



Public Health
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Canada

Implementing 988: A national three-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crises in Canada

Briefing with the
International Association of Fire Fighters Jack Jessop Biennial
Canadian Policy Conference
June 26, 2023

PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING CANADIANS
TO IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH

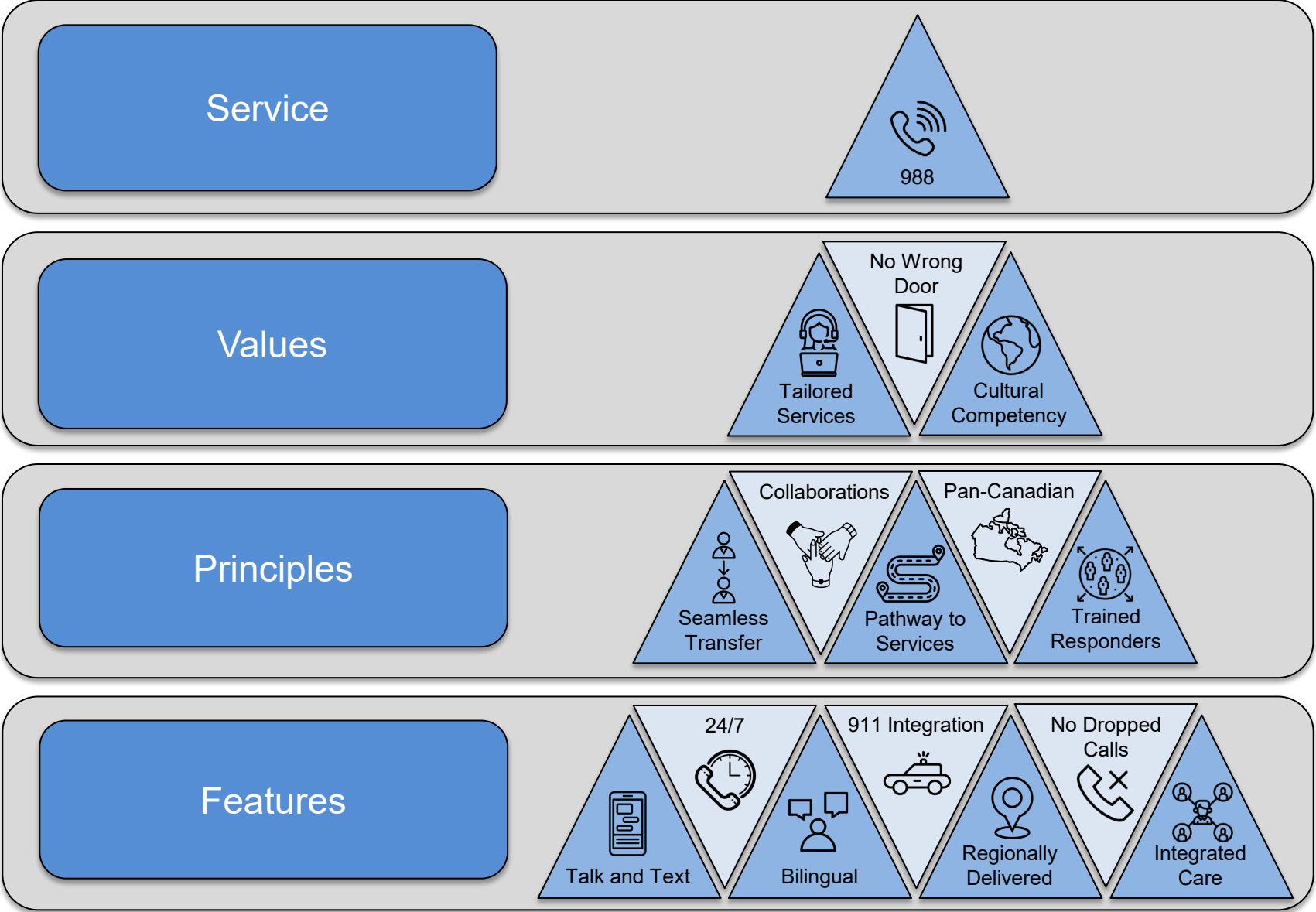


Objectives

- To provide an overview of the 988 initiative, its implementation, and current status.
- To discuss the potential impacts on public safety organizations in Canada responding to mental health crisis calls.

