

December 2025

988 Colorado “Sand Box Summit” Report



Prepared for:
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988 Director
Colorado Behavioral Health Administration

Introduction

In 2020, Congress designated the new 988 dialing code to be operated through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) considers 988 as a first step towards a transformed crisis care system in America, offering people with mental health and substance use-related needs “someone to talk to.” This immediate intervention has helped by providing 24/7 confidential support, reducing feelings of distress in callers, and de-escalating mental health crises to prevent unnecessary emergency room visits.

Under Senate Bill 21-154, Colorado established the 988 Enterprise and a monthly phone bill surcharge to help cover 988's operational costs. Referred to formally as the “988 Colorado Mental Health Line”, and its goal is *“To ensure that every person of Colorado has access to immediate, compassionate, and effective behavioral health crisis support through the 988 Colorado Mental Health Line by providing strategic oversight, fostering statewide collaboration, and promoting public awareness.”*

988 Colorado is essentially accountable to two entities. The Colorado Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) is the state-level administrative body responsible for overseeing behavioral health services across Colorado. Among its roles are ensuring access, setting regulatory policy, coordinating statewide systems, and overseeing non-Medicaid public funding. The 988 Enterprise Board (i.e., 988 Colorado / 988 Enterprise) is the governing entity created to oversee Colorado's statewide 988 crisis line architecture. Under Colorado law, the Enterprise Board is responsible for governing the infrastructure, funding, and policies related to 988 in the state, including oversight of surcharges, contracts with contact centers, and coordination with crisis services and stabilization resources.

Colorado Senate Bill 25-236 consolidated crisis response services, and 988 has quickly become the state of Colorado's single point of contact for immediate mental health and suicide prevention support. In the Fall of 2025, 988 Colorado released a three-year strategic plan that builds on that foundation, charting a course for growth and sustainability over the next three years.

Colorado repurchased the 988 vendor in 2024 and has, over the last year, transitioned from Colorado Crisis Services to Solari Crisis and Human Services (Solari). Additionally, 988 Colorado has multiple other key stakeholders. Coordination across all partners is vital to ensuring the state's successful management and development of crisis services. With this in mind, 988 Colorado organized the first-ever convening of all its partners, with a one-day retreat titled the “Sandbox Summit.”

Third Horizon was brought in by 988 Colorado as a strategic advisor to facilitate the summit, enabling staff to participate more actively in the event. Third Horizon is a strategic, boutique advisory firm focused on designing integrated health and social systems so all communities, families, and individuals can thrive. Through its work across three advisory areas – [behavioral health](#), [community health](#), and [payment design and analytics](#) – the firm offers a 360° view of complex challenges across three horizons (past, present, and future) to help industry leaders and policymakers interpret signals and trends and develop upstream innovations, strategies, and structural changes that maximize the value of the yearly spend on health care.

The summit objectives were threefold:

- Celebrate the collective achievements of 988 Colorado
- Surface system challenges and opportunities to improve how partners work together
- Collaboratively shape the future of 988 operations, outreach and strategy.

The 2025–2028 Strategic Plan served as the framework for the day. The 988 Colorado team sought input from each of its partners on the strategic plan, particularly regarding what would be required to implement it successfully and how to best collaborate across multiple agencies to achieve the shared vision.

This report provides a summary of the meeting, stakeholder input, and recommended next steps.



Participants

Organization	Attendees
988	Gordon Coombes Bronwyn Roland Harla Knapp Norman Quidachay Chloe Rekow Nate Clay
988 Enterprise Board	Yangmee Lor
The Evaluation Center (TEC)	Jeffrey Proctor Lauren Gant
Amelie	Kit Dahltorp Hana Fitchlee Christine Anderson
SE2	Alvina Vasquez Mikhail Talley Brandon Zelasko
Solari	Cassie Villegas Eric Skufca Jaime Brewer Rain Bondy Andrew Erwin Beth Brady
Behavioral Health Administration (BHA)	Shadia Lemus George Laumeyer Commissioner Smith Carey Boelter Kayla Martin Calli Tucker
Rocky Mountain Health Plans	Maureen Carney
Signal	Jenn Conrad
Third Horizon (Facilitator)	Mindy Klowden Jessica Casebolt

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Mindy facilitated introductions and an icebreaker activity, inviting attendees to share experiences of getting lost and finding their way. Commissioner Danette R. Smith and 988 Director Gordon Coombes provided opening remarks.

Comments from Danette R. Smith, Commissioner, Behavioral Health Administration

Commissioner Danette Smith opened by highlighting the icebreaker's message, noting that "getting lost" is a natural part of life and mirrors the challenges and learning inherent in the work being done for 988. She acknowledged the vital role everyone in the room plays in supporting people with behavioral health needs across the state. The Commissioner also reviewed the Behavioral Health Administration's goals for 988, providing context for the summit discussions.



BHA Goals, Cross walked with 988

- **Access to Behavioral Health Services** – 988 reduces barriers and increases access through a single, trusted entry point.
- **Statewide Behavioral Health Crisis System** – 988 is the hub of crisis stabilization, care coordination, and system integration.
- **Prevention and Upstream Support for Children and Youth** – 988 outreach normalizes help-seeking and connects youth and families to support earlier.
- **Streamline Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Intersection** – 988 provides diversion from law enforcement toward behavioral health alternatives.

