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New Jerseyans Overwhelmingly Support Creation of 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline, Eagleton Institute Poll Finds

Large majority also believe someone having a behavioral health crisis should be treated first by a health care provider or crisis counselor, not law enforcement

North Brunswick, NJ. April 5, 2022. A poll conducted by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University on behalf of Project ASPEN, a joint research project between NAMI NJ and a team of Rutgers researchers, finds that 92% of New Jersey residents support the creation of a 988 hotline for suicide prevention and mental health crisis.

Starting July 16, 2022, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 requires telecommunications companies to rout 988 calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL), a national network of over 200 call centers across the country. The law expands the role of NSPL to include mental health crisis.

“The time to reimagine New Jersey’s response to mental health emergencies is now,” said Meredith Masin Blount, Executive Director of NAMI NJ. “A mental health crisis deserves a mental health response, and 988 gives us the opportunity to do that. With an overwhelming majority of New Jerseyans wanting this service, the time for the NJ Legislature to act is now.”

NAMI NJ believes that 988 is an opportunity to establish a crisis standard of care that provides a continuum of services – 24/7 local call centers, mobile crisis teams, and crisis stabilization programs – that end the revolving door of ER visits, arrests, incarceration, and homelessness. The Eagleton survey finds that New Jerseyans are broadly supportive of this approach.

Eighty-four percent supported the idea that a person having a mental health, suicide, or drug/alcohol crisis should be treated first by a health care provider or crisis counselor, and not by law enforcement, including 95% of those identifying as or leaning toward Democrat, 84% of those identifying as or leaning independent, and 70% of those identifying as or leaning Republican.

Regarding financing of 988 mental health crisis services, 90.5% support requiring all health insurers to cover mental health crisis services, 82% support providing state funding, and 53.5% support adding a monthly fee on cell phone bills similar to those used to fund 911.

“The latest numbers from the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll show that just under half of New Jerseyans report feeling dissatisfied with how the state is doing on mental health and addiction, while 36 percent are satisfied,” said Jessica Roman, a research associate at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPIP) at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. “Given this split, it’s unsurprising that majorities of residents support new initiatives like the 988 hotline – those who are dissatisfied are looking for better solutions, while those who are satisfied may see room for expansion of services and programs.”

Pending before the New Jersey Legislature, [S311/A2036](#) would create a behavioral health crisis system of care with the continuum services needed to realize the 988’s full potential. The bill requires all carriers in the state to provide to comprehensive behavioral health crisis

coverage, which is supported by 90.5% of New Jerseyans, according to the survey.

S311/A2036 includes a “988 System and Response Trust Fund” that can only be used for 988 crisis services. It also tasks the Commissioner of Human Services with setting a monthly fee on mobile and IP-enabled voice services to cover the costs of the local call centers. When asked how much respondents are willing to pay for a fee when told that 911 costs roughly \$1.00 a month, 49% were willing to pay more than \$0.50 per month, 61% were willing to pay more than \$0.25 per month, and only 18% were unwilling to pay anything.

According to Itzhak Yanovitzky, Professor of Communication at Rutgers University and Principal Investigator of Project ASPEN, the findings of the survey demonstrate broad public support for policies that would address mental health crisis. “In light of recent findings regarding the rising numbers of Americans, particularly youth and young adults, who experience major depression and suicidal ideation since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the contribution of this to the resurgence of opioid misuse and drug overdose in many communities nationwide, policies that support effective response to mental health emergencies are urgently needed to address this significant and complex public health challenge,” he said.

The poll results reflect strong support among all demographic groups and major political parties for a mental health response to mental health crisis – funded by multiple sources.

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone using live interviewers February 25 to March 4, 2022, with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,044 New Jersey adults and a sampling error of +/-3.0 percentage points. The questions were adapted from an [October 2021 survey](#) commissioned by NAMI and conducted by Ipsos. For more analysis, please see Project Aspen’s detailed [Research Brief](#).

For more information, contact Advocacy Engagement Manager, Matthew Camarda, at 732-940-0991 ext. 115 or advocacy@naminj.org.

NAMI NJ, founded in 1985, is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families who are affected by mental illness through programs of support, education and advocacy. Visit us at www.naminj.org.

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