

News Release

Oakland County to launch pilot program with Amazon devices aimed at decreasing loneliness among seniors

Program introduced by Commissioner Kristen Nelson will use technology to connect Oakland County's most vulnerable citizens to family, friends

October 27, 2020, OAKLAND COUNTY, MI. – The Oakland County Board of Commissioners is announcing the Oakland Together Lifeline pilot program, which will launch later this year at select American House Senior Living Communities. The program originated with ideas from the Oakland County Task Force on COVID-19 Impact on Seniors' Social Isolation, Loneliness and Health, and aims to reduce isolation among Oakland County's older adults by using touchless technology to connect seniors to friends, family and more. Commissioner **Kristen Nelson** (D-Waterford) chairs the task force.

"Older adults are uniquely vulnerable during these uncertain and challenging times," Nelson said. "While there is no one-size-fits all solution for combating social isolation and loneliness, we believe Amazon Echo Shows have great potential as a tool to help enable more, and deeper, interaction with family and friends, including engaging in activities together."

As part of the pilot program, Oakland County officials will provide Amazon Echo Show devices directly to residents in selected local senior living facilities for their personal use. The seniors will be taught how to use the devices, without relying on staff for assistance, to stay connected with friends and family. The pilot will also provide further information on how technology can be used by seniors to feel connected and help inform future Oakland County programming beyond senior living facilities. Social isolation and loneliness, which have been heightened for many during the pandemic, have been linked to many physical and mental health problems including heart disease, diabetes, anxiety and depression.

"Amazon Alexa's voice interface has democratized technology for many," said Beatrice Geoffrin, director of Alexa Trust at Amazon. "We're humbled by how the Echo Show has improved the lives of people with different needs, including older adults, helping them be more connected and independent."

In April, the Board adopted a resolution authored by Nelson that formed the Oakland County Task Force on COVID-19 Impact on Seniors' Social Isolation, Loneliness and Health. In addition to Nelson,

Commissioners **Penny Luebs** (D-Clawson) and **Eileen T. Kowall** (R-White Lake) serve on the task force. The group also includes leaders from other county departments and those from the technology, senior care and education industries.

The Oakland Together Lifeline pilot program is still being finalized with support from Oakland County's health division and department of information technology.

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