Comments from 988 Director Gordon Coombes

988 Director Gordon Coombes framed the summit as an opportunity for all the 988 partner organizations to come together, address challenges, and develop solutions. He emphasized that the 988 strategic plan is a living document, designed to guide and evolve in response to the work. Director Coombes also reflected on participants' personal experiences shared during the icebreaker and noted the broader cultural shift in mental health, with 988 increasingly recognized as a trusted resource.

988 Story: Yangmee Lor

Colorado Governor Jared Polis appointed Yangmee Lor to the 988 Crisis Hotline Enterprise Board of Directors. She shared her personal experience using 988 via the text option, describing how it allowed her to connect with someone who would listen, believe her story, and provide support. This experience inspired her to create a nonprofit and host the first Mental Health Equity Summit for Hmong Women. She emphasized that 988 is particularly valuable because it allows individuals to reach out for help outside their immediate community, providing a sense of privacy and safety.

988 Colorado Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives, 2025-2028

Goal 1: Build Trust and Awareness of 988 as Colorado's Mental Health Front Door

- Objective 1: Expand public awareness of when and how to use 988
- Objective 2: Reduce stigma and increase trust across diverse communities
- Objective 3: Strengthen outreach and ensure access for populations with higher risk factors or reduced access to care

Goal 2: Strengthen System Integration and Care Coordination

- Objective 4: Achieve decentralization from the national 988 system (e.g., independence from Vibrant-managed network) to improve caller experience, data access and service delivery
- Objective 5: Ensure smooth transitions from crisis intervention to ongoing care through strong linkages to Colorado LIFTS, RAEs and providers
- Objective 6: Expand coordination with 911 and first responders, increasing the use of behavioral health alternatives to law enforcement responses

Goal 3: Ensure Long-Term Sustainability of the 988 Enterprise

- Objective 7:
 - a) Maintain stable funding through the telecommunication surcharge
 - b) Monitor the cap of \$.30/line and prepare for future legislative action if adjustments are required due to inflation or cost growth
 - c) Diversify supplemental funding without reliance on the state General Fund

Goal 4: Strengthen Organizational and Governance Capacity

- Objective 8: Build a strong 988 staff team by hiring key positions, aligning roles and responsibilities, and distributing decision-making authority
- Objective 9:
 - A) Ensure effective Enterprise Board governance through right-sized membership, updated by-laws with the Interagency Agreement, and streamlined communication and meeting protocols
 - B) Foster collaboration and accountability through regular engagement with staff, board members, and partners.

Connecting the Strategic Plan to the Discussion

Mindy provided context for the strategic plan, noting federal-level challenges such as flat funding for 988 despite significant growth in call volume, federal agency restructuring and downsizing, and imminent changes to Medicaid that may increase the number of uninsured and exacerbate behavioral health needs. Yet, Colorado has a strong foundation with dedicated funding, consolidated crisis pathways, and effective leadership.

Mindy reviewed the goals, objectives, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the strategic plan, setting the stage for breakout group discussions focused on strengths, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Session 1: Strengths and Challenges in the Sandbox

In each session, attendees were strategically divided into breakout groups that included diverse and complementary perspectives. The groups were provided with discussion prompts that focused on identifying what is working well across Colorado's crisis system, where collaboration feels misaligned, and what barriers may hinder progress. After the breakout discussions, participants reconvened, with each breakout group reporting its insights to the whole group. Key themes and responses from each group are summarized below.

Prompt: How are we working well together now?

- 988 stakeholders and partners work well together and support one another in the work.
- There is increased public awareness of 988, reflecting the efforts of the group.
- More diverse, trusted sources are discussing and promoting 988.
- Access to data is working well from the viewpoint of internal agency players.
- 988 and its partner agencies are listening to the community to address barriers, such as stigma, and inform decision-making.

Prompt: How can we build on that collaboration to ensure the best results?

- Continue the good work already underway and foster ongoing relationships with external partners.
- Further streamline services and improve education for community partners, especially law enforcement and first responders.
- Enhance 988 branding and visibility within walk-in clinics.
- Provide additional education and outreach for schools.
- Involve the right people in these conversations and create more opportunities to bring partners together.
- Avoid assumptions by using research and data, which helps secure funding and builds trust with consumers.
- Improve data access and sharing across agencies.
- Identify and engage with key community influencers in rural areas.

Prompt: Where do we feel misaligned or stuck?

- There are opportunities for stronger collaboration with suicide prevention efforts, such as through CDPHE.
- Improve opportunities for better data integration.
- Determine processes to close the loop when communities provide feedback.
- Clarify the role of 988 board members and determine how they can contribute most effectively to the organization's goals.
- Increase education for elected officials and advocate for 988 to safeguard against administrative changes and funding cuts.
- Address call-routing challenges, such as when callers with out-of-state area codes have negative experiences, which reflects poorly on Colorado.

