

In rural areas, more women falling into health care gap

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For Americans living in rural areas, obtaining and maintaining health care can be challenging. Aside from common barriers, including shortages of care providers and facilities, older women face additional challenges, according to Kay Libbus, a public health researcher at the University of Missouri. Libbus says that women ages 50-65 living in rural areas are at-risk for inadequate health care coverage and limited access to health information.

"There is a gap in health care access for women ages 50-65 living in rural areas," said Kay Libbus, professor in the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing. "These women are beyond child-bearing age, susceptible to developing [chronic diseases](#) and often retired or leaving the workforce - and these factors make it difficult to maintain health insurance or obtain new coverage. Rural communities are in need of interventions to address this issue."

Women in the 50 to 65 age group often lose insurance coverage at retirement and don't qualify for Medicare, Libbus says. Additionally, these women have less access to health information because of limited internet and technology access, which contributes to decreased understanding of their health risks. Transportation to clinics and sites that offer affordable health care also is a problem in rural areas.

In an ongoing study, Libbus and MU researchers are evaluating solutions to help women who are 'falling between the cracks' in terms of access to insurance coverage, health care and accurate health information. Libbus

is conducting focus groups with [women](#), [health care](#) providers and community leaders in rural communities throughout the state. Based on responses, the researchers will implement programs to address critical health issues specific to the communities. The study is funded by a grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health.

Libbus is a professor of nursing and women's studies at the University of Missouri. She teaches courses in public health and participates in special courses for continuing professional education. Libbus received two grants from the Advanced Education Nursing Grant Program to develop and implement a web-based masters program in public health nursing. Libbus has won numerous teaching awards including a Kemper fellowship and a faculty award for Excellence in Teaching at the School of Nursing. As a researcher, she has been involved in numerous projects and has authored or co-authored more than 30 data-based articles.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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