



Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

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July 31, 2024

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for your letter to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, and the Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman, Jessica Rosenworcel, in which you share concerns regarding the current routing structure for 988 services and the need for improved local coordination to address immediate crisis needs and facilitate ongoing connection and support. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) was asked to respond on Secretary Becerra's behalf.

SAMHSA agrees that the full potential of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline can only be realized once individuals in crisis can receive supportive resources and, when necessary, emergency services from within the state or territory from where they are calling. While callers today receive a localized response based on their phone's area code, many people rely on wireless phones with area codes that do not match their physical locations. As such, SAMHSA, in collaboration with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Network Administrator, and major wireless carriers, has made significant progress towards implementing georouting for 988 calls, so 988 calls made by wireless phones are directed to local crisis contact centers within the caller's state or territory, rather than by their phone's area code.

FCC's recent announcement about their intention to initiate a formal rule-making process marks a major step forward in our collective efforts to ensure individuals in crisis have timely access to local support services. The announcement builds on collaborative efforts across federal agencies and partners to improve 988's ability to provide a localized response. The FCC and SAMHSA held a geolocation forum in May 2022 on the opportunities and challenges related to geolocation for the 988 Lifeline. During this forum, SAMHSA, the 988 Network Administrator, and the FCC identified georouting as a promising solution to test that would not require the caller's precise location information.


Last summer, SAMHSA, the 988 Network Administrator, and a wireless carrier completed initial successful testing of georouting, which effectively routed calls to the nearest call center. It's important to note that this test was conducted solely within a testing environment and did not involve real-time/active 988 calls. Additionally, the precise locations of the callers were not transmitted to 988 as part of this solution. In September 2023, the FCC extended invitations to additional carriers to join SAMHSA and the 988 Administrator in testing georouting solutions, further enhancing the scope and reach of this effort.

Since then, SAMHSA, the 988 Network Administrator, the FCC, and major U.S. carriers have collaborated in a voluntary planning and design phase and recently progressed to building and

testing solutions and making network upgrades to be able to receive generalized location information for routing purposes. In parallel, planning for anticipated operational, training and procedural updates has also begun and will require active engagement with partners including states, territories, tribes and crisis centers. The progress made thus far underscores our collective commitment to improving 988's response so that individuals can access timely support and care wherever they are.

Once again, thank you for your support, advocacy, and engagement in this critical initiative.

Sincerely,



Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health
And Substance Use

cc: Jessica Rosenworcel
Chairwoman, Federal Communications Commission