



# Native & Strong Lifeline



# 988 PRESS 4

Washington's crisis line for American Indian and Alaska Native people is the first of its kind in the United States.

**Dial 988 and choose option 4 to reach a Native crisis counselor.**

### What is the Native and Strong Lifeline?

The Native and Strong Lifeline is a suicide, crisis, and help line operated by Native crisis counselors. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7, 365 days a year.

This line serves all Indigenous people living in Washington state or calling from a Washington area code, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, First Nations, enrolled tribal members, and unenrolled descendants.

### Fast facts

The Native and Strong Lifeline is administered by Volunteers of America Western Washington (VOAWW), one of Washington's 988 Lifeline crisis centers. Currently, it's the only program in the nation entirely staffed and operated by Native crisis counselors.

The program launched in November 2022. Since launch, staff has expanded to almost 30 counselors. The Native and Strong Lifeline has answered thousands of calls, and the number of calls has increased steadily over time.

### Why the Native and Strong Lifeline matters

Native communities have the highest suicide rates out of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Among Native youth between the ages of 10 and 24, suicide is the second leading cause of death.

Suicide is preventable, and culturally affirming support can make a difference. It's normal to need help during a mental health crisis, and getting the support you need can help you heal.

The Native and Strong Lifeline exists to prevent suicide in Native communities. It offers Native people an option for getting support and resources.

## What happens when you call?

Here's what happens when you connect with a Native and Strong Lifeline counselor:

- You can talk about anything that's causing you distress.
- Crisis counselors can also offer support if you're calling about a friend or family member in crisis.
- The counselor who answers your call will listen to what's on your mind and support you in taking steps to feel better.
- They can also provide resources that can help you get more support for yourself or your loved one.
- If you're thinking about suicide and the counselor believes you may be in danger, they'll help you come up with a plan to stay safe.
- Whenever possible, this safety plan will not involve calling emergency services, like 911.

## Does the Native and Strong Lifeline transfer calls to 911?

Native and Strong Lifeline counselors work to help callers feel better during a mental health crisis and reduce suicide risk. Their goal is to do this without involving hospitals, police officers, and other emergency services.

In some cases, the risk of suicide can't be reduced during the call. The crisis counselor will then transfer the call to 911, and 911 services may be dispatched.

Less than 2% of all calls made to 988 lead to a 911 dispatch.

## Does the Native and Strong Lifeline replace my tribe's crisis line?

You can still reach out to existing tribally operated crisis lines. The Native and Strong Lifeline doesn't replace these lines. It just offers another way to get support if you need to talk when other crisis lines aren't available or you'd rather talk to someone outside of your tribe.

## How can counselors help?

Native and Strong Lifeline counselors help callers take the first step toward healing that centers the traditions, wisdom, and lived experiences of Indigenous people.

You can call for support with any type of mental health or emotional crisis, including thoughts of suicide and substance use concerns. Crisis counselors can also help connect you with resources and offer guidance if you're worried about a family member or friend.

## What's next for the Native and Strong Lifeline?

A follow-up program for the Native and Strong Lifeline is in the early stages of development.

Follow-up care offers a way to check back in with people who have contacted the Native and Strong Lifeline for crisis support.

This type of support can make a huge difference for people after a mental health crisis. Following up can also help callers get any additional resources they may need.

The Native and Strong Lifeline also hopes to add text and chat options in the future to better serve people in need.

### Questions? Contact:

#### 988 Program

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