

Accessible Elections



With nearly **1 in 5** Canadian adults having a disability, and almost **1 million** of these people living in BC, persons with diverse abilities have the numbers to have large influence on political outcomes and decision-making. Yet, the reality is that this power is laying dormant, unused as voter turnout among persons with disabilities lags far behind the general population.

Why Voting Matters

Voter turnout among disabled persons is important for all the following reasons:

- Persons with disabilities have unique experiences and perspectives to inform public issues
- Without voting, disabled persons are more readily ignored by politicians, who gain office through election

- There are many people with disabilities, and they have the power to turn election results
- Not voting perpetuates myths of disabled persons being passive and dependent
- The more you vote, the less confusing the process becomes
- Greater accessibility benefits everyone
- Being civically active can be fun and rewarding!

The Barriers

Given the benefits above, why is there such low voter turnout among persons with disabilities?

- Voting stations can be physically inaccessible or present sensory challenges
- There is a lack of accessible information for persons with disabilities about how to vote
- Persons with disabilities do not receive the same encouragement to vote that non-disabled persons do
- Stereotypes have led many persons with disabilities to think they are incapable of voting
- Lack of voting experience makes the process and practice of voting more intimidating
- Political info is often written in confusing, inaccessible ways

Breaking Barriers

There are thankfully numerous ways to help break down these barriers

Preparing To Vote

- Engage potential voters in conversations about how to vote, political issues, and rights
- Offer reminders and encouragement about voting
- Assist the voter with paperwork as necessary
- Ensure that public candidates or election meetings occur in accessible venues
- Written political material should have plain English or Easy Read versions
- Voter registration should be offered online

- Election officials and volunteers should be educated about potential accessibility issues
- Electoral and campaign offices should be equipped with a TTY phone that deaf people can call for election info

Voting

- Advanced voting helps voters vote when it is best for them, often in a quieter setting
- Mail-in ballots provide a way to vote for people who might struggle to vote in person
- Transfer certificates allow voters to transfer to more accessible polling stations
- Level access at polling stations makes them more accessible to persons with mobility limitations
- Sign language interpreter services should be provided for deaf or hard of hearing voters who may need assistance
- Braille documents listing the candidates and parties should be offered
- Voting templates and audio recordings also help visually impaired voters cast their ballot
- Sensory reduction options such as a quiet room or allowing noise-reduction headphones are beneficial for voters with sensory input issues
- Transportation to the voting station should be available to voters who would struggle to get there otherwise

After Voting

- Hold discussions with friends, family, and support workers to help the voter understand the election results
- Staff and family should support the voter in expanding their social networks so there are more people to connect with over political issues

- The rights and duties persons with intellectual disabilities have in society must be a focus in everyday life between elections, since participation in decision making is something that should permeate daily activities year-round in several environmental contexts

Other Ways To Become Politically Active

While voting is important, it is far from the only way to make an impact. Here are some other possibilities:

- Volunteer with a political party
- Join a political party and attend their events
- Attend a political party convention: policies and resolutions are often made here
- Speak at or attend a city hall meeting
- Educate others about issues you care about
- Join an advocacy committee, such as the [Vancouver Community Council](#)