



January 31, 2022

Concept Paper

NYC Well

Purpose:

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) is re-procuring NYC Well to build on the success of this service since its initial procurement in 2016, with additional investments to support program growth and enhancements. The contractor(s) will be expected to partner with DOHMH to develop and implement a plan to seamlessly transition the current NYC Well contractor to any newly awarded contractor(s).

NYC Well will continue providing a simple way for New Yorkers to call, text and chat, 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, to receive behavioral health crisis counseling, suicide prevention, emotional and peer support, as well information and referral to ongoing behavioral health care and services that address the social determinants of behavioral health (all calls, text, chats will henceforth be referred to as “contacts”). In addition to offering chat via their website, 988/NYC Well’s website will offer a selection of behavioral health and wellness applications and self-service features for the services outlined in this document.

Beyond answering contacts to the local NYC Well phone number, texting SMS codes, short code, and web domain, contractor(s) will answer contacts to 988 from New York City. On July 16, 2020, the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [adopted rules](#) designating 9-8-8 as the new, national, three-digit number for people in crisis to connect with suicide prevention and mental health crisis counselors. This historical federal legislation will be launched in all 50 U.S. States, the District of Columbia, and all U.S. Territories. The rules require that *all* telecommunications carriers and interconnected Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers implement 988 by transmitting all calls initiated by an end user dialing 988 to the current toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) by July 16, 2022. NSPL is administered by a federal contractor and routes calls to local NSPL accredited contact centers. NYC Well contractor(s) and subcontractors must therefore be accredited by NSPL.

NYC Well and 988 will function as a single entity and the contractor(s) will be an integral part of the NYC crisis intervention services system.

All 988/NYC Well services will be provided in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese with Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) or Telephone to Telephone Typewriter (TTY) and Video Relay Service (VRS) available at all times for the deaf or hearing impaired. People contacting 988/NYC Well and speaking languages other than English, Spanish, Mandarin, and



Cantonese will also be connected with an interpreter service to allow communication between the person and the 988/NYC Well representative.

Background:

NYC Well received 1,601,226 contacts from its launch on October 21, 2016 through September 30, 2021. Initially planned to handle 200,000 contacts per year, the service will expand to answer a projected 500,000 contacts in 2022 to respond to extraordinary demand. Contacts are received via call, text, chat and online referral (online referral is providers to refer clients to specialized Mobile Crisis Team services).

In the most recent fiscal year 2021 (from July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021) 63% of contacts were calls, 28% were chats, 6% were text, and 3% were online crisis referrals. All contacts are assessed for risk using a the National Suicide Prevention lifeline standard In the most recent fiscal year, 1% of contacts were assessed as high risk, 15% were assessed as low risk, and the remainder were assessed as no risk.

Contacts may be received directly from the person seeking services, a concerned family member, friend, neighbor, bystander, or from a provider. In the most recent fiscal year, 56% of contacts were from the person about themselves, 5% were from a concerned friend or family member, and 4% were from a provider regarding a client. The remainder were unknown. Contact duration varies greatly by mode of contact, with text and chat interactions lasting significantly longer than phone interactions.

A small portion of contacts require outbound follow-up. In FY21, NYC Well made 6,209 outbound contacts to support or confirm connection to care.

Demographic information for people contacting NYC Well is limited. Interactions are often anonymous and take a conversational approach to build rapport that informs the intervention rather than relying on scripts and completing questionnaires. However, people of all ages, gender identities, race, ethnicity and language contact the service. Promotional and marketing materials as well as program improvements will aim to expand the use of NYC Well by underserved populations.

People reach out to NYC Well for a wide variety of reasons. Primary presenting concerns in FY21 included: 10% stressful life event, 10% anxiety, 10% mood, 10% interpersonal concern, 3% suicidal ideation, 2% psychotic experience, 2% substance use, and the remaining contacts spread across concerns including mental health related physiological concerns, cognitive impairment, developmental disabilities, homicidal ideation and gambling.

While demand for 988 is not yet known, DOHMH anticipates that coordination with 911 and diversion from law enforcement response will increase the number and proportion of contacts previously received by NYC Well and assessed to be in crisis.