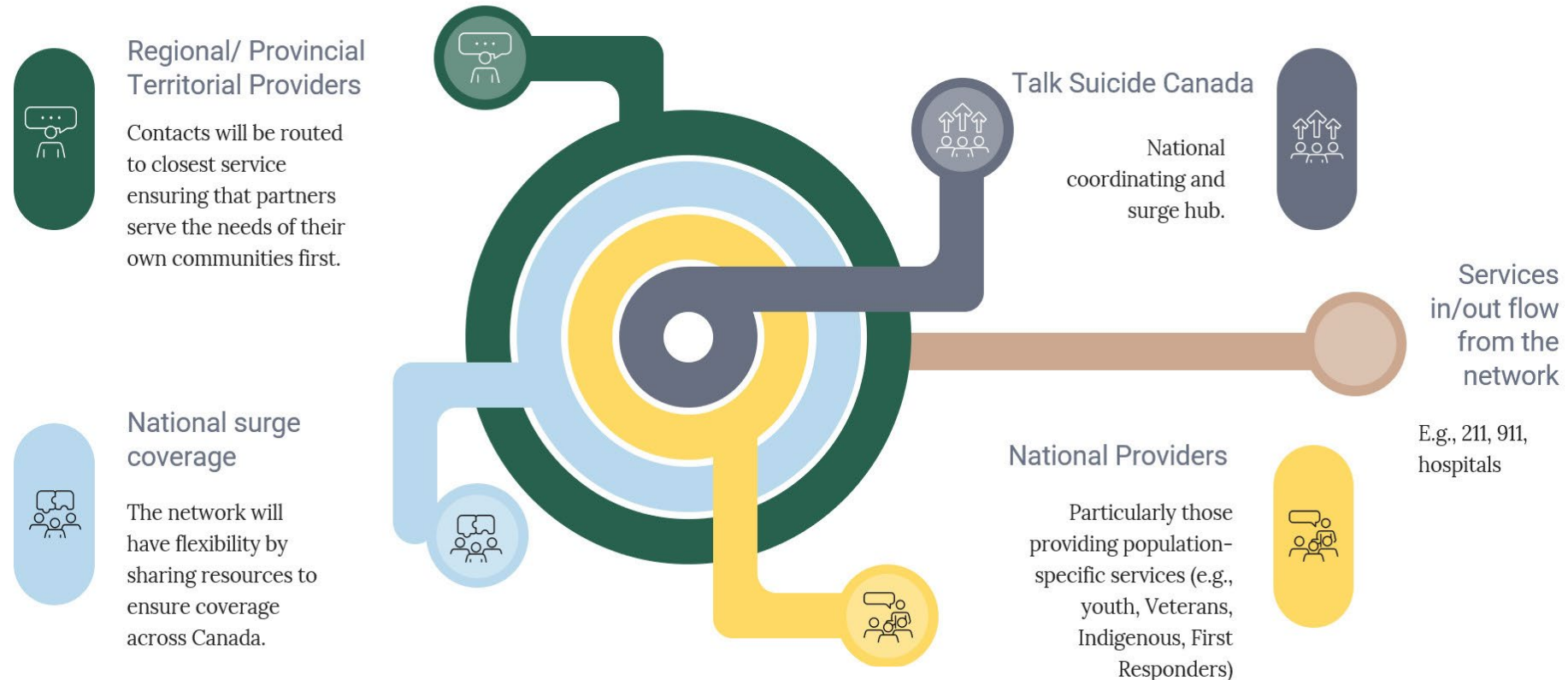
Overview of 988: A National Three-Digit Number

