

Beyond 988

Mercer Government
Ready for next. Together.



Building a Comprehensive Behavioral Health Crisis System

Since 2020, we have seen federal legislation and nationwide investment to enhance and expand behavioral health crisis systems. Crisis systems are intended to provide rapid intervention and connection to treatment for individuals experiencing a behavioral health or substance use crisis.

In July 2022, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline —1-800-273-TALK — became 988. Dialing 988 will immediately connect individuals to free and confidential support and services

How Does It Work?

Behavioral Health Crisis Call Centers

- The individual in need, a concerned friend, or a caregiver calls 988 or a local Crisis Call Center.
- The call center will assess the individual's needs, determine safety, provide preliminary stabilization, and coordinate resources and service referrals for ongoing care,
- The call center may dispatch a mobile crisis team to meet with the individual in the community, or where they feel most comfortable.

Why This Matters

This will undoubtedly save lives and help individuals and families most in need get connected to care. In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young Americans under age 44 years.

We have robust emergency care systems to address physical health needs, however these systems are not designed to address the needs of individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis.



Mobile Crisis Team

- Often includes a behavioral health professional, a person with lived experience and/or other trained professionals who respond to where the individual is experiencing the crisis.
- Responders provide immediate stabilization, de-escalation, assessment, and coordination for ongoing services.
- This team should respond timely, usually within an hour of the call in urban areas.
- Service infrastructure is undergoing expansion; however, the intent is that teams respond to the community 24/7/365.
- Responders will work to ensure that the use of hospitals, emergency rooms or referral to 911 is avoided unless necessary.

Crisis Stabilization Centers

- Offer 24/7/365 facility-based crisis receiving and treatment for individuals whose needs cannot be met in the community following a behavioral health crisis. It is a safe place to begin receiving behavioral health and /or substance use disorder treatment and to coordinate ongoing services and supports.
- In some cases, these facilities have dedicated law enforcement drop-off services, allowing for justice diversion and immediate connection to mental health treatment.
- Other facility-based options may be available in your local area. This may include psychiatric urgent cares, transition or bridge clinics, crisis respite or living rooms, and crisis residential care.

Creating an Effective Behavioral Health Crisis Care Continuum

It is important to look at crisis services within the context of a care continuum, where crisis services providers work together to form a seamless continuum of care. Additionally, these service providers need to be embedded within the local behavioral health care continuum and able to connect to existing service providers. They need to coordinate with hospitals and public safety to offer suitable diversion from inpatient and justice-involved settings. There is a better path forward and states are actively pursuing this needed infrastructure.

A Better Path Forward



Person in Crisis



Crisis Line
80% resolved
on the phone



Mobile Crisis Teams
71% resolved
in the field



Care Stabilization
68% discharged
to the community
instead of to a
higher level of care



Least Restrictive
Least Costly
85% remain stable in
community-based care

Mercer Can Help

Mercer offers a wide range of services to support your organization in the field of crisis services and behavioral health. Here are some of the specific areas where we can assist you:

- **Evaluating and updating federal authority and regulatory documents:** We can help you review and update state plan amendments to include crisis services, ranging from peer supports to 23-hour facilities and hospital stabilization units. We can also provide guidance on state crisis system policies, such as provider licensing requirements and managed care contracts.
- **Provider rate establishment and review:** Our team can assist you in establishing and reviewing provider rates for crisis services, ensuring fair and competitive compensation for providers.
- **Planning and implementing crisis services expansion:** We can support you in the planning and implementation of strategies to expand your crisis services, helping you meet the growing demand and improve access to care.
- **Crisis service definitions and needs assessment:** Mercer can help you develop clear and comprehensive definitions for crisis services and perform a statewide assessment of your crisis system needs, identifying areas for improvement and optimization.
- **Stakeholder engagement and work streams:** We can facilitate stakeholder engagement and coordinate associated work streams, ensuring all relevant parties are involved and aligned in the development and implementation of crisis services.
- **Identifying state funding opportunities:** Our team can recommend new state funding opportunities that can enhance sustainability and drive innovation in unified systems of care. This includes grants such as the Mobile Crisis Planning Grant and Telehealth Grants.
- **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) models:** Mercer has expertise in designing, developing, and implementing CCBHC models. We understand the vital role that CCBHCs play within the crisis response continuum and can help you optimize their effectiveness.

At Mercer, our team consists of highly experienced professionals in clinical, policy, and actuarial specialties, with a wealth of knowledge and expertise in behavioral health crisis systems. We have a deep understanding of various aspects of crisis response, including mobile crisis response, telehealth utilization, integration of peer support services, crisis stabilization centers, diversion from hospitals and emergency rooms, and effective collaboration with law enforcement and first responders.

What sets our consultants apart is their extensive experience in leadership roles within state agencies, where they have played pivotal roles in advocating for and implementing the expansion and development of crisis intervention services and systems. This firsthand experience gives us unique insights into the challenges and opportunities involved in creating effective crisis response programs.

With Mercer, you can trust that our team of experts will bring our comprehensive knowledge and practical experience to help you navigate the complexities of building and maintaining behavioral health crisis systems. Contact us today at www.mercer-government.mercer.com to learn more about how our specialists can support your organization in achieving your crisis intervention goals.

For more information

Visit our website at www.mercer-government.mercer.com to view our experience, services, and client feedback.