Goals and Objectives:

DOHMH aims to identify contractor(s) to answer contacts to 988 which will be included in the continued operations of the full array of NYC Well services and supports, which first launched in October 2016.

NYC Well is a state-of-the-art contact center that provides rapid access to high quality phone, text, chat and website services to meet the expanding behavioral health needs of New York City. The contractor(s) will meet the following performance indicators for all calls, texts and chats annually, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year:

1. The contractor(s) will maintain an average speed of answer of 30 seconds or less for a projected 500,000 inbound calls, texts and chats annually.
2. The contractor(s) will maintain an abandonment rate of 8% or less of a projected 500,000 inbound calls, texts and chats annually.
3. The contractor(s) will transmit 90% of a projected 30,000 of Mobile Crisis referrals annually to the most appropriate Mobile Crisis Team within 10 minutes of concluding the contact that initiated the referral.
4. 90% of contractor(s) ' counselors and peer support specialists will maintain a satisfactory or greater quality rating according to a DOHMH approved quality rating methodology
5. 90% of a projected 50,000 annual inbound contacts choosing Spanish will be answered by a Spanish speaking NYC Well counselor or peer support specialist.
6. 90% of a projected 50,000 annual inbound contacts choosing Mandarin or Cantonese will be answered by a Mandarin or Cantonese speaking NYC Well counselor.

In addition to comments regarding the program concept outlined in this document, DOHMH is specifically seeking input regarding what, if any, services outlined in this concept paper could be divided between multiple contractor(s) or subcontractor(s) in a way that would promote achieving the goals and objectives of NYC Well. For example:

- a. Separate (Sub)contractor(s) for calls originating from each borough?
- b. Separate (Sub)contractor(s) for call, text, chat, and website?
- c. Separate (Sub)contractor(s) for children/youth/families and adults?
- d. Separate (Sub)contractor(s) for crisis, information & referral, and peer support?

Program Information:

The contractor(s) will adhere to all federal and state operational, clinical and performance standards for National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) and 988 contact centers.

The contractor(s) will employ industry best practices and cutting-edge technology to ensure that anyone contacting 988/NYC Well from New York City or about someone in New York City can access the right behavioral health services and supports any time, through phone, text and internet-based communication (i.e., chat, online mobile crisis referral).



The contractor(s) will provide services for use by New York City of all ages, races, ethnicities, languages, gender identities, sexual orientations, and for providers searching for behavioral health resources within the behavioral healthcare sector as well as within service systems, such as the Department of Education and the Administration for Children’s Services for the people they serve in New York City.

Contractor(s) will participate in crisis system improvement and innovations as coordinated by DOHMH to promote coordination and improve outcomes for people in need of behavioral health care, such as referrals and transfers from 311 and 911.

The rights, title to, and ownership, as applicable, of any phone number, texting SMS codes, and short code, and web domain will be transferred on behalf of DOHMH, upon the expiration or other termination of the contract, and the contractor(s), and all their subcontractor(s), will execute all assignments or other indicia of ownership/rights transfer as may be reasonably requested by DOHMH. The domain name for the call center and data for 988/NYC Well data, including the resource database, shall be the property of, and ownership/rights thereto shall be vested in the City of New York. All subcontract(s) must reflect such ownership/rights of the City to the phone number, SMS codes, domain name, and data for 988/NYC Well, requiring the same vesting of ownership/rights in the City.

988/NYC Well’s core services will include:

1. Crisis counseling and suicide prevention
2. Peer support
3. Brief counseling and support
4. Information and referral to behavioral health care and services that address the social determinants of behavioral health
5. Single Point of Access (SPOA) to urgent behavioral health care services such as Mobile Crisis Teams
6. Mobile friendly website to find and connect with behavioral health and wellness applications and self-service features of all core services
7. Follow up with callers/text messages/internet chats to ensure connection to care and/or troubleshoot barriers to connection

Crisis Counseling and Suicide Prevention

The contractor(s) will conduct risk assessments with all persons as needed, following a DOHMH approved risk assessment methodology for referring appropriate persons to services, including but not limited to 911/Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Mobile Crisis Teams (MCT), Crisis Stabilization Centers, Crisis Residences, and other developing crisis intervention services identified by DOHMH. This includes responding to NYC residents who will be connected to NYC Well through 988 as it replaces the National Suicide Prevention Line and other sources as needed (e.g. EMS/FDNY). By participating in 988 and the NSPL network, NYC Well will ensure



that New York City residents calling 988 and the Lifeline are connected with trained mental health professionals with knowledge of suicide prevention resources in the five boroughs.

