

## **MEDIA ALERT**

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# **NYSOFA and Selfhelp Community Services Announce Free Access to Virtual Senior Center (VSC) for New Yorkers 60+ in Effort to Address Social Isolation**

*VSC includes 400+ monthly live programs and other features, such as email, news, games, and self-directed “channels”*

The New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) and Selfhelp Community Services today announced the availability of free access to Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center (VSC) for any individual age 60 and older in New York State.

**New York State Office for the Aging Director Greg Olsen said,** “The Virtual Senior Center is a powerful platform that opens a world of possibilities and connections for older adults who are homebound or simply wish to access enriching social and educational experiences from home. We began our partnership with Selfhelp by offering its free VSC service through offices for the aging in several counties, and we are now thrilled to make the platform available to any older adult in New York State as part of NYSOFA’s longstanding commitment to address social isolation across programs and services.”

**Stuart C. Kaplan, CEO of Selfhelp Community Services, said,** “We are grateful to the New York State Office for the Aging for its strong partnership and shared commitment to ensuring that older adults remain connected, supported, and engaged. This expansion of the Virtual Senior Center reflects the power of collaboration to combat isolation by building meaningful virtual communities for older New Yorkers. At Selfhelp, we see every day how access to social connection and enrichment can transform lives, and we are proud to work with the state to make these opportunities available to all.”

Selfhelp Community Services created VSC in 2020 to help homebound and socially isolated older adults stay connected to their community. The VSC offers robust programs designed for older adults, managed by social workers and a team who provide intentional engagement. Its inclusive and engaging environment offers a space where older adults can connect with one another from wherever they call home.

The VSC includes 400+ monthly live programs and other features — such as email, news, games, and self-directed “channels” — that can be navigated independently. Older adults can participate in classes, tour world-famous locations, interact with peers, engage in wellness activities, and, most importantly, expand their social network.

NYSOFA and Selfhelp began their partnership in 2021, offering access to the platform for homebound older adults in several counties through their Area Agency on Aging (AAA). The partnership was designed to supplement existing social engagement offerings for individuals identified by AAAs who may experience barriers accessing in-person social opportunities. The partnership is now expanding so that any New Yorker age 60 and older can access the VSC for free on their tablet or computer at <https://www.vscm.selfhelp.net>.

To register as VSC participant, simply call Selfhelp's VSC program at (718) 559-4370.

Among the VSC's partners, local aging service organizations also host hybrid classes on the VSC platform, further allowing older adults to maintain a connection to those in their community.

Independent evaluation found that 84% of VSC participants reported a decrease in loneliness, and 76% reported feeling less depressed because of the VSC. Seventy-six percent made new friends and 67% joined programs for social connection and to learn something new.

The VSC is one of several public-private partnerships that NYSOFA has launched to combat social isolation, support caregivers, and address social determinants of health through technology. These partnerships have already expanded access to supports for an additional 2 million older adults. [Learn more about NYSOFA's partnerships and efforts to address social isolation.](#)

Social isolation affects older adults and people of all ages. For older adults facing isolation, NYSOFA has a 50-year track record of services, supports, and interventions, including many nation-leading program innovations. In May 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General reported on the alarming health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. Loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop mental health challenges in their lives. Lacking connection can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking daily.

To learn more about the VSC, watch [NYSOFA's recent livestream with Selfhelp Community Services](#), providing more information about the platform and how to enroll.

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