



## Fact Sheet: Spotlight on Georgia's Mental Health and Substance Use Crisis Care

Federal and local officials meet to discuss 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline one-year milestones, future of crisis care

**988**  
SUICIDE  
& CRISIS  
LIFELINE

**Note to editors/reporters:** B-roll and soundbites of Georgia's crisis care system are also available for download at the [988 Newsroom page](#).



### Atlanta

Mental health and substance use experts from the federal, state and local levels held a town hall on Friday at Georgia State University in Atlanta to discuss the milestones of the first year of the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) and the future of crisis care for mental health and substance use in Georgia and across the U.S. Topics they discussed included:

- **988 Lifeline: The First Year:** Almost one year ago, on July 16, 2022, the U.S. transitioned to 988 as the easy-to-remember number to reach trained crisis counselors for help with suicide, mental health and substance use–related crises.
- **The Future Vision:** The longer-term vision for mental health and substance use crisis care is to build a robust response system across the country that links 988 Lifeline users to community-based providers who can deliver a full range of crisis care services, if needed.

### Speakers

- Kevin Tanner, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)
- Monica Johnson, Director of the 988 and Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the federal agency that oversees the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Prior to this role, Johnson served as Interim Commissioner for DBHDD
- Kimberly Williams, President and CEO of Vibrant Emotional Health, the 988 Lifeline national network administrator
- Kyle Inhofe, Deputy Executive Director, the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL)
- Kristine Cuellar, Deputy Director, DBHDD's Georgia Crisis & Action Line (GCAL), part of the 988 Lifeline network of call centers

### Spotlight on Georgia – Why Georgia?

- Georgia exemplifies many of the best practices outlined in SAMHSA's 2020 [National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care](#) within a “no wrong-door integrated crisis system” that provides:
  - 24/7 crisis intervention services via phone, text, and chat
  - Mobile crisis teams available for dispatch in a timely manner to someone in crisis at their home, work or other location
  - Crisis receiving and stabilization locations that provide short-term care and crisis stabilization services and referrals for follow-up care
- Georgia is a national leader when it comes to mobile crisis, which is provided 24/7/365 throughout the state by DBHDD. The teams serve children, youth and adults experiencing crisis related to mental health, substance use, intellectual/developmental disability or autism. A clinician and paraprofessional or certified peer specialist provide assessment, crisis intervention and determination of the most appropriate level of care.
- **Note to reporters/editors:** B-roll package provides video of urban and rural mobile crisis.

- Selina Popovich-Evans, Director, Region 4 Mobile Crisis Response Team, Benchmark Human Services
- Lori Holbrook, Chief Clinical Officer, Avita Community Partners
- Jolyn Matheson, Peer Specialist, Avita Community Partners
- Elvin Gittens, Certified Peer Specialist, Behavioral Health Link mobile crisis team
- 988 Lifeline Town Hall Moderator: Donna Lowry, Georgia Public Broadcasting

## Georgia Mental Health Stats and Relevant Issues

- According to SAMHSA's 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) [State Estimates of Substance Use and Mental Disorders](#): **8.47%** of Georgia residents 18 or older had a **major depressive episode** in the past year, **4.7%** of Georgia residents 18 or older had **serious thoughts of suicide** and **1.45%** of Georgia residents 18 or older **made any suicide plans** in the past year.
- The Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey 2020–2022 found that **29.4%** of adults in Georgia reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. **28.3%** were unable to access counseling or therapy.
- Rural South Georgians reached out for mental health and substance use crisis support at [higher rates than their urban counterparts](#). Faced with unfavorable weather and climate change, unfriendly economic conditions and labor shortages, **farmers of all types** often cope with the pressures of their profession in unhealthy ways, including [considering suicide](#).

## More About the 988 Lifeline

- Since launching in July 2022, the 988 Lifeline has had **about 3.6 million contacts through calls, chats, and texts**—an average of **about 360,000 contacts per month**. [Additional data](#).
- Federal investment in the 988 Lifeline has totaled **nearly \$1 billion** in [recent years](#), not including mental health block grants and other federal money that supports behavioral healthcare systems. Of that \$1 billion set-aside for 988, about **\$3.9 million** has been awarded to Georgia to build local capacity. SAMHSA recently announced [more than \\$200 million in new funding opportunities for the 988 Lifeline](#).
- Specialized services are also available:
  - **Military veterans, service members** and their families can reach the Veterans Crisis Line by pressing option 1.
  - Callers who want to **talk to someone in Spanish** can do so with option 2. Spanish text and chat is expected to be available this summer.
  - And currently, a pilot program offers specialized call, text and chat supports for **LGBTQI+ youth** and people under the age of 25, by selecting option 3.
- Anyone who calls, texts, or chats 988 is not required to say who they are or where they are to receive services from the 988 Lifeline.
- [In 2021](#), suicide was the second-leading cause of death for young people ages 10–14 and the fifth in people ages 35–54. Also in 2021, almost 107,000 [drug overdose deaths](#) occurred.

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### *Additional notes for reporters/editors*

- The [988 Lifeline Newsroom](#) provides B-roll and other resources.
- Also see [988 Lifeline FAQs](#).
- Reporters and editors are encouraged to include the following language when reporting about suicide: *If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.*