Peer Support

The contractor(s) will offer peer support for persons seeking to connect with someone who has been trained to use her/his own lived experience with mental illness and/or substance use and those who have provided lived-experience as a parent or primary caregiver. Using a DOHMH approved Peer Support Model, Peer Specialists and Family Peer Advocates will provide appropriate, compassionate, and effective support to persons who request peer support or those who may benefit from peer support such as people who frequently contact 988/NYC Well. The policy and procedure manual for 988/NYC Well will specify criteria for peer support and family peer advocate.

Brief Counseling and Support

The contractor(s) will provide very short term telephonic and text, counseling to persons as needed. This will consist of short-term evidence-based practices such as Behavioral Activation, Motivational Interviewing, etc., appropriate to the contact's situation, including their presenting concern, level of risk and age in order to bridge any barriers to care (e.g., awaiting a first clinic appointment) or to provide stabilizing support until an individual's next scheduled appointment in the community. This may also include recommending behavioral health and wellness tools and applications available on the 988/NYC Well website.

Information and Referral to Behavioral Health Care Services

The contractor(s) will develop and maintain a database of behavioral health care and services that address the social determinants of mental health and substance use according to the DOHMH approved resource inclusion/exclusion policy. The purpose of this database is to enable 988/NYC Well to provide people with the most accurate and up-to-date information and referrals for services available to people in New York City of all ages and cultural backgrounds, including those within service systems such as preventative programs available through the Administration for Children's Services. The contractor(s) will proactively ensure that the referral database remains as accurate and up-to-date as possible. The contractor(s) will offer a mechanism for behavioral health and social service providers and service systems such as ACS and DOE to update their information directly with 988/NYC Well as long as the updates are consistent with the description and indexing standards and reconciled with insurance panels. Listings which are unable to be updated by the provider/agency will be removed from the database.

The contractor(s) will provide information and referrals to resources in their database that will be optimal in meeting the individual's needs, including the most appropriate service modality, the most appropriate time frame and the most convenient location, all within the specified insurance and/or other relevant payment parameters. 988/NYC Well will have the capacity to



refer individuals in need of behavioral health services to a service provider that accepts the individual's insurance and/or have affordable flexible payment arrangements if the individual is uninsured. 988/NYC Well will look up a contact's insurance status and Plan, with consent, utilizing relevant and available databases (e.g., eMedNY) to improve the precision of their referrals.

The contractor(s) will not use information obtained to solicit clients on behalf of the contractor(s) or any related parties, partners, or subcontractor(s). 988/NYC Well shall not improperly favor any providers or networks. 988/NYC Well shall not preferentially refer persons to their network or the networks of services supported by related parties, partners or subcontractor(s) and will provide persons with multiple resource options that match their preferences and insurance plan.

The contractor(s) will offer to provide a warm-hand-off over the phone to the services to which they are referring a person. In a warm handoff, the 988/NYC Well counselor or peer support specialist will directly introduce the person who contacted 988/NYC Well to the behavioral health provider to whom 988/NYC Well is making a referral, for the purpose of facilitating the scheduling of appointments and connection to care.

Single Point of Access to Urgent Behavioral Health Services (e.g., Mobile Crisis Teams, Crisis Residences)

The contractor(s) will connect people and referring providers to urgent behavioral health crisis services. This includes determining whether persons would be more appropriately served by an emergency response and a warm handoff to 911. 988/NYC Well will function as a single point of access to Mobile Crisis Teams for children, adolescents and adults citywide by determining eligibility, transmitting the referral to the most appropriate team immediately following call completion to respond to a referral (based on the persons' situation, location, etc.), and offering follow-up with the person making the referral to determine the outcome of the visit by the team. In addition to handling MCT referrals via phone, text and chat, providers may make referrals via online form submission on the 988/NYC Well website.

