



**OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE
SERVICES BULLETIN**

ISSUE DATE:

March 8, 2023

EFFECTIVE DATE:

March 8, 2023

NUMBER:

OMHSAS-23-02

SUBJECT:

Emergency Services: 24/7 Call Centers

BY:

**Jennifer S. Smith, Deputy Secretary
Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services**

SCOPE:

This Bulletin applies to County Mental Health Administrators.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Bulletin is to clarify that a County/Joinder can meet the statutory requirement to provide Emergency Services under Section 301(d)(4) of the Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Act of 1966 (“MH/ID Act”) and Section 5240.72 of the proposed Mental Health Crisis Intervention Services regulations by providing Suicide and Crisis Prevention Services through 9-8-8 call centers. Additionally, this Bulletin is to inform County Mental Health Administrators of their responsibility to update local contact information for Crisis Mobile Teams and Crisis Walk-In Centers on the web-based resource platform designated by the Department of Human Services (Department).

BACKGROUND:

Section 301(d)(4) of the MH/ID Act requires the provision of 24-hour Emergency Services. The responsibility for the provision of these services directly or under contract is assigned to the County Mental Health Administrator. Additionally, on March 6, 1993, the Department published proposed Mental Health Crisis Intervention Services regulations, which the Department has used as a statement of policy. Section 5240.72 of the proposed regulations requires Counties to provide 24-hour telephone Crisis Services.

Furthermore, on October 17, 2020, Congress enacted the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 establishing a National Suicide and Crisis Prevention Hotline (9-8-8) with the goal of ensuring any individual seeking telephone support would be connected to a Crisis Counselor. In furtherance of this goal, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration invested significant resources in building a national network of call centers. Within this national network of call centers, calls not answered within a reasonable timeframe are transferred to a secondary call center to ensure that no call for help goes unanswered.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS BULLETIN SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO:

Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Bureau of Policy, Planning and Program Development, P.O. Box 2675, Harrisburg, PA 17105. General Office Number 717-772-7900.
Email: RA-PWOMHSASBULLETINS@pa.gov.

DISCUSSION:

Counties/Joiners required to operate Emergency Services have requested that clarity be provided regarding the opportunity available for engagement with 9-8-8 call centers and how a formalized relationship would alleviate responsibility for the provision of Emergency Services. The County/Joiner obligation to operate 24-hour Emergency Services under the MH/ID Act and the proposed Mental Health Crisis Intervention Services regulations may be met by entering into an agreement with a National Suicide and Crisis Prevention 9-8-8 call center located within the Commonwealth.

Regardless of whether a County/Joiner operates its own telephone Crisis Services or enters into an agreement with a 9-8-8 call center, the Department's interpretation of a County/Joiner's obligation to ensure access to county-specific resources and referrals includes the monthly updating of the County/Joiner specific web-based crisis resource list, on a platform designated by the Department. The web-based crisis resource list must be accessible to 9-8-8 call centers and local Mobile Crisis Teams. The Department will provide annual guidance to County Mental Health Administrators for updating Emergency/Crisis resource and referral services. The effective date for counties to have entered contact information for county crisis resources is May 1, 2023.

This Bulletin does not impact the requirement under section 301 (d) (9) and 301 of the MH/ID Act which states counties are obligated to directly provide "Unified procedures for intake for all County Services and a central place providing referral services and information."