



# 988 Messaging Framework

Project Overview



In July 2022, the nation will transition to an easy-to-remember three-digit suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline—[988](#)—that will route all callers to the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (currently reached via 800-273-8255). To help equip the field with guidance around how to develop messaging, the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance)—in its role as the nation’s public-private partnership working to change the conversation about suicide, suicide prevention, and mental health—worked in partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health (which operates the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) to develop a 988 Messaging Framework. The [988 Messaging Framework](#) is meant to serve as general guidance for the field to support partners’ communications efforts. This is just one small piece of a much larger coordinated and aligned messaging strategy being developed by SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health—as national leads for 988.

To inform this important and collaborative work, the Action Alliance conducted the following:

## 1. ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

An initial step in development of the 988 Messaging Framework was to conduct an environmental scan of online news articles and messaging-related resources/events about 988 between the period of August 2019 through May 2021. An updated environmental scan was also conducted to account for the period of August 2019 through November 2021. Some key findings from this updated environmental scan included:

- **More than 170 news articles** from major national dailies and broadcasts, state and community papers, trade publications, and blogs about 988 that showed:
  - Lack of consistent naming for 988 (i.e., ‘Suicide Hotline,’ ‘Crisis Hotline,’ ‘Mental Health Crisis Line’).
  - Lack of specific coverage around high-risk communities
  - Increase in coverage around what’s needed to ensure 988 is effective, in terms of state-level infrastructure needs



- **More than 35 public messaging resources and events** about 988 that showed:
  - Increase in 988-related resources and events focused on specific state-level updates and challenges
  - Lack of information or resources from high-risk or minority-focused organizations or agencies
  - Limited resources walking through what will happen when someone calls 988
  - Majority of resources highlighting the benefits of having a mental health response to a mental health crisis (vs. 911 or police response)

## 2. 988 MESSAGING SURVEY

To better understand the current and anticipated needs of the field when it comes to messaging about 988, the Action Alliance developed and distributed an 18-question, high-level survey to hundreds of people working within the fields of mental health, suicide/suicide prevention, and substance use disorders. **The survey received nearly 300 responses** representing individuals with diverse perspectives, including health care/treatment facilities, state agencies, crisis centers, suicide prevention and/or mental health organizations, private sector corporates, federal agencies, tribal communities, and more. Of note, nearly 70 percent of respondents reported having some form of lived experience—either as a suicide loss survivor, suicide attempt survivor, someone living with suicidal ideation, someone living with a mental illness or someone living with a substance use disorder.



Based on survey feedback, the top three anticipated messaging barriers when it comes to 988 are:

1. Lack of understanding about what will happen when someone calls 988 (69%)
2. Lack of understanding the difference of when to call 988 vs. 911 (66%)
3. Lack of understanding that 988 is part of a broader crisis system infrastructure that needs to be in place for 988 to be effective (65.6%)

The top-three most important messages about 988 include:

1. What happens when someone calls 988 (99%)
2. When 988 should be called (vs. calls to 911, 211, or other lines) (97%)
3. Difference between 988 and 911

Other top findings from the 988 messaging survey include:

- There is an immediate need for information and guidance from national leaders around messaging for 988
- There is a need to develop messages that are culturally competent and build trust
- Any messaging must speak to the funding needed to ensure 988 is effective
- Messaging guidance about 988 needs to recognize the nuance and complexities related to how it will work in each state

### 3. 988 MESSAGING TASK FORCE AND PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

The Action Alliance brought together diverse public and private sector partners to serve on a [988 Messaging Task Force](#), which was jointly led by SAMHSA (public sector) and Vibrant Emotional Health (private sector). This Task Force was charged with guiding the development of the [988 Messaging Framework](#). In addition to the Task Force, the Action Alliance also partnered with several key organizations to serve as reviewers, providing additional perspectives to help inform the 988 Messaging Framework.

