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988 launch will expand access to mental health, substance use crisis services

HONOLULU – On Saturday, July 16, Hawai'i will adopt the national 988-dialing code for direct access to mental health and substance use crisis resources. The new three-digit number is expected to increase access to the Hawai'i Department of Health's (DOH) Hawai'i CARES crisis helpline for crisis services, mental and emotional health support, and substance abuse recovery.

Individuals with an 808 area code phone number can call 988 to connect with the Hawai'i CARES crisis line. Individuals who call from other area codes will be connected with a crisis center in another state. Anyone can continue to reach Hawai'i CARES by calling 808-832-3100 or 1-800-753-6879; or using the chat function at suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/.

"The 988 launch reflects a nationwide commitment to prioritizing mental health and increasing access to resources," said Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director of Behavioral Health. "In Hawai'i, 988 adds to the ways that people can reach the CARES Crisis Line. Our staff will continue to connect people across Hawai'i with mental health and substance use recovery resources."

In 2021, Hawai'i CARES received 101,151 calls. Hawai'i CARES is administered by DOH with support from CARE Hawai'i and Aloha United Way.

Hawai'i CARES provides 24/7 free and confidential support to people in mental-health or substance use related distress. Locally trained and qualified clinical and crisis call center staff provide supportive counseling, screening for urgent or emergent mental health or substance use needs, and referrals to behavioral health resources. DOH's wraparound services connect CARES callers and others with crisis mobile outreach and other services.

Hawai'i CARES is part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a network of over 200 independent crisis centers equipped to help people in mental health related distress or experiencing a suicidal crisis. In 2020, Congress designated the 988 dialing code to operate through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to improve access to mental health crisis services in a way that meets growing national need.

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