



Bringing 911/988 Interoperability to Scale

By supporting 911 public safety answering (PSAPs) and 988 call center coordination, [Clear Pathways](#) is working to ensure that people experiencing behavioral health crises have a path to help across Ohio and the nation. Since 2022, Clear Pathways has developed and continuously refined an [Interoperability Strategy](#). This brief, the second in a three-part series, provides strategies for bringing 911/988 interoperability to scale.

What Is “Scaling”?

Scaling refers to the thoughtful expansion of proven solutions, with the goal of reaching a significant portion of those affected and sustaining impact over time.¹ Clear Pathways emphasizes building scalable systems that can adapt to emerging trends and ongoing shifts in the behavioral health landscape. When applied to 911/988 interoperability, this means moving beyond isolated pilot efforts toward a coordinated system of care. A coordinated system of care can respond to behavioral health crises with the same level of structure and consistency seen in fire, emergency medical services, and law enforcement responses.

Advancing Promising Practices

During the Crisis Response Pilot, Clear Pathways collaborated with five Ohio sites to develop or expand warm transfer² criteria from 911 to 988. This process revealed several shared challenges as well as new opportunities for how 988 may support 911 callers. To facilitate statewide scaling of 911/988 interoperability, we—with our partners at [Mathematica](#)—developed several recommendations to address these challenges.



National Support

It’s ideal for local systems to be supported by national efforts. Federal agencies (e.g., the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) [soon to be part of the Administration for a Healthy America], [Federal Communications Commission](#)) and national organizations (e.g., [National Emergency Number Association](#), [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#)) have developed standards and issued guidance to promote interoperability.

Challenges, Recommendations, and Anticipated Benefits

Challenge	Recommendation	Anticipated Benefits
Liability Concerns: Pilot sites reported spending significant time addressing liability concerns from transferring calls from 911 to 988. These concerns often centered on documentation requirements and hesitancy from PSAP personnel, who feared legal repercussions from transferring calls without clear guidance or protocols.	Develop Leadership Approval Processes: Advance interoperability efforts through formal leadership approval at the state or county level. Interoperability plans are more likely to succeed when senior officials explicitly authorize call transfers from 911 to 988 and clarify expectations around liability protections and documentation practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotes consistent interoperability practices across jurisdictions• Reduces liability concerns for PSAP leadership and call takers• Establishes shared understanding of documentation protocols between public safety and behavioral health• Provides legal clarity around three-way calls and medical information redaction

¹ NYU Marron Institute of Urban Management. (n.d.). SCALE + Lab overview. marroninstitute.nyu.edu/projects/upcoming-programming

² A warm transfer occurs when “one employee answers a call and then transfers the call to a different employee or location and passes on any relevant information so that the caller doesn’t have to repeat themselves” National Emergency Number Association. (2025). *NENA standard for 9-1-1/988 interactions*. cdn.ymaws.com/www.nena.org/resource/resmgr/standards/NENA-STA-045.1-202Y_911-988_.pdf

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Technology Needs: Many PSAPs and 988 centers operate outdated or inconsistent technology systems. Manual data collection, lack of interoperability between platforms, and concerns about data privacy all create significant barriers to effective call transfer and outcome analysis.	Prioritize Technology Investments: Support PSAPs and 988 centers in modernizing their technology infrastructure. Automated data collection and reporting systems should replace manual tracking. Technology upgrades must also be designed to uphold stringent privacy protections for individuals calling 988 during a crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves the caller experience during 911 to 988 transfers • Reduces administrative burden on frontline and data staff • Enables stronger analysis of behavioral health trends in 911 and 988 data • Enhances data-sharing capabilities while maintaining compliance with privacy standards
Workforce: Both PSAPs and 988 call centers struggled with limited staffing capacity. Staff shortages and time constraints often prevented personnel from dedicating resources to developing and implementing new interoperability procedures.	Expand Resources: Provide additional funding and operational support to bolster staffing at both PSAPs and 988 centers. Investments should support developing interoperability protocols, managing increased call volumes, and strengthening cross-agency collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables smaller PSAPs to participate in interoperability planning and procedural updates • Supports 988 centers in coordinating with PSAPs and effectively managing call transfers • Increases capacity to track and report metrics • Ensures sufficient staff coverage to meet the demand driven by public awareness and system expansion
Call Identification: Effective 911/988 interoperability heavily depends on the ability of 911 call takers to accurately identify behavioral health-related calls and assess their level of risk. Without consistent training or protocols, these calls may be misclassified, delaying access to appropriate behavioral health support.	Improve 911's Behavioral Health Call Identification: Invest in targeted training for 911 staff that consolidates established best practices, emerging research, and real-world examples from across the field. In addition, revise Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) protocols to better align with behavioral health response needs. Local and state leaders should continue to elevate the importance of 911 to 988 call transfers as a core element of comprehensive crisis care systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances early identification and accurate routing of behavioral health calls • Strengthens 988's role as a primary entry point to crisis services • Promotes call assessment consistency through revised EMD protocols • Reinforces system-wide commitment to prioritizing 911 to 988 transfers
Framework Limitations: The SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum served as a useful framework for conceptualizing 911/988 interoperability. However, the continuum does not fully capture the specific operational, clinical, and relational dynamics required for effective interoperability in the context of behavioral health crisis response.	Develop a Behavioral Health Interoperability Continuum: Use findings from this evaluation to design a dedicated framework tailored to behavioral health interoperability. This continuum can help clarify developmental stages, guide system improvements, and integrate behavioral health considerations into broader crisis response planning. The model should build on existing tools while allowing flexibility for local adaptation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes a clear framework for evaluating and enhancing 911/988 interoperability • Facilitates stronger linkages across the broader crisis care continuum • Supports consistent progress across jurisdictions while honoring local contexts and capacities



About Clear Pathways

Clear Pathways is an initiative of [Peg's Foundation](#) designed to sustainably align systems for improved care to individuals experiencing a behavioral health emergency.

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