For people residing in New York City shelters, the contractor(s) will look up the person's most current shelter location using the Department of Homeless Services system to ensure a timely response and coordination of services with the shelter.

Mobile Friendly Website to find and connect with behavioral health and wellness applications and self-service features

The contractor(s) will maintain an easy to navigate, mobile friendly website to connect people to all of their core services. The website will also offer complimentary services, such as DOHMH approved behavioral health and wellness tools or applications ("apps") that promote behavioral health and wellness for children, adolescents and adults. The website will provide users with an easy, guided search experience of all resources in their referral database which may be used as



a complement or self-service alternative to calling, texting or chatting with a 988/NYC Well counselor or peer support specialist. A search functionality will further assist New York City residents and providers to understand, locate and connect with available and appropriate behavioral health resources, based on matching to the person's needs, preferences, service types, insurance, location, hours of operation, language, availability of walk-ins and same day appointments, accessibility for persons with limited mobility, and other variables such as specific populations, etc. (e.g., mothers of young children, senior citizens, children under 5 years old, etc.).

The contractor(s) will demonstrate that they do not disproportionately or with any bias direct persons to services within their own agency's network or the networks of services supported by their partners or subcontractor(s). The Contractor will ensure that the 988/NYC Well website reflects their complete and current resource database

The 988/NYC Well website will be translated into Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese and made accessible through icons located on the website. The 988/NYC Well website will meet the requirements set forth in the NYC Digital Playbook outlines how city residents experience City services that increase equity and help all New Yorkers to participate in services.

Follow up with callers/text messages/internet chats to ensure connection to care

The contractor(s) will offer all eligible persons the option of receiving follow-up calls/texts/chats reminders of first appointments and other promotional messaging, support while awaiting an appointment, follow-up on concerning/risky situations, and/or confirmations of connections to care (including with the person to confirm that the first appointment has taken place). Eligibility shall be defined in the DOHMH approved policy and procedure manual. For persons who accept follow-up and have Medicaid Managed Care, 988/NYC Well will offer connection to a Medicaid Managed Care Organization Care Manager for interested persons, as well as those who are determined to be at higher risk including but not limited to those transferred to 911. NYC Well will confirm connection to care for those individuals who consent to receive follow-up contacts. This will include obtaining feedback from 911/EMS on the outcome of a warm hand-off to 911. For all follow ups, NYC Well will inquire if people engaged or reengaged in services. Risk levels will be defined in the DOHMH approved Policy and Procedure manual.

The contractor(s) will provide timely and appropriate outbound contact to referrals from DOHMH for people who contact DOHMH with questions and concerns that would benefit from 988/NYC Well's services. This process will be agreed upon in the Correspondence Tracking System (CTS) policy and procedure.

Anticipated Requirements:

The contractor(s) will be accredited by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL).



The contractor(s) will have demonstrated success integrating racial equity goals into its organization's vision and mission

The contractor(s) will have demonstrated success reducing racial disparities in its workplace, among its staff and in its service delivery

The contractor(s) will have demonstrated success operating a large-scale contact center with proven experience maintaining continuity of operations during human and natural disasters.

The contractor(s) will have a start-up plan to gradually ramp up operations between April 1, 2023 and June 30, 2023, with the ability to be fully operational at 12:00 am on July 1, 2023.

The contractor(s) would develop and implement a staffing plan to ensure that NYC Well performance indicators were achieved for an anticipated 500,000 contacts annually.

The contractor(s) will have demonstrated success providing telephonic or virtual crisis counseling and suicide prevention, emotional and peer support, information and referral to ongoing care for children and adults.

The contractor(s) will have a robust plan to develop and maintain a comprehensive database of behavioral health care resources in New York City, including crisis and non-crisis, clinical and non-clinical services and resources that address the social determinants of behavioral health.

