



ASPEN TECH
POLICY HUB

PROJECT



MICAH MUTRUX

To learn more about
this project, please visit
aspentechpolicyhub.org.

 THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



Photo by Priscilla du Preez via Unsplash

Accelerating Adoption of the 988 Mental Health Crisis Hotline

Giving people in mental health crisis better support by diverting them from 911 to the 988 system

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, approximately 18 million calls are made to 911 for incidents related to mental health or substance use disorders. Unfortunately, the rapid, police-led response for which 911 is optimized is not well suited to respond to these behavioral crises. Appropriate crisis care is typically beyond responders' scope of practice, and people experiencing a mental health crisis are up to [50% more likely](#) to end up in jail. The new 988 Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Hotline will be launched in July 2022 to better serve people in crisis. But with the rollout fast approaching, the majority of states still have not acted to support 988. This project recommends diverting crisis calls from four key points in the 911 response system to 988, and provides low-cost interventions for doing so.



**ASPEN TECH
POLICY HUB**

PROJECT

THE PROBLEM

While the most aspirational visions for a national 988 crisis-response system imagine a behavioral support hotline that is entirely independent of the 911 system, the US is currently on a more conservative trajectory. As of February 2021, only 4 states have enacted legislation with financial backing as intended, and 38 states are proceeding without any legislative support at all. Although the 988 hotline will be operational, it is less clear whether state coordinators will have the capacity to create channels that systematically divert people from 911 to the 988 system.

” *The 988 Crisis Hotline can only be helpful if people know to use it.*

THE SOLUTION

Launching the 988 Crisis Hotline will create an alternative to 911, but it does not guarantee that people will adopt it. This project presents a 988 On-Ramping Playbook with recommendations on how to create strategic 988 entry points at multiple points along the emergency response pipeline.

The playbook recommends interventions for 4 distinct components of the 911 system:

1. *The Initial Actor*: Identifying how best to inform potential callers of 988;
2. *911 Dispatch*: Diverting suicide calls as a model for other crisis calls;
3. *Law Enforcement*: Helping police teach people to use 988 in the future; and
4. *Services & Facilities*: Teaching organizations when to use 988 instead of 911.

For more information on this proposal, see 1) the [988 On-Ramping Playbook](#) and 2) the corresponding [policy brief](#).

ABOUT THE HUB

The Aspen Tech Policy Hub is a Bay Area policy incubator, training a new generation of tech policy entrepreneurs. We take tech experts, teach them the policy process, and support them in creating outside-the-box solutions to society's problems.

The Aspen Institute
2300 N St. NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20037
202 736 5800