Prompt: What prevents us from doing our best work?

- Lack of workforce and funding.
- We need to define areas of duplication.
- This is the first time many of us have come together in one room. We need more convenings and a structure to support collaboration.

Prompt: What challenges are we not naming?

- Some behavioral health players in the state may resist new ideas.
- There are opportunities to better align with CDPHE/the Office of Suicide Prevention
- The state operates within a specific cadence. There is a need for an organizational chart that clearly defines who is responsible for what and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each entity.
- Colorado's unique marketing budget creates challenges. It should be determined how agencies align marketing in the community with what is happening in the call center.
- Language services vary. Spanish and English are available via text, with additional languages supported through third-party services.
- Communities want more long-term, sustained engagement with 988.
- Storytelling is a missed opportunity—staff working in 988 and BHA are community members themselves, and their stories could help build trust.
- There are concerns about AI. People want reassurance that they are speaking with a real person.
- Need more clinicians answering calls.
- Media relations can be challenging. The 988 message still needs to be amplified.
- Two crisis systems (CCS and 988) operate under the same umbrella but are not fully aligned. Greater integration could be beneficial.
- Showing volume data is often treated as the primary measure of success, but it isn't always the best indicator. There are differing views on what constitutes positive or negative data. Some view high volume as a measure of success, but others believe that lower volume reflects how the program effectively connects people to resources and improves outcomes. How can we better tell the story?
- Mobile providers need to be held accountable when they cancel calls or create barriers to access.

Key Themes: Strengths and Challenges

Some common themes that emerged across the participants included:

- The importance of continuing to demonstrate the impact of 988 using not only data, but also human experience stories that demonstrate how the system is saving lives.
- The need for stronger coordination across the system, including with mobile crisis providers.
- Opportunities to provide more clarity and structure around how all partners work together.
- The importance of targeted efforts and resources to reach vulnerable communities.
- Making better use of data by making sure that it is accessible, well understood, and meaningfully analyzed.
- There is a need for clear expectations and defined roles and responsibilities to ensure effective use of resources.

Session 2: What Can We Build Together?

The second session invited participants to focus on solution-building. The breakout groups were organized by areas of expertise: **Market Makers** (marketing and communications), **Operations Optimizers** (program and operations), **Wealth Weavers** (finance and policy), and **Care Connect** (care coordination). Each group explored what success could look like in the coming years, using discussion prompts to guide their conversations. Key themes and responses from each group are summarized below. Participants were enthusiastic about working across the multiple partner agencies to brainstorm implementation tactics.

Discussion prompts:

- What would success look like in 2026? How would it be measured?
- What does Colorado need from 988 that we're not yet delivering?
- How do we ensure equity, access, and excellence in crisis care?
- How do we work together better?

Market Makers

- Success would involve increased awareness of and engagement with 988 and would reduce stigma among targeted populations where it has been most prevalent. Knowing gaps and opportunities around data would also be a key element of success.
- 988 needs to take action to address the concerns that are raised in the requested feedback.
- 988 also needs to build trust with parents so that youth can reach out for help.
- 988 can enhance marketing efforts by utilizing printed materials in outreach and education.
- Bringing in additional stakeholders to the strategic process is also an opportunity to ensure progress.

Operations Optimizers

- Move toward a "front door" model, where 988 serves as the seamless access point for crisis care.
- Implement robust data collection and reporting throughout the system.
- Enable mobile teams to fully utilize Solari's GPS software (complete integration).
- Develop an individualized peer support line with independent funding. Currently, this is accessed through 988.
- Measure the volume of calls coming in through PSAPs (Public Safety Answering Points)
- Currently, there is no interactive data dashboard to share with the community.
- More community partners, specifically clinics and mobile crisis providers, need to be invited to these conversations.

Wealth Weavers

- There is financial uncertainty as this is the last year of the \$4 million SAMHSA grant.
- The phone surcharge, which provides funding for 988, will reach its cap starting January 1, 2026. It will be essential to monitor how the finances unfold and determine the spending rate.
- 988 Colorado as an Enterprise, can raise private funds. It is important to seek out opportunities, such as sponsorships or co-branding partnerships with major organizations.
- There may be opportunities to reduce existing costs or find efficiencies and use those funds elsewhere.
- Hospital partnerships may be a strategic opportunity given 988's value proposition in diverting people from the emergency room, which results in significant cost savings, especially since many of those individuals are uninsured.

Care Connect:

- Improve care coordination across providers and the network of first responders.
- Explore ways to operationalize a “no wrong door” approach and achieve true integration of providers.
- Memorandums of understanding would be needed for consistency and standardization of referrals.
- To achieve success, there should be a consistent experience over time for callers.
- Clear goals should be articulated to partners with an understanding of what those goals mean for them.
- Colorado needs better coordination between systems and better integration of technology.
- It is essential to bring agencies together to foster a deeper understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- To improve equity, data is needed on the populations being served; however, a sensitive approach is necessary, as asking demographic questions can put individuals in a vulnerable position.
- It is important to take the time to assess what people want rather than simply providing a list of services that may not fully address their needs.
- Decentralization of 988 is needed to bring decisions back to local stakeholders rather than being nationally directed. The state relinquishes a significant amount of control in exchange for receiving funding through the \$4 million grant.
- It may be worth considering the addition of a “lived experience workgroup” that all partner agencies would have access to, to better understand the community being served.
- There are opportunities to further cultivate collaborations with The Office of Suicide Prevention.

