

Study finds that seniors in subsidized housing have higher rates of vision impairment

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Older adults living in subsidized housing facilities have higher rates of vision impairment than their peers, according to a study from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Department of Ophthalmology.

The findings, published in *The Gerontologist*, were based on vision screenings for 238 residents of 14 federally subsidized senior housing facilities in Jefferson County, Ala. Forty percent of those surveyed failed distance vision screenings, and 58 percent failed near vision screenings, considerably higher than the rate of visual impairment in the general older adult population, which is typically between 10 and 20 percent.

This study is among the first to characterize vision impairment in this group of seniors. The high rate of vision impairment observed suggests an increased need for visual health monitoring in this population of socioeconomically disadvantaged older adults.

"Poor vision in seniors is associated with a loss of mobility and independence, which can have a profound impact on overall health and well-being," said Cynthia Owsley, Ph.D., MSPH, professor and vice chair for Research Administration in the UAB Department of Ophthalmology. "Overall, the results of the present study underscore the importance of providing vision health surveillance efforts to older adults to identify those in need of eye care and begin to address issues

surrounding access to care in this population."

The study also characterized the relationship between vision impairment, [cognitive impairment](#) and chronic co-morbid conditions in this population.

"Our study found that cognitive status and chronic co-morbid medical conditions significantly contributed to predicting [visual impairment](#) in this group of older adults. Specifically, older adults with higher levels of cognitive impairment and those who self-reported having heart and circulation problems were more likely to have [vision impairment](#)," said co-author Amanda Elliott, Ph.D., assistant professor of nursing at the University of South Florida. "It is important for [older adults](#) with these conditions to obtain their recommended annual eye examinations."

More information: "Vision Impairment Among Older Adults Residing in Subsidized Housing Communities." *The Gerontologist* (2015) 55 (Suppl 1): S108-S117 [DOI: 10.1093/geront/gnv028](https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnv028)

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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