

Stanford studies life plan community residents to see how virtual reality affects older adults

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A Pompano Beach, FL, life plan community is the first site in the country to partner with Stanford University on a study to see how older adults respond to virtual reality and whether it can improve their sense of well-being.

John Knox Village is partnering with the California educational institution's Virtual Human Interaction Lab and MyndVR on one of the largest scale studies to date on how virtual reality affects older adults. The study also will examine older adults' attitudes about new technologies.

Using headsets with video and sound, residents will be able to travel anywhere in the world, virtually — including space. MyndVR CEO Chris Brickler said that volunteers will be screened to ensure that they are mentally suitable to use virtual reality. Participating residents will be supervised by staff members, and participants also will have access to an “abort” button in case they become overwhelmed by the experience.

“Our goal since day one has always been to improve the quality of life for older adults,” Brickler said.

John Knox Village partnered with MyndVR in 2020 to offer virtual reality to its residents as part of the community's wellness programming (and [earned a Bronze Award](#) in the

2020 *McKnight's* Excellence in Technology Awards for it, in the Activities category in the Senior Living track). The Stanford study, the company indicated, will provide [“empirical data”](#) on whether virtual reality helps its residents.

Although John Knox Village is the first active site to take part in the Stanford University study, other senior living communities that have signed on to participate include Minnesota-based Benedictine Living, St. Barnabas in Western Pennsylvania, the Long Island State Veterans Home in New York, Maple Knoll Village in Ohio, and Technology for Ageing & Disability WA in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.

MyndVR also is working with Therapy Management Corp., a therapy services provider, to expand the opportunity to other populations.

Researchers at Stanford have been building immersive virtual reality content and testing its effects on people for almost two decades.

“Virtual reality adoption has been growing significantly, and we’re interested in both the immediate and lasting benefits it can provide,” Jeremy Bailenson, founding director of Stanford’s Virtual Human Interaction Lab, said in a [statement](#). “Working with MyndVR gives us access to a crucial population of older adults that were it particularly hard by the isolation of the past year.”

“There is a fair amount of previously published research by academic labs around the world that shows VR, when administered properly, can help reduce anxiety, improve mood and reduce pain,” said Jeremy Bailenson, the Stanford lab’s founding director. “This particular study is focused on how using VR might reduce the residents’ feelings of isolation from the outside world, all the more important after the isolation we all faced during the pandemic.”

John Knox Village also was one of 11 senior living operators [announced in 2019](#) as participants in a Green House pilot project testing a virtual reality immersive technology platform.