

New study examines benefit of internet access, social media networking on seniors' health

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Many elderly adults are increasingly isolated and grapple with depression, loneliness and declines in physical health. The UAB Department of Sociology and Social Work will use a five-year, \$1.9 million National Institute on Aging (NIA) grant to study the ability of computer use and social media networking to enhance the quality of life of elderly adults through online social connections and easier access to health information.

In the study, UAB sociologist and principal investigator Shelia Cotten, Ph.D., will examine the extent to which access to the Internet and the use of [social networking sites](#) by seniors in assisted living facilities enhances their personal interactions and relationships.

"With increasing numbers of older [adults](#) living in long-term care facilities and declines in quality of life as people age, we need innovative ways to lessen these negative impacts and to enhance quality of life," Cotten said.

UAB graduate students will train 300 senior adults at 15 Alabama assisted-living facilities to use the Internet, e-mail, [Facebook](#) and other social media networking sites. The residents also will learn about blogging, online groups and ways to evaluate online health information.

Cotten says a primary benefit of the study is that it will help decrease

inequalities in access to health information due to age-related declines in mobility. An increasing amount of health information is available electronically, says Cotten. "Once older adults cross the digital divide, they can access health information much more easily using the Internet than they can go to the library or visit a health-care professional," she said.

Source: University of Alabama at Birmingham ([news](#) : [web](#))

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