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Mental Health receives funds to support 988 line in South Carolina

Columbia, SC — The South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) has been awarded a 988 State Planning Grant through Vibrant Emotional Health, the nonprofit administrator of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline) to prepare for the launch of the nationwide 988 line. In July of last year, the US Federal Communications Commission unanimously voted to approve 988 as the three-digit number Americans will dial to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline crisis center, rather than the current ten digit number (800-273-8255).

These grant funds will allow SCDMH to develop strategic plans for implementing the change in South Carolina, including infrastructure needs, volume growth, and access to the line, prior to its nationwide launch in 2022. Until July, 2022, the current number (800-273-8255) will remain in use for reaching the Lifeline crisis center. SCDMH will develop clear plans to address coordination, capacity, funding, and communications relating to the launch of 988. It will collaborate with state leadership, suicide prevention experts, people with lived experience, and others to create an implementation plan to ensure it is ready and functioning smoothly when it goes live.

"In 2019 alone, the Suicide Prevention Lifeline received 31,966 calls from South Carolinians," said SCDMH State Director Kenneth Rogers, MD. "That's 31,966 opportunities to save a life. Having an easy-to-remember, nationwide, three-digit number will increase the access to immediate help and save more lives, and this grant will help us put this vital resource in place for our state."

Dennis Gillan, of SCDMH's Office of Suicide Prevention agreed, "988 will simplify the process for South Carolinians in crisis to reach the Lifeline. It is now our responsibility to make sure South Carolina is ready to properly implement the line, and this grant will help us do that."

The South Carolina Department of Mental Health's mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses, giving priority to adults with serious and persistent mental illness and children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. As South Carolina's public mental health system, it provides outpatient mental health services through a network of 16 community mental health centers and associated clinics, serving all 46 counties, and psychiatric hospital services via three State hospitals, including one for substance use treatment. In addition to mental health services, the Agency provides long-term care services in one community nursing care center and three State veterans' nursing homes.