

988's LGBTQ+ Hotline to Relaunch this Year. But the Group that Helped Start it Might Be Excluded

The Trevor Project may not be allowed to offer the service it had helped develop for the lifeline



Matt Slocum/AP

By Associated Press
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The Trump administration is moving to restart the specialized LGBTQ+ option for youth who contact the 988 crisis intervention hotline, but the group that helped pioneer the idea is being shut out.

The Trevor Project, the leading nonprofit for suicide prevention in LGBTQ+ young people, may not be allowed to offer the service it had helped develop for the 988 Lifeline just a few years ago.

The 988 hotline, which has been dubbed the 911 for mental health emergencies, is credited with reducing teen and young adult suicide deaths. It offers specialized options for certain groups, such as veterans and Spanish speakers, but in July the Trump administration stopped offering the “press 3” option for LGBTQ+ youth with a month’s notice.

The administration said it ended the service because the funding ran out. It is now working to bring it back by the end of the year because Congress directed officials to allocate \$33 million toward LGBTQ+-specific interventions for youth.

However, The Trevor Project might not be allowed to offer the services it developed and specializes in.

Dr. Christine Yu Moutier, chief medical officer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, said it “would not make sense” to keep The Trevor Project ineligible to help and it is a “long-standing, high-quality and trusted resource” to LGBTQ+ people.

The development is the latest in what's become a chaotic chapter for the service for LGBTQ+ youth, who attempt suicide at higher rates than the general population. Leaving The Trevor Project out is raising concerns about the relaunched service, especially given the Trump administration's broader attempt to unravel protections for transgender and non-binary Americans at a time when more of them are reaching out in crisis.

"The Trump administration never should have shut down the 'press 3' option and put young Americans at further risk," said Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin, who has led a bipartisan push to restore the service. She called on the president to restore the service "without needless limitations and with the most qualified, experienced people answering the phone calls and text messages from these vulnerable young people."

The Trevor Project handled the bulk of 988's LGBTQ+ youth services

The lifeline's specialized service allowed people to press 3, text "PRIDE" or use online chat to reach counselors who were specially trained to work with LGBTQ+ young people.

The umbrella of services broadly called the "Press 3" option fielded 1.6 million contacts while it was in operation, according to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Trevor Project handled about half of the program's traffic.

When it canceled the "Press 3" option, federal officials said LGBTQ+ youth could still get help through 988's general services, but it would "no longer silo" the services "to focus on serving all help seekers," including LGBTQ+ youth.

The relaunch of 'Press 3' may not include The Trevor Project

Now, the nonprofit that administers the 988 service, Vibrant Emotional Health, has called for applications to manage the return of the "Press 3" lines.

But applications are limited to crisis centers that are "current and active" members of the 988 network. The Trevor Project is not currently active — only because the administration canceled the service it specialized in.

The six other crisis centers that worked on the LGBTQ+ youth program are active in the 988 network. They work with the general population as well as LGBTQ+ people. Only The Trevor Project had a specific mission to serve LGBTQ+ youth.

"This troubling development indicates a dangerous step toward degrading the clinical standards to serve high risk groups that the 'press 3' specialized services were founded on," said Jaymes Black, CEO of The Trevor Project, in a statement to the AP.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services did not directly respond to questions about The Trevor Project's eligibility, saying that the department is working with Vibrant to restore the service by the end of the year as directed by Congress.

Moutier said other crisis centers are providing high-quality care for LGBTQ+ youth. LGBTQ+ young people who are often marginalized and bullied need "psychological safety" because they don't always

trust institutions to help them. She said it's too soon to say she's worried about the relaunch, but how it is brought back is just as important as the fact that it is.

"I think there's the potential for great good, and some harm as well," she said.

Concerns shroud relaunch of the 'Press 3' option

Even though the service itself may be restored, how it will operate is unclear — and LGBTQ+ advocates are concerned, in part because the Trump administration has indicated that its anti-transgender policies will influence how the program relaunches.

This month, a SAMHSA leader wrote to Illinois Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi that the agency needed to assess the "most appropriate approach" to restart the service while complying with a Trump executive order that targets the rights of transgender people, claiming "gender ideology extremism" is a threat to women and declaring there are only two sexes.

The Trevor Project's Black worries that the next iteration of 988's LGBTQ+ youth services "may exclude transgender and nonbinary youth entirely." The organization still independently runs its own 24-7 crisis line for LGBTQ+ young people.

Studies have shown that LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk of suicide, including a 2024 analysis by the CDC that found 26% transgender and gender-questioning students attempted suicide in the past year. That's compared with 5% of cisgender male and 11% of cisgender female students.

"While anti-LGBTQ+ politics may be altering the very purpose of this lifeline created to help save young LGBTQ+ lives, it is critical to make clear that politics has no place in suicide prevention," Black said.