



Improving Oklahoma's Response to Veteran Suicide

Charlie Severance-Medaris, Project Manager, NCSL,
Health Program – September 22, 2026



Overview of Presentation



- Introductions
- About NCSL
- About Veteran Suicide
- 988 National Policy Landscape
- Other Legislation
- Conclusion

Overview of Veteran Suicide

The latest
National Veteran
Suicide Prevention
**ANNUAL
REPORT**
is here.



Key National Statistics

- 6,398 veterans died by suicide in 2023, according to the VA's 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report.
- This equates to approximately 17.5 veteran suicides per day in 2023.
- The veteran suicide rate was 35.2 per 100,000 veterans in 2023 vs. 14.1 suicide deaths per 100,000 adults.
- Veterans accounted for about 13% of all suicides among U.S. adults in 2023 despite representing a much smaller share of the adult population.

Source: [National Veteran Suicide Annual Report](#), US Dept. of Veterans Affairs

Other Insightful Statistics

1

Factors such as **health problems (pain and substance use), homelessness, and social connection** contribute to veteran suicide.

2

Approximately **61% of veterans who died by suicide in 2023 were not receiving VA health care** in the year before their death.

3

Suicide rates remain elevated among veterans ages 18-34, and the VA highlights this group as particularly vulnerable.

State Implementation of the 988 Lifeline

- Shorter, 3-digit number intended to be easier to remember.
- Builds off existing infrastructure of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
- Allows states to impose a surcharge to support local call centers.
 - Similar to funding model in place for “911” calls.
- Hotline will also include the Veterans Crisis Line.

