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August 13, 2026

The Honorable Margaret Wood Hassan
Ranking Member
Joint Economic Committee
United States Senate

National Crisis and Support Hotlines: Contact Volume Increased and Operations Remained Relatively Consistent in 2025

Dear Ranking Member Hassan,

This letter formally transmits the attached briefing in response to your request for information on the operations and workforce of three national crisis and support hotlines: the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, the Veterans Crisis Line, and the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operate three crisis and support hotlines. Within HHS, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) oversees the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which provides free, confidential 24/7 support for anyone experiencing mental health distress, suicidal thoughts, or substance use crises. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) oversees the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline (1-833-TLC-MAMA), which provides free, confidential emotional support, resources, and referrals to pregnant and postpartum women experiencing mental health challenges. VA operates the Veterans Crisis Line, which offers specialized, confidential support to veterans, service members, and their families.

In February 2025, the President issued an executive order instructing federal agencies to reduce the size of the federal workforce.¹ HHS and VA, along with other federal agencies, subsequently announced plans to reduce their workforce in response to this order.²

This briefing describes what available monthly data for fiscal year 2025 show for each of the three hotlines, including staffing, contact metrics, and quality metrics. We briefed your staff on the preliminary results of our work on May 13, 2026, and the enclosed briefing slides also include updated information, as available, from SAMHSA, HRSA, and VA.

In summary, contact volume for the three hotlines generally increased throughout fiscal year 2025, based on available monthly agency data we reviewed. In addition, trends and fluctuations

¹Exec. Order. No. 14,210, *Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative*, 90 Fed. Reg. 9669 (Feb. 14, 2025).

²See, for example, Department of Health and Human Services, "HHS Announces Transformation to Make America Healthy Again" (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 27, 2025); Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA Dismisses More than 1,000 Employees" (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 13, 2025); Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA to Reduce Staff by Nearly 30K by End of FY2025" (Washington, D.C.: July 7, 2025).

in volume and performance metrics for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and Veterans Crisis Line during fiscal year 2025 overall were generally similar to prior years, based on previous GAO reporting on these hotlines.³ Agency data also show that the federal agencies responsible for the three hotlines experienced some reductions of staff who oversee or operate the hotlines during fiscal year 2025. At the same time, selected stakeholders representing users of the hotlines told us that they experienced consistent services during the fiscal year.

To address this request:

- We obtained and reviewed data from SAMHSA, HRSA, and VA showing fiscal year 2025 monthly trends in staffing, contact metrics (e.g., total contacts, answer rates, wait time), and quality metrics for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline, and the Veterans Crisis Line. We also compared information for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and the Veterans Crisis Line with similar metrics from our previous reporting. We have not previously reported on the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline.
- We interviewed SAMHSA, HRSA, and VA agency officials or received their written responses to understand information about the data and performed electronic testing to identify any missing data and obvious errors, as appropriate. Based on these steps, we determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for reporting information on the three hotlines.
- We interviewed a selection of nine external stakeholders who have experience with the hotlines, such as national organizations that represent users, to obtain their perspectives on any workforce changes at the three hotlines and on whether changes have affected each hotline's ability to achieve its mission.⁴

We conducted this performance audit from August 2025 to June 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to HHA and VA for review and comment. HHS and VA provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committee, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In addition, the report is available at no charge on our website at <https://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at hundrupa@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of

³See GAO, *Suicide Prevention: Capacity and Federal Monitoring of the 988 Lifeline*, GAO-26-108114 (Washington, D.C.: July 1, 2026) and GAO, *Veterans Crisis Line: Actions Needed to Better Ensure Effectiveness of Communications with Veterans*, GAO-25-107182 (Washington, D.C.: June 2, 2025). We have not previously reported on the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline.

⁴We interviewed the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Legion, the Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance, Mental Health America, the National Alliance for Mental Illness, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors, the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We selected these organizations based on their work with communities that utilize these national crisis and support hotlines.

this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report were Will Simerl (Assistant Director), Sean Miskell (Analyst in Charge), Barbara Hansen, Ruth Morgan, Andrea Richardson, and Roxanna Sun.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Alyssa M. Hundrup
Director, Health Care
Enclosure