

DFTA Joins State Robotic Pet Trial to Combat Loneliness in Older Adults

NEW YORK (June 27, 2019) - The New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) has joined the New York State Office for the Aging's robotic pet pilot program with the goal of fighting social isolation and depression among older New Yorkers. Robotic cats and dogs are usually given to people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias as a form of calming pet therapy, but feedback shows that this new use of the pets is working.



Ageless Innovation

"By using robotic pets, we're turning to technology and innovation to address the persistent problem of social isolation," says **Department for the Aging Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez**. "This allows socially isolated older adults to receive similar gratification and comfort that they would get from live pets." Program participant Carrolyn Minggia, 64, moved from Philadelphia to New York to take care of her dying aunt. Minggia says her health problems started when her aunt and sister died. She suffers from Guillain-Barré

syndrome, which causes her immune system to target her nerves, and other ailments.

"I'm staying in New York because my medical team and support system are here," says **Minggia**, who named her robotic dog. "Buddy is a lot of fun. He's a big help. I turn him on in the morning, and he moves and barks when I walk near him or pet him." Minggia also benefits from DFTA's Home Sharing Program partnership and case management network.

"Many older adults live alone, leaving them more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness, which can lead to serious health issues such as cognitive decline, depression, and heart disease, among others. This innovative pilot is another way that New York State, as the first age-friendly state in the nation, is working to combat social

isolation and improve the health and well-being of older New Yorkers," says **Greg Olsen, Director of the New York State Office for the Aging**.

Program participants were selected based on their score on a [loneliness scale](#), their expressed level of interest in receiving a robotic cat or dog, and whether they are clients of DFTA's case management system. Participants will be re-evaluated at various stages and will keep their pets.

DFTA also combats social isolation through the [ThriveNYC Friendly Visiting Program](#), hundreds of senior centers that serve as social hubs, and through the delivery of approximately 4.5 million meals annually to the homebound.

To learn more about DFTA services, call 311.

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The New York City Department for the Aging works to eliminate ageism and ensure the dignity and quality of life of New York City's diverse 1.6 million older adults. DFTA also works to support caregivers through service, advocacy, and education. DFTA is the largest area agency on aging in the U.S.

Media contacts:

Zenovia Earle
212-602-4152

Suzanne Myklebust
212-602-4153