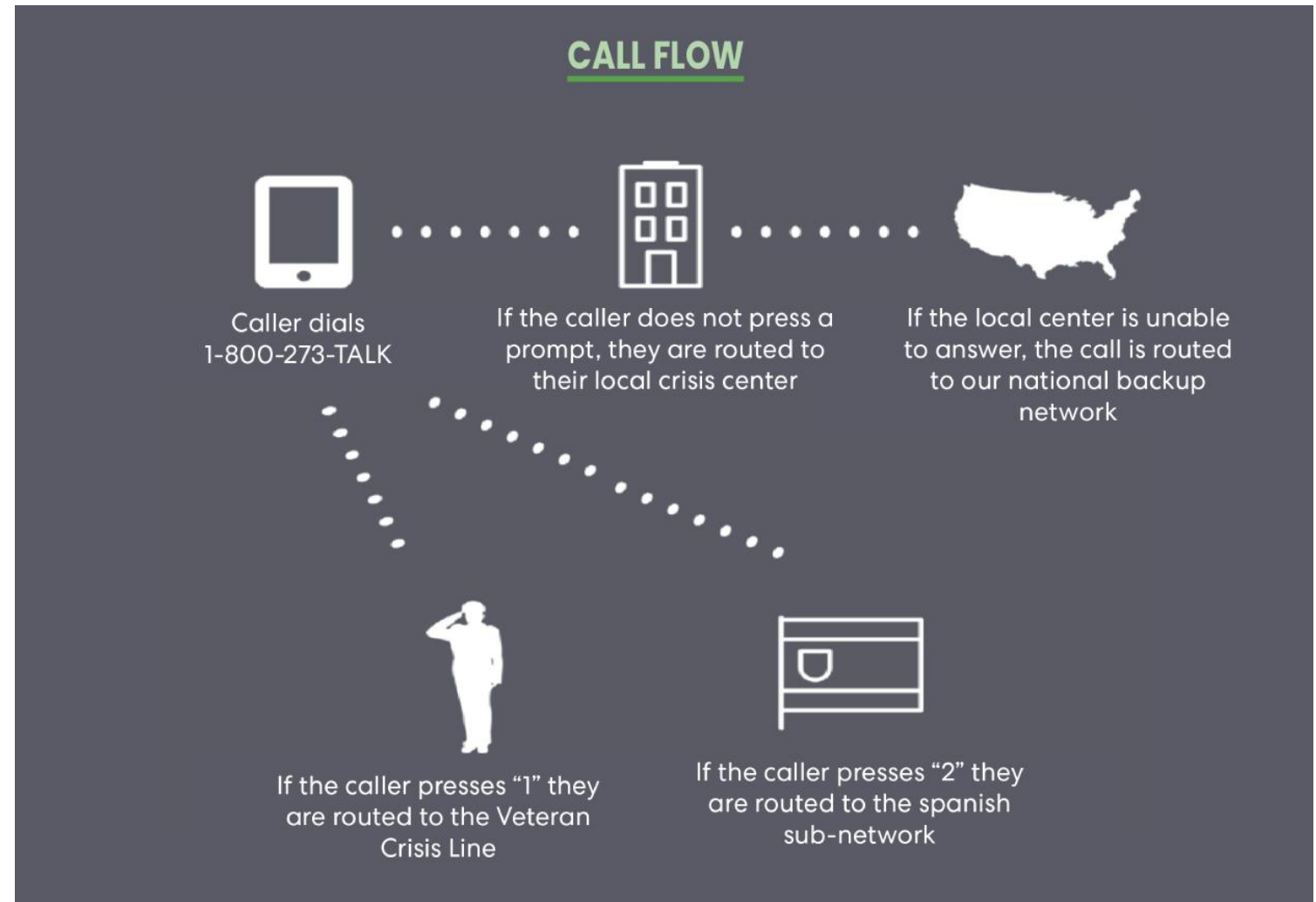


It takes strength to reach out for support. The road to help can start with a single call, chat, or text.



How Does the Lifeline Operate?

- What happens when someone calls the lifeline?
- Who answers the call?
- What if no call center is available in my state?
- Can I text the lifeline?



How are States Supporting the Lifeline?

Communications Surcharge

- This surcharge is not required under federal law.
- Must be similar to surcharges imposed to support 911.
- Must be used to support responses to calls to 988.

General Funds

- General fund dollars can also be appropriated.
- Many lawmakers interested in what resources are already supporting behavioral health crises.

Medicaid

- States have access to an 85% federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) for mobile crisis for the first three years of implementation.

How are States Supporting the Lifeline?

Expanding Call Center Capacity

- Call centers provide immediate support for a person in crisis.
- Local call centers may be able to do this more efficiently by connecting the caller...
 - To local resources.
 - To local emergency response.
 - To local crisis stabilization.

