



**DBHDD**

Georgia Department  
of Behavioral Health &  
Developmental Disabilities

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## **Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and Georgia Poison Control Center Forge Innovative, First-of-its-Kind Partnership to Enhance Suicide Prevention Efforts**

**ATLANTA** – In a groundbreaking, statewide initiative aimed at bolstering suicide prevention efforts, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) in collaboration with Georgia's Poison Control Center (GPC) and the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL), has announced a pioneering partnership. This alliance is part of the statewide rollout of the federal 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, designed to streamline access to mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use crisis support for Americans.

The partnership emerged from a recognized need by the GPC to collaborate closely with the 988/GCAL, facilitating the transfer of calls from individuals in distress, specifically those considering poison as a method of suicide, to specialized behavioral health support services. The initiative underscores a shared commitment to saving lives and providing critical support at moments of crisis. Georgia is the first state to integrate statewide poison control call centers and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Key aspects of the pioneering partnership include:

- The identification of call types by DBHDD and GPC that should be transferred to GCAL, ensuring those in need receive immediate and appropriate care.
- Provision of Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) gatekeeper training by DBHDD Suicide Prevention staff to GPC call center personnel, enhancing their ability to support individuals in distress effectively.

- Establishment of recommended warm-transfer processes, enabling seamless support transitions from GPC to GCAL for enhanced behavioral health crisis assistance.
- Implementation of a new protocol by GPC in early January 2024, marking a significant step forward in providing integrated crisis support.
- Scheduled quarterly meetings between GPC, DBHDD, and GCAL staff to review protocol utilization and adapt strategies as necessary to optimize support for those in crisis.

This initiative is especially critical considering the CDC Wonder Database's findings that, from 2018 to 2021, 576 Georgians succumbed to suicide via poisoning, positioning it as the third leading method of suicide in the state. By integrating resources and expertise, this partnership aims to intervene effectively in such crises, redirecting individuals to the professional, compassionate care offered by GCAL representatives.

“As one of the busiest poison control centers in the country, responding to hundreds of life-threatening cases on a daily basis, we have seen a persistent and increasing trend of callers who are contemplating poison as a mechanism of self-harm,” shared Dr. Gaylord Lopez, Executive Director of the Georgia Poison Center. “This partnership is an exciting opportunity for the Georgia Poison Center to enhance our ability to serve Georgians in crisis.” Dr Lopez and his team are also excited about sharing their new models and protocols with other states’ poison centers that are interested in their work.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, operational via call, text, and chat through 988lifeline.org, marks a significant advancement in mental health crisis intervention. Since its national rollout on July 16, 2022, 988 has served as a vital, easily accessible lifeline for individuals facing mental health challenges, thoughts of suicide, or substance use crises. Georgia's proactive approach, including strategic investments in call center staffing and technology, has been instrumental in managing increasing call volumes and improving response times, demonstrating the state's leadership in mental health crisis management.

"In forging this innovative partnership, we are not merely combining resources; 988 in Georgia is creating a comprehensive lifeline for those in crisis. Together with the Georgia Poison Control Center, we stand united in our commitment to turn despair into hope, ensuring every call for help finds the support it deserves," added DBHDD Commissioner Kevin Tanner.

In light of the substantial impact of suicide on communities across Georgia and the evolving concept of postvention as prevention, DBHDD continues to enhance its postvention program. This program is dedicated to offering support, resources, and referrals to families and communities affected by suicide, alongside training and technical assistance to stakeholders.

As Georgia continues to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the 988 initiative, the partnership with Georgia Poison Control Center represents a significant stride towards creating a more responsive, effective, and integrated crisis support system. Through collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to saving lives, Georgia sets a national precedent in suicide prevention and mental health crisis intervention.

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat <https://988lifeline.org/>.

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