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988 Is Now Online and Sinnissippi Centers is Playing a Part Locally

New crisis number is one step toward a transformed crisis care system

(Dixon, IL)

On July 16, 2022, the new 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number came online, replacing the previous 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) number. 988 is an easier number to remember and to dial more quickly. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration sees 988 as just the first step in several towards a transformed crisis care system in America. But who should call the line and how does it work?

As the name suggests, the suicide prevention lifeline was developed to help those who are thinking of suicide or those who are concerned about someone else. However, there are no specific requirements to call the lifeline. You can call 988 any time you are experiencing a significant mental health issue. You can also call if you are having struggles with substance use, or experiencing any level of crisis from stress, or from any behavioral healthcare concern.

When someone in crisis **calls or texts 988** it connects them to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Calls and texts are free, there is no charge. The Lifeline is a network of over 160 call centers throughout the United States. The Lifeline is staffed 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Trained crisis workers answer the phone at a nearby crisis center. The crisis worker will listen, provide support, and share resources. Calls are kept confidential in all cases except where the caller is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others. Then the crisis center may involve other resources near the caller.

What does that mean for someone in the Sauk Valley area calls or texts 988? That is where Sinnissippi Centers may play a role. Sinnissippi is contracted through the Illinois Division of Mental Health as a Mobile Crisis Response (MCR) provider. As part of that responsibility in the future our crisis team will be dispatched to assist individuals who call 988.

“We won’t be responding to every call,” says Patrick Phelan, Sinnissippi Centers President/CEO. “We will only respond to those that need more support than a phone call. Estimates range that will be anywhere from 10% to 20% of calls,” adds Phelan.

“In addition, the Community Emergency Services and Supports Act (CESSA) requires that 911 call centers coordinate with this mental health dispatch to triage calls that are more appropriate for a mental health response than law enforcement,” says Phelan.

A state-wide CESSA committee has been operational for some time now, but they are also now going to hold regional CESSA committees in each of the state’s Emergency Management Service regions. “I agreed to co-chair our regional committee with the Regional EMS Medical Director,” says Phelan.

“We believe that 988 and this response from MCR providers is a great new resource for individuals in our communities. However, there are a lot of details to still be worked out,” adds Phelan.

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