Key Themes: What Can We Build Together

Some common themes that emerged across the participants included:

- Stronger system coordination and collaboration. This could involve bringing more partners to the table, improving integration across providers and first responders, and clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Improved data infrastructure and data usage are necessary, including an interactive data dashboard and a more targeted application of data to measure equity within the system.
- Sustainable funding and efficient use of resources by preparing for the end of the SAMHSA grant, monitoring surcharge limits, exploring private fundraising, and evaluating cost efficiencies.
- Expand outreach, engagement, and stakeholder inclusion.



Session 3: Sculpting the 988 Roadmap

In the final session, groups were asked to review the key performance indicators (KPIs) that correspond to their focus areas under the strategic objectives. Generally, participants indicated support for the KPIs included in the strategic plan and encouraged a more granular level of specificity in measuring success.

The feedback shared in the report outs is summarized below.

Discussion prompts:

- What are the priority actions to achieve the strategic plan objectives?
- Are there any different ways you would suggest formulating or approaching the KPIs and success measures?
- What structure will work best to create shared ownership for these objectives, action steps, and KPIs?

Market Makers

- KPIs should track improvements in public awareness and understanding, outreach effectiveness, access, stigma reduction, and improved trust.
 - What stigmas exist now, and what are different organizations already doing to address this issue?
 - Being thorough in how we share data to tell the story will impact stigma reduction and improve trust.
- How can we inform the board about the information we have?
 - Structures are in place, but we need to strengthen the ways people can access that information.
- Additional planning is needed to determine what structure would enable coordination across marketing departments at different agencies.

Operations Optimizers:

- Steps should be taken to move toward decentralization. These include:
 - Work with SAMHSA and Vibrant to coordinate on lobbying.
 - Outline a process flow of what decentralization would look like.
 - Plan for how the volume of calls would flow.
 - Create a formal letter from the BHA for SAMHSA and Vibrant outlining the desired outcomes.
 - Come up with a plan to remove parts of the process that are currently not supported (i.e., questions that feel robotic that are required by the national funder).
 - Consider creating a local backup network for calls that are dropped.
- To implement decentralization, monthly meetings should take place between Solari, the BHA, and the Attorney General's office.
- A solution will be needed for geo-routing at the federal level.
- To reduce stigma, the peer population should be utilized. Peer support is its own unique service line and can be marketed to the public.

Wealth Weavers:

- Use data to craft a compelling message for potential funders.
- Determine a specific dollar amount to allocate for advertising.
- Identify what data is needed for case studies.
- Current funding allows a minimal service to be provided, but what can be added through additional funding?
 - A KPI would be the specific dollar amount needed. \$6 million is a rough estimate that is considered reasonable.
- A KPI is needed related to the phone surcharge to measure its correlation with the program's success and to demonstrate the value 988 brings to Colorado. This could include data points on cost savings resulting from jail and hospital diversion.

Care Connect:

- The two main objectives are seamless care coordination and 911 integration.
 - To achieve seamless care coordination, the next step would be to develop scripts and other materials, as well as compile a list of quick contact numbers.
 - Warm hand-offs to BHASOs and RAEs would be ideal.
 - To achieve 911 integration, there needs to be education about 988 and its benefits for the 911 model. Messaging needs to be scaled up to appropriate levels.

Key Themes: Sculpting the 988 Roadmap

Some common themes that emerged across the participants included:

- Groups emphasized KPIs that measure awareness, access, stigma reduction, trust, financial need, and cost savings. There is a shared interest in defining what data is needed and ensuring it tells a coherent story that supports both accountability and funding.
- Many comments focused on strengthening data collection, sharing, and interpretation across agencies.
- Shared planning, monthly meetings, and coordinated approaches to decentralization, messaging, and integration were common needs.
- There is interest in a more Colorado-controlled model, which would provide improved process flows, smoother warm hand-offs, and stronger integration between 988 and 911.



Moonshot Activity



As part of the summit, participants engaged in a “moonshot” activity intended to spark creative thinking, encourage bold ideas, and surface big-picture aspirations for the future of Colorado’s 988 system. The exercise invited attendees to imagine what 988 could become if constraints such as funding, staffing, and infrastructure were temporarily set aside. Participants were invited to share ideas by writing them on the wall in response to the question, “What is your moonshot or bold vision for 988?” The ideas below reflect the visionary concepts contributed during this activity.

