

CHAPTER 499

AN ACT concerning social isolation in certain population groups.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. a. Within 270 days after the effective date of this act, the Commissioner of Human Services shall assess and report on the nature and frequency of social isolation occurring in the State, and the resources that are available to combat social isolation. The assessment and report shall focus on, but need not be limited to, an analysis of social isolation affecting the following vulnerable populations:

- (1) individuals who are 65 years of age or older;
- (2) individuals with disabilities, with the definition of the term “individuals with disabilities” interpreted by the Commissioner of Human Services in an expansive fashion to include as many disabilities as is appropriate for the purposes of this act;
- (3) individuals with mental illness; and
- (4) other vulnerable populations, as deemed by the commissioner to be appropriate, including individuals who serve or have served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard of the United States, a Reserve component thereof, or the National Guard of this State as defined in section 1 of P.L.1963, c.109 (C.38A:1-1).

b. In conducting the social isolation assessment pursuant to subsection a. of this section, the commissioner shall:

- (1) consult with appropriate professionals, organizations, and agencies throughout the State that provide counseling, health care, mental health care, support care, or other social or daily living assistance to members of vulnerable populations;
- (2) consult with members of vulnerable populations who are currently seeking treatment or care for social isolation, and, to the extent practicable, consult with the family members or caregivers of such individuals;
- (3) review available data and research materials on social isolation, and consult with educational institutions and other educational or public interest organizations in the State, which are actively involved in the study or research of matters related to social isolation;
- (4) review the actions that have been undertaken, and the policies that have been implemented, by other states and jurisdictions to combat social isolation occurring in their communities; and
- (5) consult with other State, county, and municipal departments and agencies to gather information, data, and materials on social isolation.

c. The report prepared under this section shall include:

- (1) for each type of vulnerable population listed in subsection a. of this section, an indication of the frequency of social isolation occurring among members of that population, including the approximate number and percentage of individuals in each population who are experiencing social isolation, and the approximate number and percentage of such individuals who are susceptible to, but are not yet experiencing, social isolation;
- (2) a description of the demographic and other characteristics that are held in common by the members of vulnerable populations who are experiencing, or are susceptible to, social isolation;
- (3) a description of the symptoms and other indicators of social isolation;
- (4) a description of the circumstantial and situational factors that contribute to social isolation;
- (5) an indication of the State resources that are available to help individuals recognize, address, and recover from social isolation, including an indication of the organizations and

other entities throughout the State that provide information, counseling, or other assistance to individuals who are experiencing, or are susceptible to, social isolation, and, to the extent such information is available, the number of individuals from each vulnerable population group who have been assisted by such organizations or other entities;

(6) an indication of the ways in which other states and jurisdictions have addressed issues of social isolation occurring in their communities;

(7) an indication of the ways in which the available State resources for social isolation are lacking and could be improved;

(8) an analysis of trends that are evident from the data reported in this area that have occurred over time; and

(9) recommendations for legislative, executive, or other action that can be taken to: (a) prevent or redress instances of social isolation occurring in the State, particularly among vulnerable populations; and (b) otherwise improve the accessibility and effectiveness of available resources and supports for socially isolated individuals.

d. The report prepared pursuant to this section shall be submitted to the Governor, and, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), to the Legislature; and shall additionally be posted on the Internet website of the Department of Human Services.

e. As used in this section, “social isolation” means aloneness or sequestration that is not chosen or wanted; that stems from or results in the virtual absence of interaction with others, beyond those interactions that are required for the sequestered person to perform basic life functions; and that has a negative or threatening effect on the sequestered person.

2. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire upon submission of the report required pursuant to this act.

Approved January 21, 2020.