusetts residents can access the care that they need how and when they need it, whether that’s via call or text,” said Governor Maura Healey. “We know how important it is to have these resources in place, and I am thrilled that continued funding means that these organizations will still be able to make 988 available to anyone who needs it.”

“Everyone in Massachusetts, no matter how they identify or what language they speak, should be able to access the resources that 988 provides,” said Lt. Gov Kim Driscoll. “We can prevent an unnecessary loss of life by continuing to provide this life-saving resource, which can mean everything for an individual who just needs help or some form of connection in a time of crisis or need.”

The five crisis call centers are being funded by DPH’s Suicide Prevention Program as part of the Massachusetts 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Network. The 988 Lifeline Network is

available 24/7, 365 days a year, via phone, chat, and text to provide free and confidential support to those experiencing emotional distress or thoughts of suicide. It features dedicated support for veterans, Spanish speakers, LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, videophone and TTY services for the Deaf and hard of hearing, and translation services spanning more than 200 languages.

“We will do whatever we can to prevent the pain and tragedy of suicide,” said Secretary of Health and Human Services Kate Walsh. “It is imperative that we identify people who are suffering and provide comprehensive resources and support to those who find themselves at a loss and unable to cope. One important and simple thing we can do is preserve the funding for this important lifeline that can help deescalate a crisis, connect someone to life-saving services, and offer hope.”

“When someone is struggling with feelings of despair, a caring and compassionate presence on the other end of the 988 Lifeline can be lifesaving,” said Public Health Commissioner Robbie Goldstein, MD, PhD. “Suicide prevention is a critical public health responsibility, and the 988 Lifeline is a resource that offers emotional support at some of the most vulnerable moments in a person’s life. Seeking help for mental health is a sign of strength, and we want all residents of the Commonwealth to know that they are not alone, even in the darkest of times.”

Suicidality, suicide attempts, and suicide deaths among Massachusetts residents are a significant and preventable public health issue. Data from the 2021 Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System reported that there were 596 suicides in Massachusetts, a rate of 8.5 per 100,000, with 22 percent of suicides resulting from firearms. The Commonwealth seeks to reduce the incidence of suicidal ideation, behavior, and deaths in Massachusetts through compassionate crisis services. The 988 Lifeline is a core component of this strategy.

Funding for the five community organizations will begin July 1, 2024, and will continue for two years.

The Suicide Prevention Services crisis call center funding recipients are:

- Family Services of the Merrimack Valley
- Samaritans of Cape Cod and the Islands
- Samaritans, Inc, Boston
- Samaritans of Fall River and New Bedford, Inc. dba Samaritans Southcoast
- United Way of Tri-County, Framingham

This summer, DPH will launch a statewide public awareness campaign to promote the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and inform people throughout Massachusetts that they can access it by calling or texting 988. The campaign will run in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole and will include TV, radio, social and digital media, and out-of-home.