- In December 2020, a Motion to establish a national 3-digit suicide prevention number passed unanimously in the House of Commons.
- Over 140 municipalities across Canada have since passed resolutions in support of a 3-digit number for suicide prevention and sent letters of support to the Minister of Health.
- In August 2022, the CRTC announced the adoption of 988 as the number for calls and texts for people in Canada in need of immediate support in a suicide or mental distress crisis. The number will be in place November 30, 2023.
- The 988 service will provide effective, timely, safe and accessible service 24/7/365 to all Canadians in need when and where they need it most, in French and English.
- PHAC has selected the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) as the lead organization to oversee the coordination of service delivery, building on its experience in delivering Talk Suicide – the current pan-Canadian Suicide Prevention Service.
- Various 988 governance committees have been established and meet regularly:
 - Advisory Committee, Technology Working Group, Service Delivery Working Group.



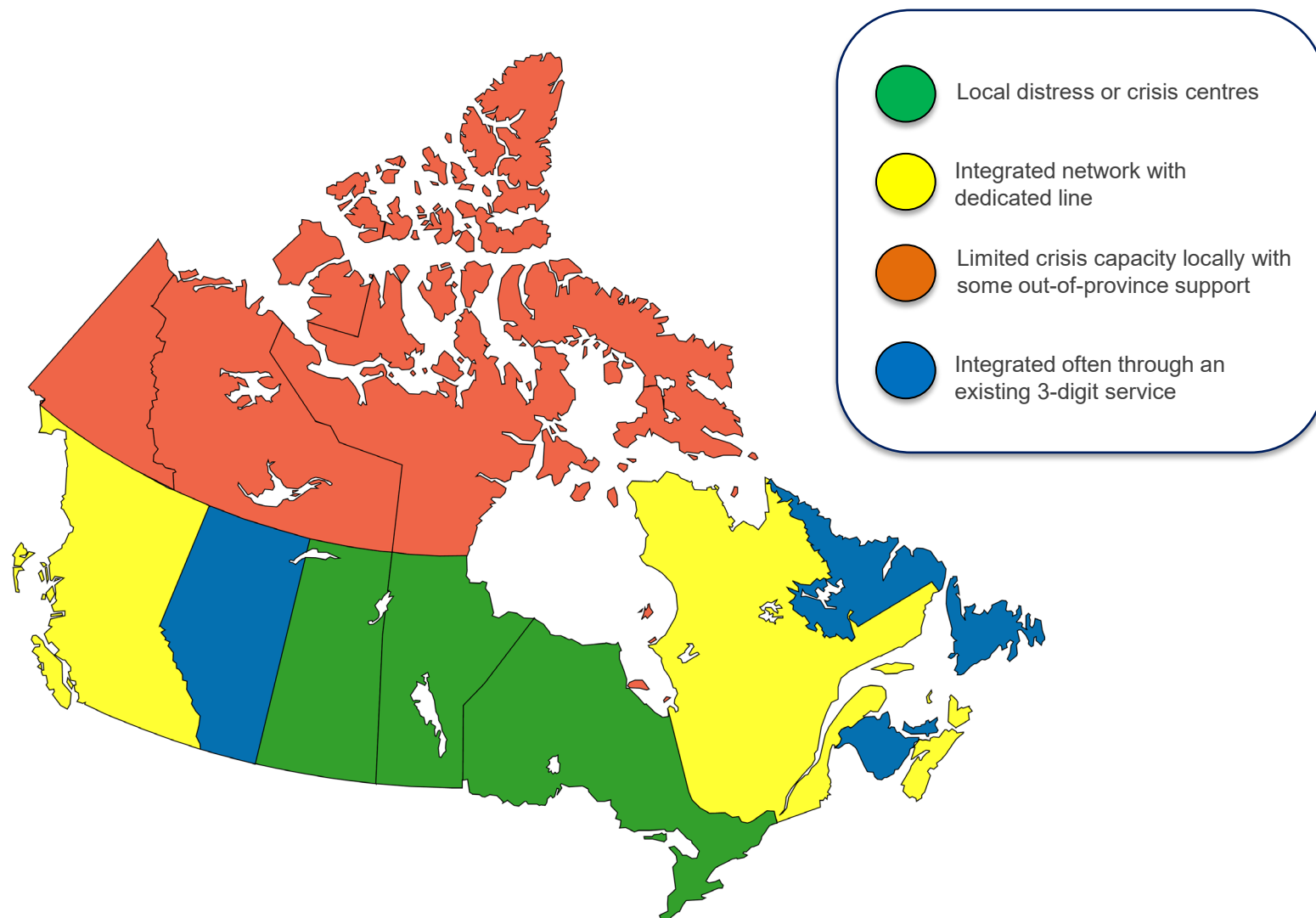
Proposed network approach

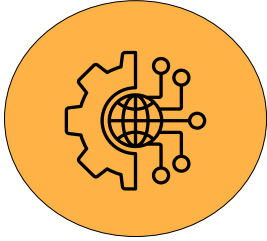
Serving local communities and ensuring national coverage



Engagement with Provinces and Territories

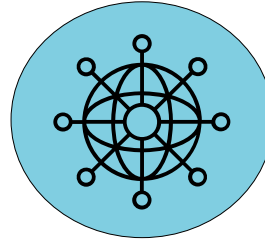
Discussions in January 2023 with Provinces and Territories highlighted that existing mechanisms and capacity vary across jurisdictions.





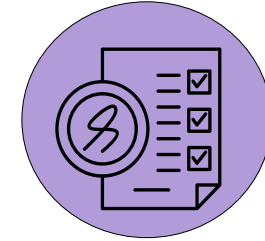
Creating the 988 Network

- Build on the existing capacity of local, regional and national distress lines, as well as existing provincially-led distress lines and services.
- Leverage the expertise and capacity of population specific lines for warm transfers, as appropriate.
- Connect into existing systems where feasible and in agreement with provinces and territories, such as 811 and 211.
- Ensure 988 partners meet core requirements (e.g., response time, competencies for responders).



Mobilizing Technology

- Ensure technology solutions are in place to ensure cross-system interoperability between various distress lines and services.
 - Telecommunication upgrades are underway, including upgrades to 10-digit local dialing where 7-digit dialing is still in use.