The contractor(s) will have demonstrated success developing, maintaining and adapting an intuitive and functional website.

The contractor(s) will have demonstrated success developing clear reports and visualizations of large data sets.

Reporting Requirements:

The contractor(s) will collect and report on all aspects of the services outlined in this document. Reportable data includes, but is not limited to:

1. Daily reports to DOHMH on the number and percent of contacts answered, contacts abandoned, average speed of answer, and average handle time (each variable reported in total and separately by call, text and chat).
2. Weekly reports to DOHMH on all NYC Well performance indicators outlined above, in addition to total call handling staff (i.e., counselors and peers), person shifts, inbound contacts and ratio of contacts to person shifts.
3. Monthly reports to DOHMH on the content and outcome of all contacts, language of the person making contact, follow-up contacts made, descriptive data regarding demographics of person making contact, presenting concerns, core services provided and outcomes, including details regarding referrals,

staffing information and consumer survey results.

4. Monthly transfer of raw data will be provided to DOHMH which must include all data that corresponds to the aggregate data included in weekly and monthly data reports.
 - a. The contractor(s) will provide an opportunity for all contacts to complete a feedback survey at the end of each call, text or chat, in addition to having the option to agree to complete a survey prior to the call onset. The feedback survey should be brief but allow for feedback in all service areas.
 - b. The contractor(s) will participate in all DOHMH quality improvement efforts and initiatives which includes but not limited to space on-site for DOHMH employees to provide quality monitoring.
 - c. The contractor(s) will provide remote access to DOHMH to monitor 988/NYC Well contacts using the Contractor(s) data/technology/telephony systems.
 - d. In all instances, the contractor(s) will collect data from all partners and subcontractor(s) and would incorporate that data into all reports to DOHMH.
 - e. The contractor(s) must themselves, and require their subcontractor(s) , to apply strict security and confidentiality safeguards with respect to the data generated through the services performed on behalf of DOHMH and shall hold such data strictly confidential in accordance with all applicable Federal, state and local laws, rules, and regulations applicable thereto.
 - f. The contractor(s) ' information and technology division must comply with DOHMH security requirements and must comply with security protocols promulgated by the DOHMH's Division of Informatics, Information Technology, and Telecommunications (DIIT). Subcontracted partnerships that capture the range of modalities and functions described here are acceptable to meet all the service needs.
5. An interactive, near real-time dynamic dashboard of all elements of 988/NYC Well data.

Proposed Term of the Contract:

DOHMH anticipates that the term of each contract resulting from this RFP will be nine (9) years in duration, contingent on the availability of funding. The contractor(s) will commence start-up activities April 1, 2023 and gradually ramp up to assumed full operations on July 1, 2023.

Procurement Timeline:

It is anticipated that the RFP issuance date would be in Spring 2022, with proposals due in Early Summer 2022. Anticipated award decisions will be made Fall 2022.



Planned Method of Evaluating Proposals:

DOHMH anticipates that proposals will be evaluated based on proposers' relevant experience and proposed approach to the scope of services; program monitoring; data management; and reporting; racial equity, social justice and addressing health disparities; organizational capacity; including proposed staffing plan; and budget management.

Funding Information:

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene anticipates awarding up to (3) contracts totaling \$335,000,000 for nine (9) years.

Use of PASSPort and Prequalification

To respond to the forthcoming **NYC WELL RFP**, organizations must have an account and an Approved HHS Accelerator PQL qualification status in PASSport. Proposals and Prequalification applications will ONLY be accepted through PASSport. If you do not have a PASSport account or Approved PASSport HHS Accelerator PQL Application, please visit nyc.gov/passport to get started. If you have any questions about your HHS Accelerator PQL status or for assistance with creating a PASSport account, submit an inquiry to the [MOCS Service Desk](#)!

Contact Information/Deadline for comments:

DOHMH invites written comments on this Concept Paper through March 17, 2022. Please email RFP@health.nyc.gov and indicate **NYC Well Concept Paper** in the subject line of the email.