



*There is Hope.*



## What is 9-8-8?

9-8-8 is emerging as the 9-1-1 of behavioral health, and like the rollout of 9-1-1 will take many years to reach full capacity. It is one of the largest federally mandated crisis response transformations in decades designed to meet the rising needs of mental health, substance abuse disorders and suicide interventions.

Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities is leading the planning process and implementation of 9-8-8 in Georgia.

Moving to a 3-digit dialing code is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to strengthen and expand the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Establishing 9-8-8 for suicide prevention and behavioral health crises will make it easier for Georgians in crisis to access the help they need and decrease the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health.



## Georgia's Rollout

The 9-8-8 dialing code will be available for call, text or chat on July 16, 2022. Callers will be connected to a trained staff member who can help address immediate needs and connect the callers to care resources., 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

We know that eventually 9-8-8 will become as commonly used as 9-1-1, providing appropriate mental health crisis responses for all Georgians. While 9-1-1 began in the 1960's, it took thirty years to have 93% of the U.S. population covered by 9-1-1 and it continues to evolve. We will take lessons learned from 9-1-1 implementation: build capacity and staffing over time, with a focus on technology and infrastructure.

We expect call volumes to be higher than ever before and we are working hard to prepare to meet this demand. We are working to build capacity to serve this increased demand at a time of workforce shortages and other unprecedented challenges.

DBHDD's planning committee has been meeting since April of 2021 to prepare for the July 16, 2022, rollout. The committee is made up of healthcare professionals and providers, law enforcement, 9-1-1 officials, policy makers, individuals with lived experience and behavioral health advocates.



## Funding

Georgia's General Assembly has already approved some funding for 9-8-8 support. However, just like 9-1-1, more funding is needed to help build out a system that ensures a robust mental health response. The federal legislation not only put 9-8-8 into law, but it also allows states to implement monthly fees on telecommunications bills. While other states have rushed to pass fees, Georgia will continue to assess actual call volume to determine how best to approach funding this long-term transformation of Georgia's crisis infrastructure.



## 9-8-8 Matters

The gradual rollout of 9-8-8 can eventually become a critical tool to address our state's mental health crisis needs. Georgia ranks 31st in suicide deaths in the United States. In Georgia, from 2019-2020, there was a slight decline in suicides in urban areas, but an 8.3% rise in rural suicides. During the COVID-19 pandemic, from April 2020 to April 2021, Georgia has seen a 36% increase in overdose deaths.

Current projections suggest that the implementation of 9-8-8 will increase call center volumes by as much as 100% by the end of the first year.

Georgians now have access to GCAL (1-800-715-4225) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year to help anyone in crisis. This will not change with the implementation of 9-8-8.



## GCAL Professionals Provide:

- + Crisis Intervention Services over the phone
- + The ability to dispatch mobile crisis teams
- + Assistance to individuals in finding an open crisis or detox bed across Georgia
- + A way to link individuals with urgent appointment services



## 9-8-8 vs. 9-1-1

9-8-8 was established to improve access to mental health crisis services. 9-8-8 will provide easier access, distinct from 9-1-1, which focuses on dispatching Emergency Medical Services, fire and police as needed.



## Re-imagining Crisis Response with 9-8-8

The time is now for policymakers, healthcare providers, law enforcement and behavioral health advocates to re-imagine how Georgia responds to people in mental health, substance use, and suicide crisis.

- + 9-8-8 will help to connect a person in a mental health crisis to a trained professional responder, who can address their immediate needs and help connect them to ongoing care.
- + 9-8-8 will help to reduce healthcare spending with more cost-effective early intervention.
- + 9-8-8 will reduce the use of law enforcement, public health and other safety resources.



**988** SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE