Strategies to support people with intellectual disability to participate in voting: Interim staff survey results

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La Trobe University
Voting & People with Intellectual Disability

Human Rights enshrined in the UNCRPD

Article 29 – Effective & full participation in political and public life...

(i) Voting procedures, facilities and materials appropriate, accessible; (ii) Right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections & public referendums without intimidation...

People with intellectual disability are less likely to vote than other populations

(Keeley, Redley, Holland & Clare, 2008; Matsubayashi & Ueda, 2014)

Yet many have an interest, sense of duty & desire to vote & be heard

(Agran, MacLean & Kitchen, 2016; Bell & Horsler, 2003)

Significant gap in empirical research in Australia
Aims

- Identify factors that facilitate & obstruct voting
- Develop, trial & evaluate an initiative in Vic 2018

In partnership with the Victorian Electoral Commission & Inclusion Melbourne
Methods – Overall Research Design

Mixed methods - Action Research

Phase 1 - Online Survey of staff in the disability sector

Phase 2 - Focus Groups with people with intellectual disability

Phase 3 - Stakeholder reference group to develop recommendations

Phase 4 - Implementation & Evaluation of an initiative for the 2018 Victorian State Election
Methods – Phase 1: Online Survey of Staff in Disability Sector

Aim
- Perception & experiences of staff in supporting people to vote

Data collection
- Online survey
- 70 closed & open items
- Piloted with stakeholders

Recruitment
- Targeted various organization types & staff in various roles
- Advertising in newsletters
- Directly approaching organisations

Analysis
- Descriptive statistics
- Thematic analysis
Participants - Organisations

- 157 respondents  102 completed  **65% completion rate**

![Pie chart showing NGO participation by sector and type](chart.png)

- NGOs 75%
  - Gov 18%
  - Edu 3%
  - Other 4%

- Types of NGOs
  - Disability Support NGO 83%
  - Advocacy/ Peak Organisation 12%
  - Other/ Not-specified 5%

La Trobe University
Participants - Roles

- Majority working on the front-line (i.e. direct support work, front-line management)

- **Direct Front-line workers**
  (e.g. support workers, front line managers, case managers, individual advocates)

- **Indirect staff**
  (e.g. executive managers, systemic advocates, policy advisors/officers)

- **Other**
Participants – Most Common Characteristics

- Mostly Female (78%)
- Aged ranged from Under 20 to 60-69 bracket. But most 50-59 yrs (29%)
- All had post high school qualifications. Most either Diploma (29%) or Undergrad (29%)
- An experienced group. Most had 15+ yrs experience in the sector (52%)
Participants – Personal Views Towards Voting

1. I always vote
   - 2% Neutral
   - 4% Strong disagree/disagree
   - 94% Strong Agree/Agree

2. I think voting is important
   - 2% Neutral
   - 4% Strong disagree/disagree
   - 94% Strong Agree/Agree

3. I am interested in politics
   - 15% Neutral
   - 19% Strong disagree/disagree
   - 66% Strong Agree/Agree
Findings – Phase 1

- Good will
- Minimal Action
- Uncertainty
Good Will Among Staff – Positive attitudes

- Strong belief that people should have the same right to vote as others.
- Regardless of level of disability.

Attitudes towards people with intellectual disability & voting

People with **severe or profound** intellectual disability...
- ...have the same rights as everyone
  - Strongly disagree/Disagree: 4%
  - Neutral: 10%
  - Strongly agree/Agree: 86%
- ...have the right to vote
  - Strongly disagree/Disagree: 0%
  - Neutral: 10%
  - Strongly agree/Agree: 96%

People with **mild or moderate** intellectual disability...
- ...have the same rights as everyone
  - Strongly disagree/Disagree: 4%
  - Neutral: 2%
  - Strongly agree/Agree: 94%
- ...have the right to vote
  - Strongly disagree/Disagree: 1%
  - Neutral: 5%
  - Strongly agree/Agree: 94%
Staff recognised the practical obstacles that get in the way of voting.

### Obstacles BEFORE voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to support making related decisions</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to formal education/training</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible info available</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience/practice voting</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Obstacles DURING voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal support to complete voting process</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to support at polling place</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible voting materials (i.e. how to vote cards, ballot)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staff also recognised the structural obstacles that get in the way of voting.

Widely held negative attitudes

“[The] community’s negligence in ignoring and/or undermining the value of all people.”

74% agreed that the attitudes of others get in the way

Impact of widely held attitudes

“People's general life experience often reinforces an identity & self-belief that their opinion does not count and they have little to offer.”

Changes to systems necessary

“it’s not the easy read that needs to change – it’s the complicated process of voting”
Findings – Phase 1

Good will

Minimal Action

Uncertainty
Minimal Action - Front Line Staff

• Most direct front-line workers had not supported people to vote.

Direct Front-line workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever supported someone to vote?</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...in recent Victorian or Federal elections?</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nature of support…

Before voting:
• Reminders & encouragement
• Completing paper work
• Casual conversations about how to vote, political issues & rights
• Advocacy with others

During voting:
• Completing the voting process
• Transport

After voting:
• Understanding results of election
Minimal Action - Indirect Staff

- Indirect staff had given thought to voting support.
- However, few had implemented initiatives - even fewer successfully.

Has your organisation given thought to supporting people with intellectual disability to vote?

- No: 23%
- Unsure: 23%
- Yes: 54%

Has your organisation implemented initiatives to related to this?

- No: 20%
- Unsure: 40%
- Yes: 40%

...in recent Victorian or Federal elections?

- No: 31%
- Unsure: 51%
- Yes: 18%

Nature of Programs implemented

- On voting rights & how to vote (100%)
- On why to vote (85%)
- Education programs or info resources (57%)
- Policy & systematic advocacy work (14%)

Success?

“Now have a couple of people on electoral role & voting but less 1% of service population”

“Unsuccessful”

“Not successful”
Minimal Action -

- Both direct & indirect workers were not confident that the people they supported:
  - were enrolled to vote, or
  - supported to vote

Confidence in voting support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral/Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most people we support are enrolled to vote</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people we support are supported by our organisation to vote</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings – Phase 1

- Good will
- Minimal Action
- Uncertainty
Uncertainty – Support & Influence

- No guidance about the role of direct supporters.
- Lack of funding, time priorities, and uncertainty about how to provide support led to hesitancy.

### Direct workers – Reasons for NOT providing support

- Timing of elections: 18%
- Lack of time/Not priority: 16%
- Unsure how to provide support: 20%
- Minimal support from employer: 44%

62% had **not received related guidance** from employer.

### Indirect workers – Reasons for not implementing programs

- Lack of funding: 45%
- Lack of time/Not priority: 36%
- Unsure how to provide support: 27%
- Other: 36%
Uncertainty – Support & Influence

Concern about undue influence:

“A lot of attention needs to be given to ensuring carers/helpers don't influence who the person votes for.”

“Often people with an intellectual disability are ... easily influenced by factors other than the best Policies.”

Uncertainty re how to support:

“How to support people is very difficult without appropriate information targeting what ‘should be’ important to them.”

Concern about level of disability:

“A lot of people with complex disabilities will have little or no comprehension of the voting process and its implication on their lives.”
Conclusions

What’s needed?

• The perceptions and experiences of people with intellectual disability
• Research needed into HOW to best support voting – especially people with high support needs
• Formal evaluation of programs & initiatives to support voting needed
References


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Thank you to our partners:

And the many other organisations & staff that supported recruitment.