 - Technology Task Team is in place.



Establishing Core Requirements & Protocols

- Ensure robust suicide prevention intervention across the 988 network – building on the experience of Talk Suicide Canada.
- Establish training and requirements for responders
- Establish various situation-specific, and transfer protocols, for example:
 - Transfers to 911 – including exchange of information and coordination in high-risk situations
 - Transfers from 911 to 988 – when is it appropriate?

Understanding the Potential Impacts on Public Safety Organizations in Canada

- Currently emergency calls by, or on the behalf of, individuals experiencing a mental health crisis are typically received by either:
 - 911, the emergency number available in most of Canada; or,
 - An existing distress line (e.g., local line, provincial line, 811, 211) – where emergency situations may be escalated to 9-1-1 for wellness checks.
- Currently, in Talk Suicide, services from Northern 911 are used to dispatch to local 911 services.
- The 988 service (i.e., a network of distress lines), will be distinct from 911 services
 - Protocols required to standardize transfer of calls from 988 to 911, and possibly from 911 to 988.
- Based on 988 demand estimations, which were calculated using the US experience, there is an expected increase in the number of interactions (calls and texts). As the 988 service is implemented, it will be critical to monitor its impact on policing and other public safety organizations.

Discussion:

1. What impacts on public safety organizations might you expect from the introduction of 988 in Canada?
2. What are the main requirements needed for public safety organizations to prepare for the implementation of 988? What is needed at launch? What can take place in the medium and long term?
3. Are there any gaps that need to be filled (e.g., training, collaboration with social services, etc.)?
4. What are the unique regional needs for public safety organizations to effectively support the implementation of the 988 service?
5. What strategies can be employed to engage public safety stakeholders to raise awareness of upcoming changes?

What are the main indicators required to measure the impacts?