

988 Fee FAQs

FOR STATE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES



What is the purpose of 988?

988 is the easy-to-remember three-digit phone number that connects people to the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline \(988 Lifeline\)](#). It is a free and confidential service for anyone who is experiencing thoughts of suicide, a mental health or substance use-related crisis, or any kind of emotional distress. When someone calls, texts, or chats with 988 they are connected to trained crisis counselors that are available 24/7. 988 is available in English and Spanish (with access to translation services for 240+ other languages), American Sign Language (ASL) video phone, and accessible through relay services for TTY users.

Why is 988 important?

The 988 Lifeline provides immediate access to suicide prevention and crisis services, which has been found to assist [98% of callers with de-escalation](#) which reduces the unnecessary use of law enforcement in crisis responses and is cost-effective in diverting from 911, emergency medical services, and emergency departments. According to [SAMHSA's 988 FAQs](#), numerous studies have shown that most 988 Lifeline callers are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to a 988 Lifeline crisis counselor.

What is a 988 telecommunications fee?

The 988 Lifeline has grown faster than most imagined. One of the biggest challenges facing the states is how to continue to fund this growth especially when current federal, state and private funding are not guaranteed for the future. Congress, however, made a new viable and permanent funding option available to the states through legislation, the [National Suicide Hotline Designation Act](#), which permits telecommunication fees on state residents' monthly phone bills, similar to a 911 fee.

As of late 2024, ten states (California, Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington) levy per line/per month fees varying from \$.08 to \$.60. Variations on types of fees are described below:

- **Fixed Fees** – The majority of states have established a fixed fee, i.e., it remains the amount established in statute indefinitely or until it sunsets.
- **Capped Fees** – Fees that may change but only increase to a level that may never be exceeded, in other words, a “cap.”
- **Formula-based Fees** – States also have the option of establishing a formula-based fee to calculate the fees based on provider type and access line.
- **Sunset Fees** – Fixed, capped or formula-based fees that have a date specified in statute on which they will end.

How are states providing oversight of the 988 fee?

Some states created 988 Trust Funds established as special revenue accounts. They are used to account for assets held by the government in a trustee capacity and overseen by the State Treasurer. Other states have opted to create various Oversight Boards for the purpose of reviewing the 988 fee usage for compliance, procedures, accountability, etc. In addition, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) compiles and submits the [Annual 988 Fee Accountability Report](#) to Congress on states' collection, distribution, and spending of 988 fees specified in the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020.

LEARN MORE



Visit NAMI's [Reimagine.Crisis.org/Map](https://www.reimagine.crisis.org/map) for the status of states' 988 telecoms fee efforts.



Did You Know?

According to a recent [NAMI-Ipsos poll](#), "after receiving messaging about existing 911 monthly phone bill fees, Americans are willing to pay a slightly higher monthly fee to fund 988 Lifeline operations."

Why is having a 988 telecommunications fee needed?

Establishing a 988 fee creates sustainable funding, unlike that of appropriations, private donations and grants. A fee creates a consistent revenue stream for 988 that is available year after year without any additional legislative action needed. Additionally, it can help reduce the pressure on state general funds and allow those funds to be utilized for other programs and services. A 988 fee eliminates the concern of future budget cuts which is vital for a life-saving service such as 988.

What strategies were successful in passing a 988 fee?

Each of the states that have passed a 988 fee had both unique and similar circumstances as other states looking to sustainably fund 988. Some strategies that were helpful included:

- Communicate that many state residents have been paying a similar small monthly fee on wireline and wireless services for 911 since 1997. Delaware found success in using an equitable approach, so residents are charged the same fee amounts for both 988 and 911.
- Provide data analytics to justify the monthly fee amount needed to supplement other 988 funding mechanisms used to support 988 operations. For example, create a workgroup to conduct an analysis to determine how a fee structure could be designed to establish a monthly 988 fee charge and its utilization.
- Highlight that residents' cost per year is minimal. One state's \$0.25 monthly fee equates to \$3 per year.
- Multiple states have shared that having a "988 champion" to help educate stakeholders about the importance and impact of 988 was crucial in obtaining support of a 988 fee. Connect with mental health and suicide prevention organizations, such as state NAMI organizations, to support advocacy and educational efforts for a 988 fee. Additionally, find legislative champions with experience in both behavioral health policy and the state budget process.
- Define what 988 systems and related crisis services the 988 fee revenue and any surplus will be used for and how it will be dispersed. Some states outlined that the 988 fee revenue can only be used for 988 operations, such as personnel and technology, whereas other states allowed the 988 fee revenue to be used beyond the 988 contact centers. For example, California prioritized that the 988 revenues must first be used for 988 centers, then mobile crisis services for 988 help seekers needing a community response.
- Include language that state residents participating in the [FCC's federal Lifeline Program for Low-Income Consumers](#) will not be subject to paying the 988 fee to avoid any additional costs for lower-income residents, like Maryland.