



## **LDH launches new 988 helpline campaign to broaden statewide awareness, utilization**

*The campaign launch is timed to recognize National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month*

Baton Rouge, La. (September 13, 2023) — The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) is launching a new marketing campaign aimed at raising awareness, destigmatizing the need for mental health treatment and services, and increasing [Louisiana 988](#) usage statewide. A key goal of the campaign is reaching vulnerable populations about the services available through 988, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ people and veterans.

A series of historic storms, the COVID-19 pandemic and other traumatic events have taken a major toll on the mental health and emotional well-being of Louisianans of all ages in recent years. Because of these challenges, the message from LDH has been clear: It's OK to not be OK, and Louisiana 988 has counselors ready to assist anyone seeking help.

"LDH recognizes that stigma and even fear may deter individuals from seeking support from 988. This campaign is designed to address those barriers and encourage Louisiana residents to reach out whether they are in a mental health crisis or just having a bad day," said LDH Secretary Stephen Russo. "Our hope for this new marketing initiative is to reach a wider audience, including vulnerable communities, so that all Louisianans know how to utilize 988 and what to expect. All of us need help sometimes, and LDH is committed to eliminating the stigma around mental health and substance use. The 988 helpline ensures everyone has easy and confidential access to high-quality emotional support, regardless of why the support is needed."

One in five adults in the U.S. lives with a mental health condition. Death by suicide is the 14th leading cause of death in the state, and it is the third leading cause of death for Louisianans ages 10-34. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 689 Louisianans died by suicide in 2021.

The campaign is informed by field research that identified three primary barriers to individuals contacting 988:

- Not knowing what to expect when calling 988;
- Fear of being let down when someone is feeling most vulnerable; and

- Fear of overstepping personal boundaries or making things worse for someone else when calling for help.

Key components of the campaign include an aggressive paid media strategy starting with social media advertising, a new website — [Louisiana988.org](https://Louisiana988.org) — for people to learn more, and a platform for community partners, advocates and local influencers to generate their own 988 promotional materials.

To help kick off the new marketing campaign, and in recognition of National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, the Governor’s Mansion will light up in purple on the evening of Wednesday, September 13.

### ***About 988 in Louisiana***

In July 2023, Louisiana, along with other U.S. states transitioned to using the 988 dialing code to strengthen and expand the existing Lifeline. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) sees 988 as a first step toward a transformed crisis care system in America, and LDH believes 988 to be an important resource for residents to get immediate support when they need it.

According to national studies, the helpline works — individuals who contact 988 are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less overwhelmed and more hopeful after speaking to a counselor. Almost 98% of people who call, chat or text the 988 helpline get the support they need and do not require emergency services in that moment, according to SAMHSA.

The LDH Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) has contracted with two certified call centers in Louisiana to answer 988 calls:

- The call center in New Orleans answers calls for area codes 504, 225 and 985.
- The call center in Bossier City answers calls from area codes 318 and 337.

The two call centers provide backup to each other to help ensure calls, chats and texts are answered by an in-state 988 center with access to local resources. Since launch, call volume for 988 has increased by 11%, and the in-state answer rate rose from 64% in June 2022 to 87% over the last year. The helpline offers specialized support to veterans and their families, Spanish speakers, LGBTQ+ youth, and deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Both centers are certified by Vibrant Emotional Health, the federal 988 administrator. They must meet Vibrant’s national standards in addition to being accredited by a national accrediting agency.

In May, LDH launched a [dashboard](#) that provides key monthly metrics from Louisiana’s two 988 centers. Calls to 988 are confidential and any self-reported data is aggregated before sharing with the public.

988 was established nationally in 2022 to improve access to support services in a way that meets our country's growing suicide and mental health-related care needs. 988 replaces the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800 number with an easy-to-remember phone number, providing access to the helpline network and referrals to local resources.

### **About the Louisiana Department of Health**

The Louisiana Department of Health strives to protect and promote health statewide and to ensure access to medical, preventive and rehabilitative services for all state residents. The Louisiana Department of Health includes the Office of Public Health, Office of Aging & Adult Services, Office of Behavioral Health, Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, Office of Women's Health and Community Health, and Healthy Louisiana (Medicaid). To learn more, visit [www.ldh.la.gov](http://www.ldh.la.gov) or follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or our [blog](#).

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