- Same day access for outpatient mental health and SUD counseling in every region of the State
- More languages available without translation service
- 988 holds the bed registry and can see and give that info
- Like 911, every Coloradan knows about 988 and what it's used for
- Mental/behavioral health in Colorado isn't distributed across state agencies but is centralized for max impact (e.g. OSP, AGs office, HCPF)
- More staff funding
- MTs combined with secured transport for all
- data integration to enable care coordination between all behavioral health services
- Map video!
- 988 have the contact info for RAEs and BHASOs clearly identified
- 988 website includes a "feedback" button that says "tell us about your experiences with 988," which opens a form to collect user experiences
- Normalize 988 as the "front door" for all crisis services
- Integrated data system that connects crisis service and 988 to track individuals through system
- Integrated, one stop crisis system (walk-ins, calls, CRTs)
- Commercial insurance coverage for behavioral health crisis services (requires legislation like in Washington state)
- Giving retired first responders a part time position to help others and have purpose after their career



Closing Activity

To close the meeting, Mindy invited participants to go around the room and share their key takeaways from the day, including any “aha” moments they found valuable, or key next steps they would like to see.

What participants valued:

- The opportunity to interface and get out of the usual silos.
- That front-facing teams were included in the operations piece.
- The collaboration between 988, BHA, Solari, and BHASOs is amazing; huge strides have been made.
- The reminder that everyone is better together.
- Recognition of accomplishments and excitement for future goals.
- The opportunity to discuss how to work well together and avoid duplication of efforts.

What participants learned or emphasized:

- The importance of decentralization.
- Learned more about mobile dispatch and crisis units.
- There are clear gaps that need to be addressed.
- Opportunities exist to help communities and partners better understand the role of BHASOs.
- The importance of informing people about available services and giving them hope.

What participants want to see happen next:

- Maintaining the momentum in moving forward with the 3-year plan.
- A way to address the issue of repeat clients who call frequently is to connect them to longer-term services and improved warm handoffs to the RAEs and BHASOs.
- Consideration for doing an economic study that looks at cost impacts across systems (criminal justice, education, health).
- Communication from the BHA not only to the population that will use 988, but also to the state at large, to ensure long-term buy-in and sustainability.
- Bridge-building to clarify the role of BHASOs and how they can support 988 in long-term care coordination.
- A way to bring in stakeholders not in the room, such as peers and providers.
- New and innovative ways to approach stigma that consider the cause of stigma and don't rely on research from 2023, given that much has changed for certain populations in the past few years.



Recommendations and Conclusion

The 988 Colorado 2025–2028 Strategic Plan outlines the priorities needed to sustain and strengthen 988 over the next three years. The Sandbox Summit provided a valuable forum for 988 Colorado’s key partners to define necessary action steps for operationalizing the strategic plan and identify opportunities for better collaboration. Stakeholders demonstrated a strong commitment to achieving the shared vision, goals, and objectives outlined in the plan. Participants provided constructive feedback on how communication can be fostered on an ongoing basis through structured engagement and defined areas of responsibility.

Third Horizon recommends the following next steps:

1. The 988 Colorado team should facilitate cross-agency workgroups that meet virtually on a regular basis (e.g., monthly or bi-monthly) to coordinate the implementation of objectives within their respective functional areas.
2. The Sandbox Summit should be made an annual event to gauge progress in achieving the strategic plan and progress against its key performance indicators, identify emerging needs, and pivot as needed.
3. 988 Colorado and its partners should develop effective strategies to enhance coordination with other critical behavioral health organizations, including provider organizations, peers, and Regional Accountable Entities (RAEs).
4. A shared dashboard could be developed, or communication vehicles such as a partner newsletter could be used to help all stakeholders track progress against the key performance indicators in the strategic plan.

Colorado is fortunate to have strong leadership and commitment to improving behavioral health and crisis care. Together, we can achieve the 988 Colorado Vision:

