



POLICY ISSUE BRIEF

Mental Health Crisis Response

New York is fortunate to have one of the lowest suicide rates of any state in the nation. But, as a 2018 Office of Mental Health report rightfully stated – 1,700 deaths per year due to suicide is too many. And, although New York’s suicide rate is comparatively low, the number of suicides has risen 40% since 2000. Enhancing the State’s mental health crisis response capability is critically important for reducing suicide and mental health related self-injury.

The National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018 set the stage for the three-digit hotline number. Pursuant to the Act, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recommended a 3-digital dialing code to be used for a national suicide prevention and a mental health crisis hotline system. Currently, individuals in crisis are able to call 1-800-273-8255 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (run through Vibrant Emotional Health – MHANYS NYC affiliate). Soon, it will be much easier to remember how to reach the Lifeline as the number will be changing to "988" nationwide by July 2022. 988 call centers are integral to a community’s capacity to respond to behavioral health emergencies in a coordinated manner working in concert with public safety resources and crisis management resources including Crisis Stabilization Centers and Mobile Crisis. Governor Hochul has included \$35 million in year one, followed by \$60 million in year two for the implementation of 988.

Crisis Stabilization Centers are a resource for those individuals with a known or suspected mental health condition or substance use disorder to provide observation, evaluation, care, and treatment in a safe and comfortable environment, twenty-four (24) hours per day, seven (7) days per week.

Mobile Crisis provides integrated, short-term crisis response, stabilization and intervention for adults and children experiencing a mental health or chemical dependency crisis. Mobile Crisis Teams provide brief crisis intervention, support, and stabilization to try and manage the crisis in the community.

While a mental health crisis is not an ideal circumstance for accessing care, a coordinated system of responding to crisis that includes a 988 crisis number supported by crisis stabilization centers and mobile crisis capability will result in more people getting help and follow up services and supports.

Recommendation

MHANYS Recommends the following:

1. Long term funding for 988 to insure viability through an excise tax on phones similar to funding for 911;
2. Strong linkages between 988, Crisis Stabilization Centers and Mobile Crisis Teams to insure that individuals don’t have to be engaged with law enforcement or end up in emergency rooms when in crisis. Also, insure that when a person is out of Stabilization Centers that they have a plan of care that includes links to community services; and
3. Funding for a public awareness campaign for 988.