
Kansas 988 Council:

Chat & Text in Suicide

Prevention

Topics of Discussion

Chat & Text in Kansas: What is it and Why is it important?

Staff Considerations: Training & Burnout

Data: Challenges & Future Considerations

Budget Considerations

Chat & Text

What is it?

What is Chat & Text in 988 Suicide Prevention?

988 help-seekers reach out to Lifeline counselors over three types of media:

- Voice (phone)
- Internet (web browser*)
- SMS (text)



HQ CHAT PROGRAM

988 Chat can be thought of as counseling via instant messaging

What is Chat & Text in 988 Suicide Prevention?

Chat help-seekers interface with HQ Counselors through Vibrant's **Unified Platform (UP)** software system:

- Help-seekers (both web-based & text) enter the system at one central point.
- The UP redirects help-seekers to separate queues:
 - State Queue - determined by IP address (web-based)/phone area code (text)
 - National Backup Queue – help-seeker connects with any counselor in the country (USA)
 - Spanish Queue – by help-seeker request
 - LGBTQ Queue – by help-seeker request

What is Chat & Text in 988 Suicide Prevention?

STATE QUEUE process flow:

- Help-seekers (web-based & text) enter the central entry point
- The UP redirects Kansans to state queue if:
 - Counselor is logged in AND status set to “on-queue” (aka available for chat)
- Help-seeker remains in queue for maximum 60 seconds
 - If no counselor accepts the contact the help-seeker flows back to National queue without HQ receiving notification of the contact
- HQ Chat counselors can accept only two chats at one time

Chat & Text

Why is it important?

Why is Chat & Text Important in 988 Suicide Prevention?

Suicide is the ***second leading cause of death*** among young people ages 10-34 in the United States.

Lifeline Chats tend to reach a younger population as most text-based visitors are under the age of 25

- 40% of the people who access **Lifeline Crisis Chat** are under age 20
- 31% are under age 30

Roughly 30% of all 988 contacts (phone/chat/text) are text-based contacts.

This is expected to rise as more people learn about the 988 chat/text program

Why is Chat & Text Important in 988 Suicide Prevention?

Many young people today feel uncomfortable speaking on the phone or face to face

- Texting and instant messaging is their preferred method of communication
- Becoming comfortable with text-based counseling can lead to over the phone and face-to-face counseling in the future for vulnerable minors
- Help-seekers lacking privacy in their home environment find Chat an easier way to receive help without others knowing and will be more likely to reach out for help again

Chat & Text

Staff Considerations

Staff Considerations - Training

- HQ Chat Specialists
 - Complete HQ Counselor Training (**80-100 hours**)
 - **work one-on-one with Chat training coordinator** to learn specific techniques for text-based vs phone counseling
 - chat training involves additional **20+ hours including:**
 - Chat-focused conversation flow techniques,
 - Role play practice and
 - **Three trainer-supported shifts**

Staff Considerations - Training

What makes text-based support different than over the phones?

- Help-seekers complete a pre-chat survey
- Chat/Text last 2 to 3 times longer than calls
- Chat/Text lack auditory cues
- Chat/Text tend to cover more intense subject matter.
- Chat/Text tend to focus quickly on difficult topics with a high level of disclosure and expressed thoughts of suicide.

It is not uncommon for the first message from a help-seeker to be:

“I want to kill myself”

Staff Considerations – Mitigating Burnout

Crisis Counseling is *more intense* and requires *unique* skills not found in traditional counseling

- Most HQ chat counselors work remotely so providing support during intense chats is crucial
- Each scheduled chat shift has at least one supervisor available
- Counselors and Supervisors stay connected via a voice/video/text app that provides real-time immediate support to the counselors
- Supervisors have monthly meetings with their assigned counselors
- Counselors also meet on a monthly basis with the **Chat Support Liaison** who is available for all chat program staff.

Chat & Text

Data: Challenges & Future Considerations

Data - Challenges

HQ Chat Program receives chat-related data from two different sources:

- Monthly reports sent from Lifeline – **Broad State Metric Reports**
- Within the UP platform – using tool called **Success KPIs**

Broad State Metric Report:

- Each state is assigned one state queue (subdivided into separate chat & text queues) that is shared by all centers providing that state's **988 Lifeline Chat & Text services**. That queue is only active if a crisis counselor assigned to the state queue is logged in (but not necessarily available for taking chats e.g. they are already taking two chats)

Success KPIs:

- Contains agent reports and center-level reports for interactions directly offered to HQ crisis counselors – Does not report interactions never seen by HQ.

Data - Challenges

Discrepancies between Success KPI Data and the Broad State Metric Reports make staffing decisions more difficult.

- **Success KPIs** is reporting the offered/answered for HQ Kansas.
- **Broad State Metric Report** is reporting on the offered/answered for the Kansas state queues (chat & text) which includes interactions never seen by HQ

Broad State Metric Report

- is divided between chat & text interactions and by hour and day of week making staffing considerations more difficult to determine.
- Lifeline is working to produce a more readable and inclusive format that will provide easier determination of staffing needs.

Data - Future Considerations

Despite discrepancies, the data in general highlights a need for more counselors during peak hours 6 pm. to 3 am.

As of March 1st, HQ Chat included two more overnight counselors to increase answer rate for peak periods.

Challenges occur as staffing qualified counselors willing to work overnight shifts remains difficult:

- Pool of qualified applicants is limited
- Training a chat counselor can take a long time
- Intensity of the job requires increased monetary compensation
- Turnover rate tends to be seasonal as most counselors are university students that move on after graduation.

Data - Future Considerations

HQ Chat program future goals:

- Streamlining training process for quicker start dates
- Drawing from a wider pool of qualified applicants
- Staffing more counselors for peak periods
- Increasing quality control over the program

HQ Chat is committed to providing Kansas help-seekers with highly qualified kind, compassionate and caring crisis counselors

Chat & Text

Budget Considerations

Budget Considerations - Technology

The **Unified Platform** is provided for free to centers for answering texts and chats directed to **988**.

Pursuing text capabilities for local or regional numbers come with additional costs

- Purchasing of short codes to avoid per minute message limits (annual fee)
- Per message charges (\$.01-\$.03)
- Emojis? 😊

Budget Considerations - Staffing

- Targeting funds to add available staff during peak hours
- Utilizing Success KPI reports from the **Unified Platform** to do statewide analysis of staffing needs
- Analysis of chat/text workforce compensation nationwide due to remote nature of the work at **988** centers across the state

Thank You.



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