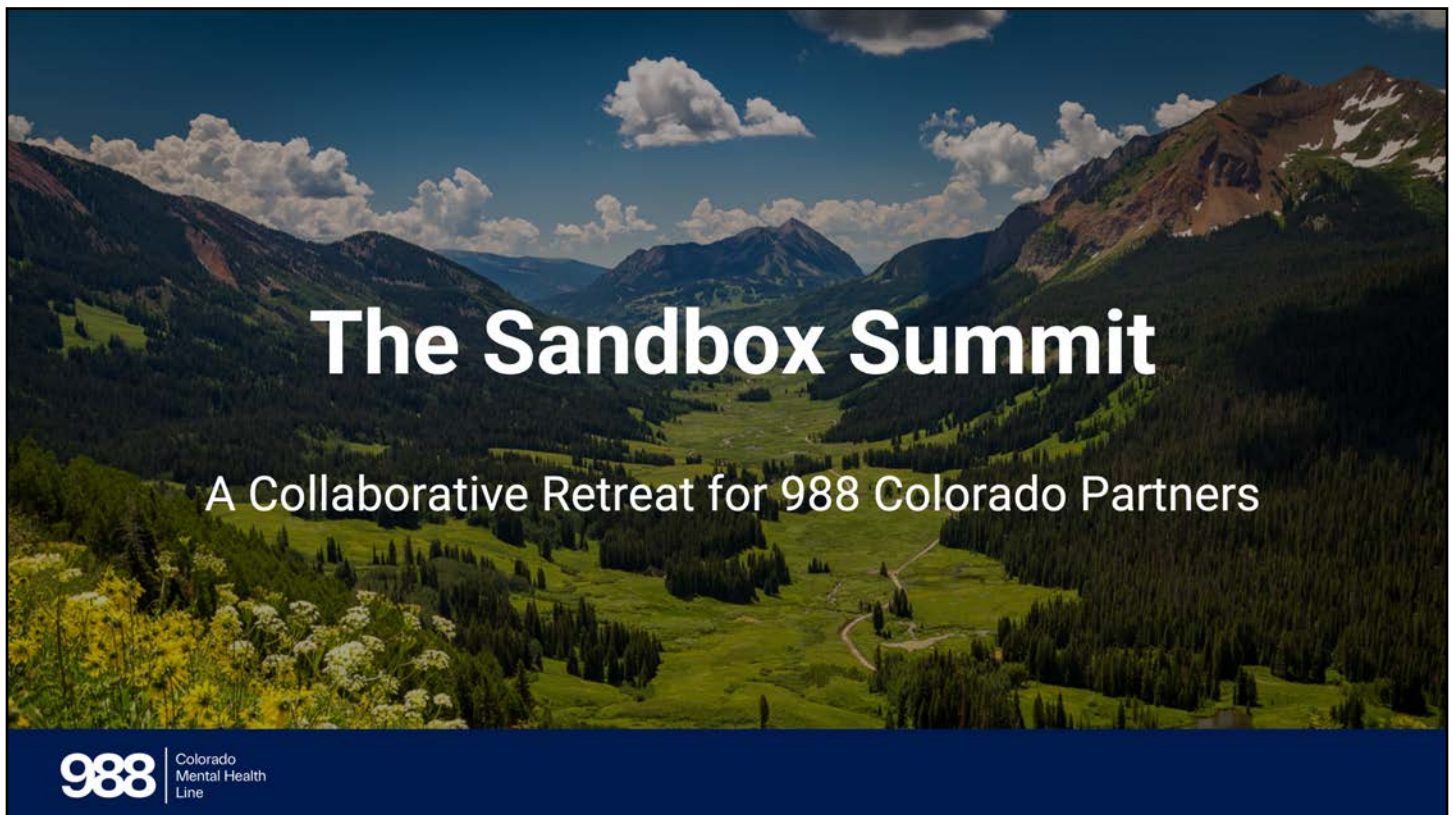
A Colorado where individuals in crisis are met with a responsive, integrated, and person-centered system of care, anchored by the 988 Colorado Mental Health Line and supported by informed communities, aligned partners, and sustainable infrastructure.

About Third Horizon

Third Horizon is a boutique, strategic advisory firm focused on designing integrated health and social systems so that all communities, families, and individuals can thrive. Through its work across three advisory services, behavioral health, community health, and market analytics, the firm offers a 360° view of complex challenges across three horizons – past, present, and future – to help industry leaders and policymakers interpret signals and trends and develop upstream innovations, strategies, and structural changes that maximize the value of the yearly spend on health care.

A small but growing firm founded in 2018, Third Horizon is nimble and provides client-centered services in a highly collaborative manner. The firm has extensive experience in developing crisis response strategies, coordinating behavioral health strategic planning services, and facilitating multi-stakeholder engagements. Clients range from state and local government agencies to providers, associations, payers, and philanthropy.

For more information, see <https://thirdhorizon.com>



988 | Colorado
Mental Health
Line

Opening Remarks

Setting the stage for a productive day

Introducing Today's Facilitator



Third Horizon is a strategic, boutique advisory firm focused on designing integrated health and social systems so all communities, families, and individuals can thrive. Through its work across three advisory areas – behavioral health, community health, and payment design and analytics – the firm offers a 360° view of complex challenges across three horizons (past, present, and future) to help industry leaders and policymakers interpret signals and trends and develop upstream innovations, strategies, and structural changes that maximize the value of the yearly spend on health care. Services include:



