

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes people in mental health crisis deserve a mental health response. NAMI supports public policies and laws that ensure help seekers contacting the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline are immediately connected to the nearest crisis call center, referred to as georouting, while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

Why We Care:

Note: This policy position is in regard to knowing a person's general location to route a call to the nearest call center. This position does not pertain to "geolocation," or knowing a person's precise location.

Mental health and suicidal crises can be devastating for individuals, families, and communities. The [988](#) Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a life-saving resource for any person – or their loved one – to access support during a period of mental health crisis or emotional distress. Building community-level crisis continuums of care are essential to helping individuals get well and stay well, as outlined in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care](#). When someone experiences a mental health crisis and doesn't receive the care they need, they can end up in emergency rooms, on the streets or involved in the criminal justice system – or worse, they could lose their life. [Early evidence](#) suggests that crisis lines can reduce caller distress, and refer people to resources and community-based services.

The 988 Lifeline operates through a growing network of crisis centers around the country and serves millions of people in crisis annually via call, text, and chat. However, contacts to the 988 Lifeline are currently routed based on the help seeker's area code. Because cell phone calls to the 988 Lifeline may not match the area code where a person lives or where they travel to, some people will be routed to a call center that is not close to their physical location. For example, if someone with a 703 (Virginia) area code calls the 988 Lifeline, the help seeker will be routed to a Virginia crisis center, regardless of where the caller is located during that crisis. This structure presents obstacles to addressing the needs of help seekers in crisis and limits the 988 Lifeline's ability to support all help seekers in crisis access local resources. While 988 crisis counselors can provide support regardless of a help seeker's location, they may not be able to connect people in crisis to follow-up care within their local community.

In an ideal crisis system, call centers should be able to connect help seekers to local services and supports, such as dispatching mobile crisis teams when needed, scheduling appointments with local community mental health providers,

providing referrals to local resources like housing or food assistance, and conducting follow-up calls. To most effectively serve help seekers in crisis, all contacts should be connected to crisis centers based on the person's general location and irrespective of the person's phone area code – a process known as "georouting."

NAMI supports public policies and laws that ensure help seekers contacting the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline are immediately connected to the nearest crisis call center, referred to as georouting, while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

According to the [Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC), "Georouting refers to technical solutions for directing calls based on a geographic location for the origin of the call without transmitting information about the caller's precise location." Implementing a georouting solution that connects calls based on general geographic location would improve 988 services while avoiding disclosing a caller's precise location. Notably, this is different technology than geolocation, which identifies a caller's precise location for the purposes of dispatching life-saving services.

NAMI believes that the 988 Lifeline should be an entry point for every person to receive support for immediate crises and also connect people in need to the care, support and resources they need to get well, and stay well throughout and after a crisis. NAMI supports implementation of georouting solutions for all calls, texts and chats to connect every help seeker to all available resources.

To learn more about NAMI's work on this issue, visit www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities