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

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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
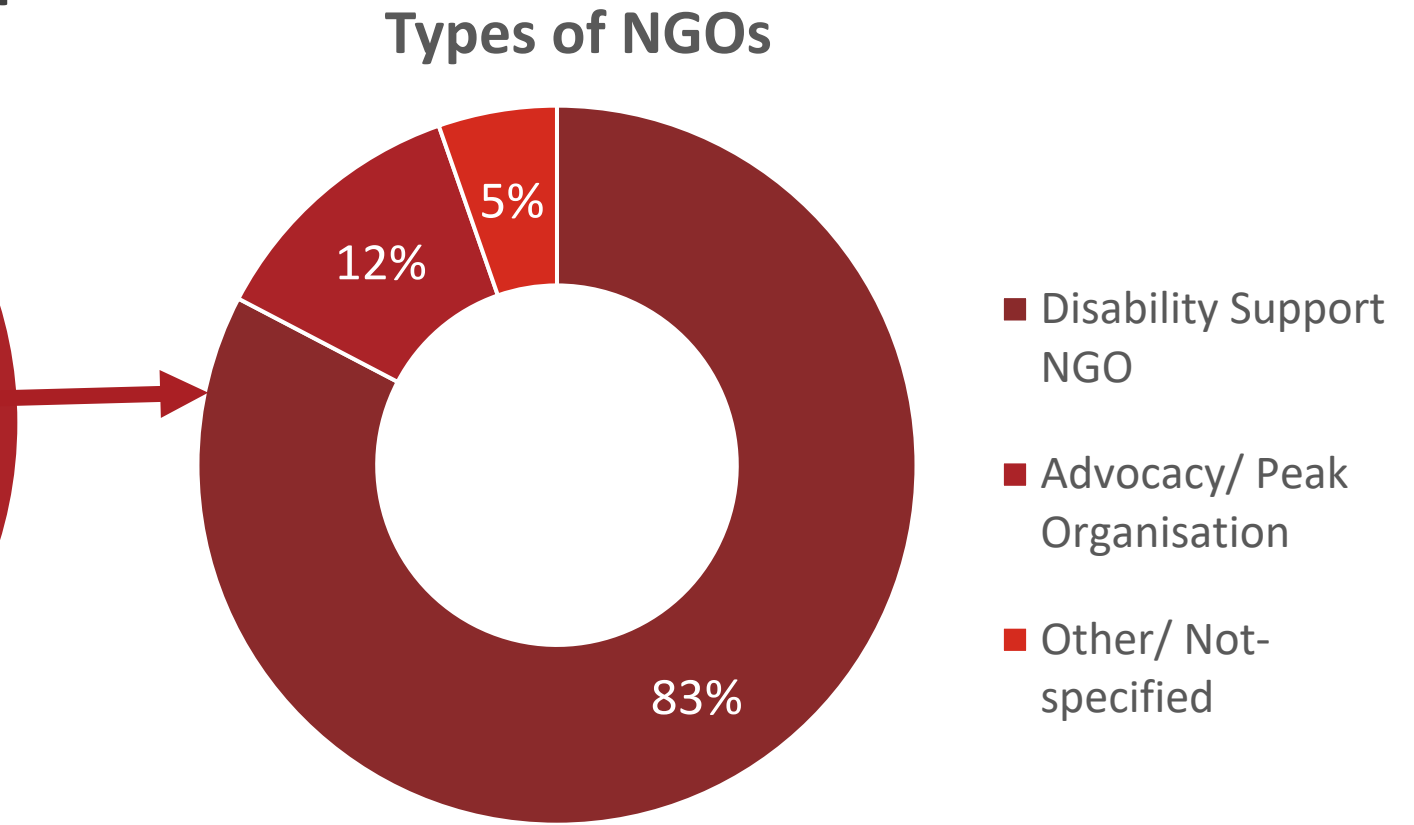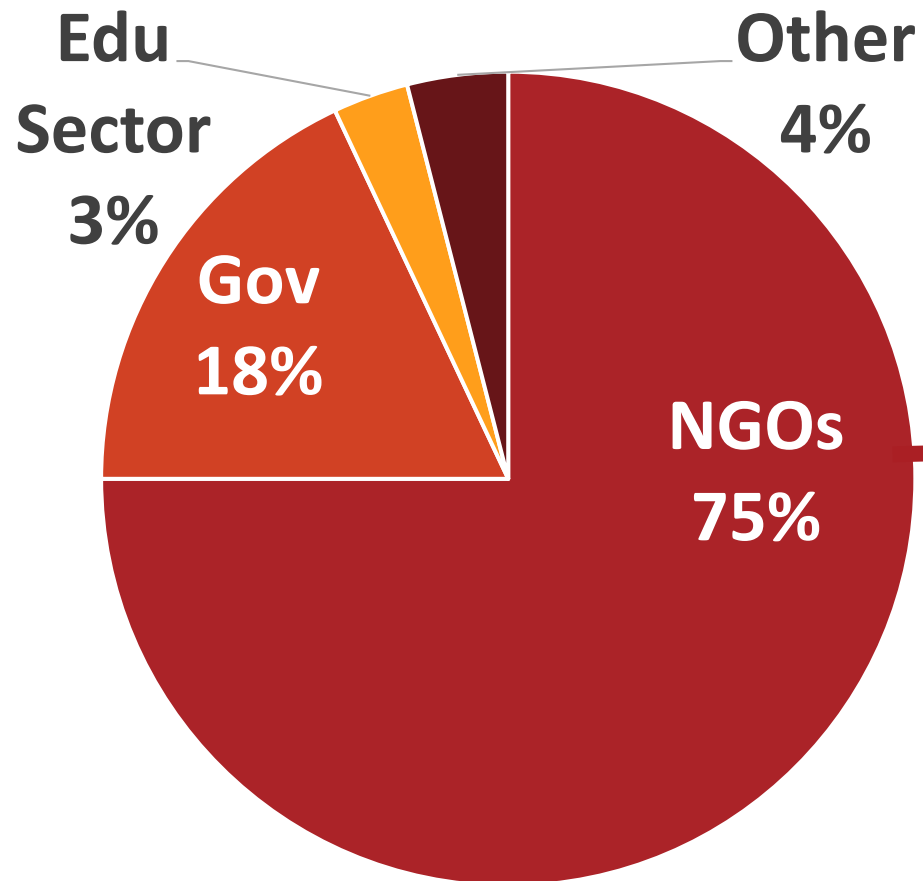- Piloted with stakeholders