Data Analysis



Payment and Delivery System Redesign



Strategy

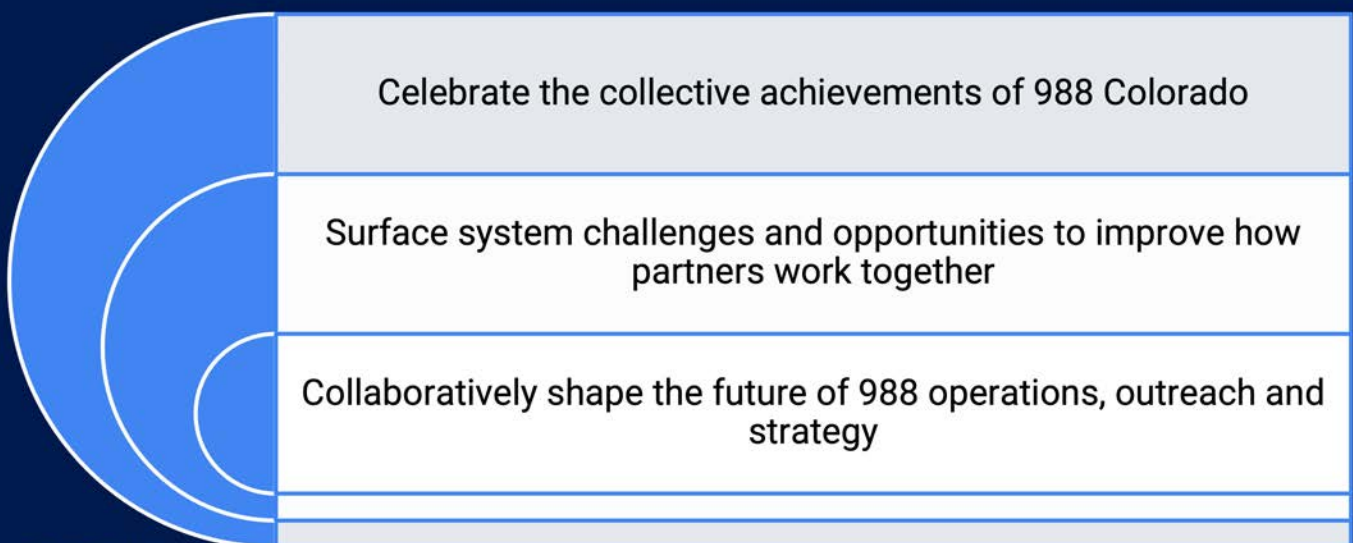


Policy and Convening



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Summit Objectives



The 2025-2028 Strategic Plan serves as the framework for the day

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Participant Agreements

We will start and end on time

We will be present and focused (laptops closed and cell phone ringers on vibrate)

We will be inclusive and strive for equitable participation

We will be respectful even when we disagree

We will be collaborative and engage in shared problem-solving

We will be outcome-oriented, creative and forward-thinking

What else?

Federal Funding and Agency Context*

- Core 988 funding remains flat: Federal budget proposals maintain ~\$520M annually for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and related crisis response activities, rather than expanding funding in line with rising demand.
- SAMHSA announced on June 17, 2025, that the “Press 3” option would end effective July 17, 2025, stating the Lifeline would “no longer silo LGB+ youth services”.
- HHS announced a major restructuring in 2025 to create the Administration for a Healthy America (AHA), consolidating SAMHSA with several other public health agencies to “streamline” operations. This has not been acted on by Congress, but may mean an agency transition for 988 oversight.
- Changes to Medicaid under HR 1 such as work requirements, 6-month eligibility redeterminations, etc. will likely result in a greater number of Coloradans being uninsured and potentially exacerbate behavioral health needs.

Colorado's Strong Foundation

- Dedicated state "Enterprise" funding mechanism via surcharge/charges
- "No-wrong-door" access & consolidation of crisis pathways
- 24/7 access with multiple modes (call, text, chat)
- Coordinated statewide system of "someone to call", "someone to respond", and "somewhere to go" - including peer supports
- Leadership dedicated to strategic thinking, multi-agency collaboration, increased access to care and sustainability



Gordon Coombes

988 Director



Dannette Smith

Commissioner,
Behavioral Health Administration

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Yangmee Lor

Vice Chair,
988 Enterprise Board

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Framing the Sandbox: Why We're Here

Connecting the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan to today's discussions

Goal 1: Build Trust and Awareness of 988 as Colorado's Mental Health Front Door

Objective 1: Expand public awareness of when and how to use 988

Objective 2: Reduce stigma and increase trust across diverse communities

Objective 3: Strengthen outreach and ensure access for populations with higher risk factors or reduced access to care

Goal 1 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Awareness and Stigma Reduction

- Awareness growth: baseline from the FY25–26 statewide survey with a goal of a 5 percent annual increase
- Engagement: website, social media email subscribers
- Impact metrics: 988 utilization by geography, marketing attribution to utilization, crisis intervention success stories
- Stigma and trust: baseline from the first trust and stigma report with annual measurement
- Stigma reduction indicators in rural and high-risk populations
- Number and reach of ambassadors/testimonial campaigns
- Event participation and engagement in targeted communities

Goal 1 Key Performance Indicators: Statewide Access and Outreach

- Number of languages supported and utilization by language
- Service utilization by geographic region
- Service utilization among high-risk populations
- Number/percentage of total 988 contacts received via call, text, and chat (year over year growth in utilization by modality)
- Distribution of community grants by geographic reach and population served
- User satisfaction across groups with access barriers or greater needs

Goal 2: Strengthen System Integration and Care Coordination

Objective 4: Achieve decentralization from the national 988 system (e.g., independence from Vibrant-managed network) to improve caller experience, data access and service delivery.

Objective 5: Ensure smooth transitions from crisis intervention to ongoing care through strong linkages to Colorado LIFTS and providers.

Objective 6: Expand coordination with 911 and first responders, increasing the use of behavioral health alternatives to law enforcement responses.

