

More mental health help for veterans

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Three-Digit national suicide prevention, crisis phone number debuts

SANTA FE — A new three-digit phone number has replaced the existing and often hard-to-remember ten-digit national suicide prevention and crisis phone number.

The new number to call is 9-8-8, and it features a military & veteran feature.

Veterans or service members facing a crisis can simply dial 9-8-8, and press option “1” to be immediately linked to the same U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs support system featured with the old phone number. The old number will remain active and will reroute calls to the new 988 system.

Mental health advocates are hoping calling 988 will replace emergency calls to 911 for mental health crises. According to the VA, while 911 dispatchers are prepared to send first responders and support callers during an emergency, staffers linked to the 988 number are counselors specifically trained to immediately handle distraught callers, access records, and send help.

New Mexico has also joined the *Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families*.

This is a collaboration between states to develop plans in their states to implement the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, which provides a framework for identifying priorities,

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organizing efforts, and developing veteran suicide prevention strategies and outreach at the state level.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services is the lead agency in New Mexico for this collaboration. DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith and DVS Field Services Division Director Robin Wilson were in Alexandria, Va., during the week of Aug. 1 for a meeting with other states' Governor's Challenge representatives.

"The new national 988 phone number is a tremendous development," Smith said. "But we will do more here in New Mexico. I am honored that Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has tasked our agency to lead the state's veteran and service member suicide prevention effort. We've learned a lot from our initial meeting and will be implementing a plan soon."

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