

Mental health workers say resources available for seniors who feel isolated

Service connects people with resources

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MANCHESTER, N.H. —

New Hampshire mental health workers are reminding seniors there are resources available to help them as they're being told to isolate themselves to protect against COVID-19.

People over age 60 are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus, so they're being asked to stay away from family and friends. A population that is often already isolated could be feeling left behind.

In response, mental health centers are connecting people with services through the REAP program, which stands for referral, education, assistance and prevention. The program has been around for decades, but its purpose is highlighted in this time of crisis.

"We do some evidence-based assessments around cognitive issues, substance abuse and mental health, and then we talk with them about what their goals are, so it's really that solution, how do we connect you to the services," said REAP director Anne Marie Olsen-Hayward.

Olsen-Hayward said fewer people are accessing benefits, and referrals for issues across the board are decreasing as people isolate in their homes. She said it's important for people to realize what resources are available.

She said there are ways to cope for people who are feeling isolated at home:

- Disconnect from the TV and the constant COVID-related news for a time
- Get dressed for the day

- Take a walk, even if it's just stepping in place in your living room
- Focus on what you're grateful for
- Be a resource for someone else who may be isolated

Anyone who knows someone over 60 who might be isolated at home can also help.

"Making sure that you have a consistent time that you're calling them, checking in," Olsen-Hawyard said. "Don't just say to them: 'Let me know if you need anything.' Let them know what you can do."

People over 60 who are not currently in the mental health system and their caregivers can access REAP through the New Hampshire community mental health center in their community or by calling the REAP number at 603-957-5913.