

# Loneliness declared health emergency in California's San Mateo County

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San Mateo County recently became the first county in the country to recognize loneliness as a public health emergency.

The county Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to approve a resolution introduced by Supervisor David Canepa declaring loneliness a health emergency.

In the resolution, Canepa outlined several strategies to address loneliness. These include strengthening [social infrastructure](#), implementing pro-connection public policies, mobilizing the [health sector](#), conducting research to deepen knowledge, reforming online environments and fostering a culture of connection.

"Many people are suffering alone in silence, and there's no cure for it," Canepa said.

"Loneliness, isolation and lack of connection can lead to profound health impacts, sending many of our most vulnerable residents on the path to homelessness, as observed in the county's one-day homeless count conducted last week," the county supervisor added.

Regarding specific policies or proposals to address loneliness as a health issue, a staff member from Canepa's office said details are still in the works, including a possible health summit later this year.

Following the resolution, Canepa wrote a letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom, requesting he appoint a "minister of loneliness" for California.

"They say loneliness can have the same health consequences as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, an alarming fact that I think should be addressed by the state through the establishment of a Minister of Loneliness similar to what the U.K. and Japan have instituted," Canepa said.

This April, a law is set to take effect in Japan creating a [task force](#) that would create policies addressing loneliness and [social isolation](#),

according to a story in the Japan Times. The United Kingdom created a loneliness minister position in 2018 and most recently launched a campaign to tackle isolation among university students.

In San Mateo County, at least 45% of residents reported difficulty with isolation and loneliness, according to the resolution.

While to some, [loneliness](#) may be a natural part of the human experience, the resolution is based on scientific research.

In a statement released last May, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy highlighted that poor or insufficient social connection raises the risk of heart disease by 29%, stroke by 32%, and increases the likelihood of developing dementia by 50%. Murthy also emphasized that lacking social connection elevates the risk of premature death by more than 60%.

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