

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Minimum Standards For Crisis Contact Centers Applying To Join The 988 Lifeline Network

Minimum Application Requirements for Call Centers (January 2022)

The **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988 Lifeline)** is a network of independently operated crisis centers. The network is comprised of 200+ individual crisis centers across the country. Crisis contact centers set their hours and geographic coverage areas for Lifeline calls, chats, and texts. There is no application fee or membership fee.

Calls to the 988 Lifeline, originating from the United States and U.S. Territories, are routed to the nearest available 988 Lifeline member crisis center 24 hours a day/seven days a week. Currently, calls are routed based on where the caller's phone number is registered. When a local call center cannot answer a call, the 988 Lifeline re-routes the call into a network of backup call 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). 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 call centers must meet.

Certification/Accreditation

The crisis center must provide proof of certification/accreditation from one of the following:

- American Association of Suicidology (AAS)
- International Council for Helplines (formerly CONTACT USA)
- Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS)
- The Joint Commission
- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)
- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- Utilization Review Accreditation Commission (URAC)
- State/county licensure, as approved by the Administrator

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 a set time frame.

Insurance

The center must have liability insurance that covers directors and officers, as well as staff and volunteers who respond to crisis calls in the amount of at least \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$3,000,000 aggregate, unless otherwise approved by the Lifeline.

Coverage Capacity

The crisis center must be able to consistently cover a specific geographic region, determined in collaboration with the Administrator (Vibrant), as designated by county, area code, zip code, or state. Centers do not need to provide 24/7 coverage for Lifeline calls, chats or texts, although 24/7 coverage is preferred.

Dedicated Staff & Guidelines

The organization is required to have a distinctive call operation with the capacity to identify, receive and respond to calls, chats and texts from individuals in distress (preferably 24/7). The crisis call 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

The crisis center must be willing to engage in a contractual agreement with the Administrator by signing the Network Agreement.

Training

The crisis center must provide for basic training of call center staff (for both new and active staff members) and include specific training on safety assessment procedures, working with third-party callers, and protocols for working with callers at imminent risk for harm to self or others. Guidance on training is provided by the Lifeline during the clinical review phase of the application process.

Quality Assurance

The crisis center may not practice any of the following in order to manage incoming 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 Lifeline calls to a third party; or
- Allow a receptionist or any center staff/volunteers that have not been trained to assist callers to answer/triage calls.

Quality Assurance Evaluation

The crisis center must be willing to participate in periodic 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline network evaluation activities to promote quality assurance for network operations.

Crisis Center Liaison

The center must provide at least one contact to serve as a liaison to the 988 Lifeline.

Referrals

The crisis center must be able to offer referrals to service providers in its designated coverage area.

Suicide Safety Assessment

The crisis center must ask all 988 Lifeline contacts standardized questions about suicide at some point during the course of the call, chat or text. If the individual who had contacted 988 answers affirmatively to any one of the required questions, the center staff must conduct a more thorough safety assessment by using an instrument that incorporates the principles and subcomponents of the 988 Lifeline's Suicide Safety Policy.

Assisting Callers at Imminent Risk of Suicide

The center must adhere to Lifeline's current Policy for Assisting Individuals at Imminent Risk, which provides specific guidelines for assisting the 988 Lifeline callers at immediate risk for harm to self or others.

Telephony Requirements

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