

Vibrant Emotional Health
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NATIVE AND STRONG LIFELINE LAUNCHES AS PART OF 988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE NETWORK

First Crisis Line of Its Kind Focuses on American Indian and Alaska Native Communities in Washington State

NEW YORK, NY (November 18, 2022) – Vibrant Emotional Health (Vibrant), the nonprofit administrator of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988 Lifeline), is pleased to announce Washington state’s Native and Strong Lifeline, as part of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, the first program of its kind in the nation dedicated to serving American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Funded by the Washington State Department of Health and operated by Volunteers of America Western Washington (VOA), one of the three 988 Lifeline crisis centers serving the state, the Native and Strong Lifeline is available for Washington state’s American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Calls are answered by Native crisis counselors who are tribal members and descendants closely tied to their communities. Native and Strong Lifeline counselors are trained in crisis intervention and support, with particular emphasis on cultural and traditional practices related to healing.

“We are tremendously excited for the launch of the Native and Strong Lifeline,” shared Kimberly Williams, President & CEO of Vibrant Emotional Health, the nonprofit that administers the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. “We commend the Washington State Department of Health for recognizing these challenges and funding this program, providing culturally appropriate care in times of crisis. We hope other states will be inspired by this model and work to replicate it.”

“It is exciting to be launching the Native and Strong option for American Indian and Alaska Native citizens in Washington state. The opportunity has been needed to meet the crisis needs of our people for many, many years,” said Marilyn M. Scott, Chairman of the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe. “It will be nice for our people to be served by individuals who understand what our trauma experiences are and assist with getting the help that they need.”

Forced relocation, land dispossession, assimilation, and other traumas inflicted on indigenous peoples are still strongly felt in Native communities today.

“American Indians suffer from higher rates of suicide and mental health crises stemming from intergenerational trauma caused by the aggressive assimilation efforts of the federal government and religious institutions,” stated Leonard Forsman, Chairman of the Suquamish Tribe.

Among Washington state residents in 2020, non-Hispanic American Indians and Alaska Native people had a 34 percent higher suicide rate than the general population. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the barriers to care that Native communities face. As a result, American Indians experienced higher suicide and overdose attempt rates during the pandemic – at least two times higher than non-American Indians.

“Native people are often overlooked in this country. I feel proud and humble at the same time to be a part of Native and Strong Lifeline; that I may help Native people overcome the generational trauma that they experience daily,” shared Susan David, Upper Skagit and Iowa descendant.

After launching on November 10, Native and Strong is now integrated into the 988 Lifeline system in Washington state. When someone calls 988 from a Washington state area code, they now hear an automated greeting that features four different options, including the Veterans Crisis Line and the Spanish Language Line. Callers can now choose option 4 to be connected to the Native and Strong Lifeline. While the Native and Strong Lifeline is not meant to reconcile or undo the violence and traumas of the past, it does offer a new culture for healing that centers on the lived experiences, traditions, and wisdom of Native people. The all-Native crisis counselors and staff are a testament to this indigenous-centered approach.

Umair A. Shah, Secretary of Health of Washington state, expressed, “A tremendous thank you goes to our tribal leaders and communities, service providers at the frontlines of behavioral health work, the Washington State Health Care Authority, our legislators, and other partners across all levels of governance in helping transform how mental health services are provided for American Indian and Alaska Native people throughout the entire continuum of care.”

On July 16, 2022, the Lifeline transitioned to the three-digit access code 988. The 988 Lifeline serves as a universal entry point to free, confidential services, which are available 24 hours a day, and seven days a week. Recently-released reports show that the transition to 988 and messaging around the change have been successful in reaching more people. In August 2022, the first full month following the national 988 rollout, the program was able to support 45% more people than in the same month last year. No matter where a person lives in the United States or territories, a trained crisis counselor will respond.

For more information on the Native and Strong Lifeline and 988, visit www.doh.wa.gov/988. To learn more about [Vibrant Emotional Health](#) and the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), contact Hannah Collins at hcollins@vibrant.org.

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About Vibrant Emotional Health

For 50 years, Vibrant Emotional Health has been at the forefront of promoting emotional well-being for all people. As leaders, advocates, educators, and innovators in mental health, we have been raising awareness and offering support to everyone who is struggling. We work every single day to help save lives and assist people to get care anytime, anywhere and in any way that works for them. We are unwavering in our belief that everyone can achieve emotional wellness with the right care and support. As part of our work, we administer the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, funded by SAMHSA, which provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in emotional distress across the United States. For more information, please visit www.vibrant.org.

About the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)

Funded by SAMHSA and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988 Lifeline) is a leader in suicide prevention and mental health crisis care. The 988 Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support and crisis counseling to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. Callers who follow the “press 1” prompt are connected to the Veterans Crisis Line. A Spanish Language line is available by pressing #2 when calling 9-8-8, and more than 150 languages are supported through a Tele-Interpreters service. Callers now also have the option of following a “press 3” prompt to be connected to a counselor specifically trained in supporting LGBTQ+ callers. The Lifeline comprises a national network of more than 200 local crisis centers, uniting local resources with national best practices. Since its inception in 2005, the Lifeline has engaged in innovative public messaging, development of best practices in mental health, creative partnerships, and more to improve crisis services and advance suicide prevention for all. suicidepreventionlifeline.org.