

What's New in 2022 in Illinois' Mental Health Crisis System

Illinois is launching several new programs and initiatives for mental health emergency response. What are these programs, and how do they intersect?

988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE

Starting July 16, 2022, people in Illinois and nationwide will be able to dial 9-8-8 for someone to talk to if they're having a mental health emergency. The phone number will be answered by call centers in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) network, which has existed since 2005 at 1-800-273-TALK.

WHAT WILL CHANGE WHEN 988 LAUNCHES?

In Illinois, **not much will immediately change** after the July launch of 988. Residents will simply have an easy, 3-digit code to call, chat or text the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). The service will also expand who it helps: **988 will be for all kinds of mental health crises**, not just suicide.

WHAT WILL 988 BE ABLE TO DO?

988's primary role will be to provide emotional support during a crisis. Unlike 911, **it's not primarily a dispatch service**. Experts predict that more than 80% of 988 calls will require phone support only.

When 988 launches in Illinois, it **won't have a direct connection to local 911 dispatch centers**, and **won't be able to centrally deploy first responders or mobile crisis teams** across the state. If a crisis call needs an in-person response, each call center will have separately coordinate this with resources near the caller. Advocates have a vision of a future where Illinois' 988 service would be much more technically sophisticated, but those developments will take years of work and advocacy.

WHAT DO ILLINOIS ADVOCATES THINK?

Launching 988 is an important step for Illinois, but we have much more work ahead. Illinois' NSPL call centers have faced funding and capacity challenges for years. **In 2021, Illinois had the lowest in-state answer rate in the nation for NSPL calls**, which can lead to long wait times and mean that callers don't always speak to someone who knows their local resources.

In order for 988 to be a high-quality resource for Illinoisians, we must **build 988 as the front door to a comprehensive mental health crisis system**, so people have somewhere to call, someone to respond, and somewhere to go if needed. We also must **build a sustainable funding structure for 988**.

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590 MOBILE CRISIS TEAMS

Mobile crisis teams provide 24/7/365 timely in-person response to people in a mental health crisis. They can do assessments and help stabilize a person at their home or wherever they are located. They can also connect people to treatment and community resources.

Illinois started the 590 grant program in late 2021 to fund new mobile crisis team programs at 68 organizations across the state. These programs dispatch “590 teams,” which should include both a mental health clinician and a peer “engagement specialist.”

Q: What kinds of crises can a 590 team handle?

A: Currently, each 590-funded program operates by their own guidelines about what kinds of crises they will respond to versus what they'll refer to 911 or a community provider.

Q: Will 590 teams serve everyone and anyone?

A: 590 teams must serve people with all insurance statuses, including Medicaid, private insurance and no insurance. Some 590 teams have age restrictions on who they will serve.

Q: How does someone access or deploy a 590 team in their area?

A: Currently, each 590-funded program has their own dispatch number. Someday, Illinoisians may be able to call 988 to centrally access 590 teams, but that won't be built out when 988 launches.

Q: How are 590 teams different than other mental health mobile crisis teams?

A: Their services aren't categorically different than other mobile crisis teams. They do receive some training and oversight from the State that other mobile crisis teams do not. 590 teams may have a special coordination relationship with 911 after the implementation of CESSA.

CESSA: Community Emergency Services And Support Act

CESSA is a 2021 law to help organize the way mental health crisis services work in Illinois.

Q: What does the law require?

A: Each of Illinois' 11 emergency services regions must create rules for responding to mental health crises. The rules will dictate what kinds of crises will receive a law enforcement or EMT response versus a response by a mental health professional.

Q: How will the work be done?

A: Illinois must convene a Statewide Advisory Committee and 11 Regional Committees by 2023. Committees include EMS leadership, law enforcement, 911, unions, mental health providers, and people with lived experience. These committees will make the rules for each region.

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