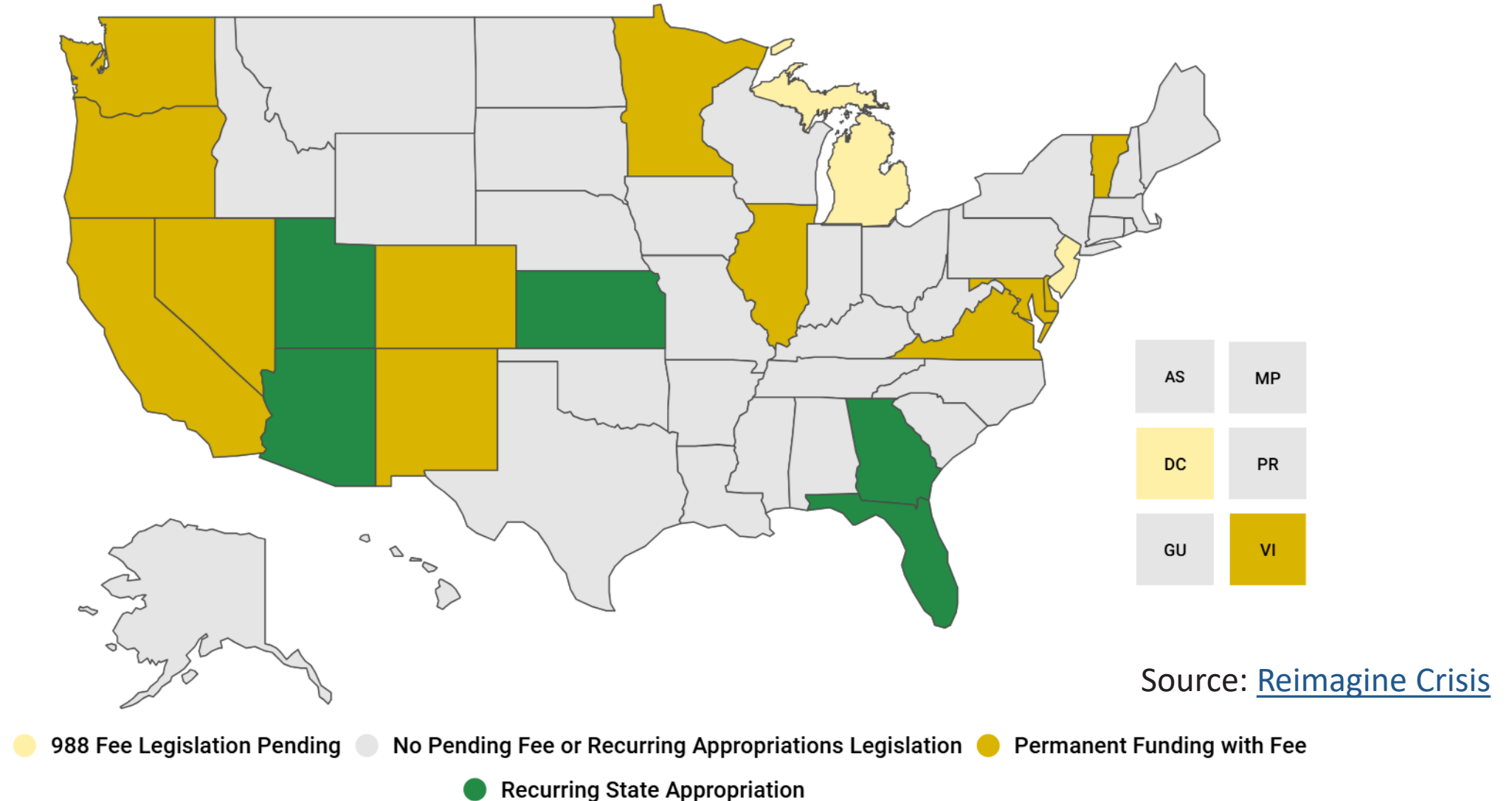
Supporting Mobile Crisis Teams

- Behavioral health professionals and emergency responders working as a unit to respond to people in crisis.
- Trained specifically to address behavioral health crises.
- Allows law enforcement to focus on other priorities.

Expanding Access to Behavioral Health

- Leverage opportunities to expand access to crisis stabilization centers, certified community behavioral health clinics and other facilities.
- Creates an alternative to emergency departments.
- Can defray expensive treatments and improve outcomes.

988 Crisis Response State Legislation Map



Example Legislation

988 DAY

You had their six.

We have yours.



California – Required entities seeking moneys from the fund to also include the number of individuals who used the service and self-identified as veterans or active military personnel in its annual expenditure and outcomes report.

Georgia – Appropriated \$16M to increase crisis stabilization services and \$300K to increase call center capacity.

Indiana – Appropriated \$50M to establish CCBHC and provide crisis response services including mobile crisis teams and crisis receiving and stabilization services.

Maine – Ensured the coordination of services of 911 system and the state's 988 mobile crisis services system and sets up reporting requirements on the coordination of services.

Utah – Increased opportunities for interoperability and effectiveness between 988 and 911.

Gatekeeper Training

Washington - Passed [HB 15-1424](#) in 2018 requiring all medical health professionals to undergo suicide prevention training specific to veterans and [HB 18-6514](#), which requires higher education professionals to receive training for identifying and intervening with student veterans at risk of suicide.

Arizona - Established the Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program to offer claims examiners and county and municipal veteran service offices specialized training and certification in preventing veteran suicides.

Florida – Created a veteran suicide prevention training pilot program, requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish the pilot program, requires pilot program participants to receive certain training, requires the department to contract with an organization to develop the curriculum for such training, requires the department to submit an annual report.

A graphic of a book with a dark blue cover and white text. The title 'Gatekeeper Training Course for Suicide Prevention' is written in a sans-serif font, with 'Gatekeeper' and 'Training' in white and 'Course for Suicide Prevention' in yellow. The book is shown at a slight angle, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

Gatekeeper
Training
Course for
Suicide
Prevention

Connections to Care

Kentucky - Raised awareness of and access to behavioral health services and resources, promoted evidence-based best practices and safe messaging to increase awareness of veteran suicide prevention hotlines and other crisis resources, and connect service members, veterans, and their families to trained mental health providers and appropriate community resources.

New Mexico - Enacted the service members and veterans suicide prevention act within the veterans' services department act, provided department responsibilities to raise awareness regarding suicide within the populations of service members, veterans and military and veteran family members and to increase access to suicide prevention resources.

Texas - Established a dedicated Internet website to provide veterans with information regarding suicide prevention in collaboration with community-based, nonprofit, and private organizations to conduct the suicide prevention campaign.

Gatekeeper
Training
Course for
Suicide
Prevention

Questions?

Charlie Severance-Medaris

Charlie.Severance@ncsl.org