Goal 2 KPIs:

- Follow-up connection rates: current rate collected in FY25–26 with FY26–27 targets to follow
- Decentralization: percentage of calls routed directly to Colorado without IVR barriers
- Reduction in caller drop off rates
- Availability of caller-level data for state analysis
- 911 integration: number of PSAPs with live transfer protocols and diversion outcomes
- Policy/legislative progress towards decentralization

Goal 3: Ensure Long-Term Sustainability of the 988 Enterprise

Objective 7:

- a) Maintain stable funding through the telecommunication surcharge
- b) Monitor the cap of \$.30/line and prepare for future legislative action if adjustments are required due to inflation or cost growth
- c) Diversify supplemental funding without reliance on the state General Fund

Goal 3 Key Performance Indicators

- Annual revenues meeting or exceeding operating costs
- Legislative readiness plan developed for potential surcharge adjustments
- Successful diversification of supplemental funding sources (e.g., federal grants) without reliance on the state General Fund
- Positive results from annual financial audits demonstrating fiscal responsibility

Goal 4: Strengthen Organizational and Governance Capacity

Objective 8: Build a strong 988 staff team by hiring key positions, aligning roles and responsibilities, and distributing decision-making authority

Objective 9:

a) Ensure effective Enterprise Board governance through right-sized membership, updated bylaws with the Interagency Agreement, and streamlined communication and meeting protocols

b) Foster collaboration and accountability through regular engagement with staff, board members, and partners

Goal 4 Key Performance Indicators

- Completion of evaluation and recommendation regarding board size
- Updated and approved by-laws
- Adoption of new meeting protocols and communication processes
- Documented increase in board engagement, collaboration and effectiveness as per board evaluations or feedback
- Annual vendor conflict of interest attestations reviewed by the Board

What Will it Take to Get There?

- The strategic plan should not “sit on a shelf”; it is intended as a living document and roadmap – not a static plan
- Strong collaboration and trust among partners
- Comprehensive data collection, reporting and continuous quality improvement
- Organizational and governance capacity
- Continual monitoring of the external environment, including the federal, state, regional and local landscape
- What else?

Session 1: Strengths and Challenges in the Sandbox

Objective: Identify opportunities to improve system-wide coordination, operations, and strategy

Instructions for Session 1 Small Groups

- Break into six multi agency, cross functional groups (find your name tag)
- Pick a recorder and a reporter
- Use the following prompts to guide your discussions:
 - How are we working well together now?
 - How can we build on that to collaboration to ensure the best results?
 - Where do we feel misaligned or stuck?
 - What's preventing us from doing our best work together?
 - What challenges are we not naming?

Lunch and Sandbox Stroll

Optional: Moonshot activity

Session 2: Dreamcast - What can we build together?

Objective: Generate bold ideas and collaborative solutions

Instructions for Session 2 Small Groups

- Break into your assigned four small groups for Session 2 & 3:
 - Marketing & Outreach
 - Care Coordination
 - Program & Operations
 - Finance & Sustainability
- Pick a recorder and a reporter
- Use the following prompts to guide your discussions:
 - What would success look like in 2026? How would it be measured?
 - What does Colorado need from 988 that we're not yet delivering?
 - How do we ensure equity, access, and excellence in crisis care?
 - How do we work together better?

Session 2: Group Assignments

WealthWeavers

Bronwyn Roland
Yangmee Lor
Christine Anderson
Brandon Zelasko

OpOptimizers

Andrew Erwin
Calli Tucker
Hana Fitchlee
Harla Knapp
Jaime Brewer
Lauren Gant
Norman Quidachay

MarketMakers

Beth Brady
Chloe Rekow
Kit Dahltorp
Mikhail Talley
Rain Bondy
Shadia Lemus

CareConnect

Alvina Vasquez
Carey Boelter
Cassie Villegas
George Laumeyer
Jeffrey Proctor
Jenn Conrad
Kayla Martin
Maureen Carney
Nate Clay

Session 3: Sculpting the 988 Roadmap

Objective: Prioritize, align and begin shaping the 2026 action plan

Instructions for Session 3 Small Groups

- Return to the same small groups as in session 2
- Pick a recorder and a reporter
- Use the following prompts to guide your discussions:
 - What is the priority action or actions to achieve the strategic plan objectives?
 - Are there any different ways you would suggest formulating or approaching the KPIs and success measures?
 - What structure will work best to create shared ownership for these objectives, action steps and KPIs?

Session 3: Group Assignments

WealthWeavers

Bronwyn Roland
Yangmee Lor
Christine Anderson
Brandon Zelasko

OpOptimizers

Andrew Erwin
Calli Tucker
Hana Fitchlee
Harla Knapp
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Jeffrey Proctor
Jenn Conrad
Kayla Martin
Maureen Carney
Nate Clay

Objectives by Small Group Assignments

Objective	Small Group
Public Awareness and Understanding	Marketing & Outreach
Trusted Resource and Stigma Reduction	Marketing & Outreach
Statewide Access and Outreach	Marketing & Outreach
Decentralization from National 988 System	Program & Operations
Seamless Care Coordination	Care Coordination
Integration with 911 and First Responders	Care Coordination
Sustainable and Stable Funding	Finance & Sustainability

Sandbox Reflections & Commitments

Round Robin



Thank you!

For all you do every day, and for your participation at the Sandbox Summit!

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