Recruitment

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

Analysis

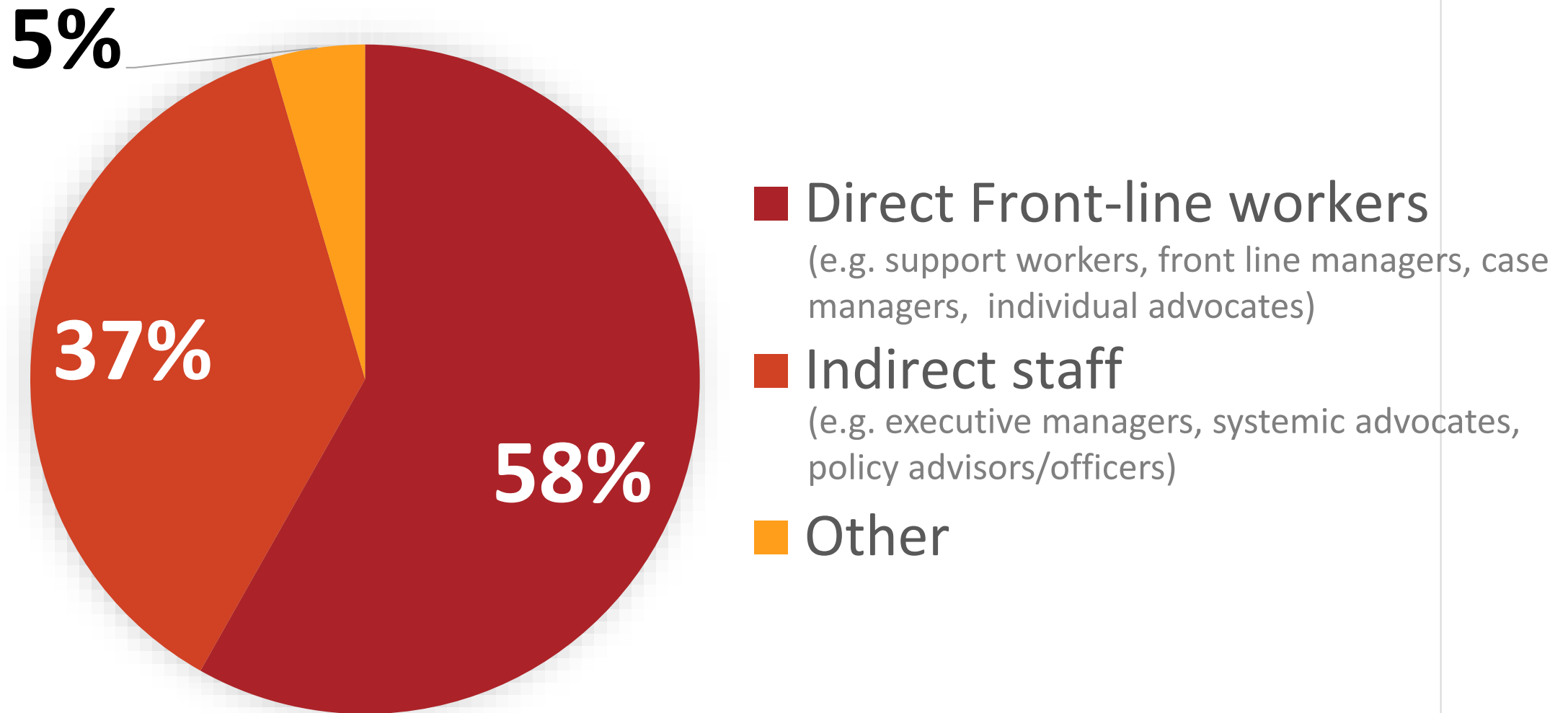- Descriptive statistics
- Thematic analysis

Participants - Organisations

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

Participants - Roles

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

5%

37%

58%

■ 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

Aged ranged from

Under 20 to 60-69 bracket

But most 50-59 yrs (29%)

An experienced group

Most had 15+ yrs experience in the sector (52%)

Mostly Female

(78%)

All had post high school qualifications

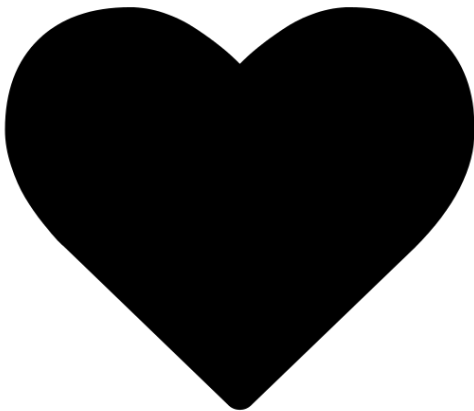Most either Diploma (29%) or Undergrad (29%)
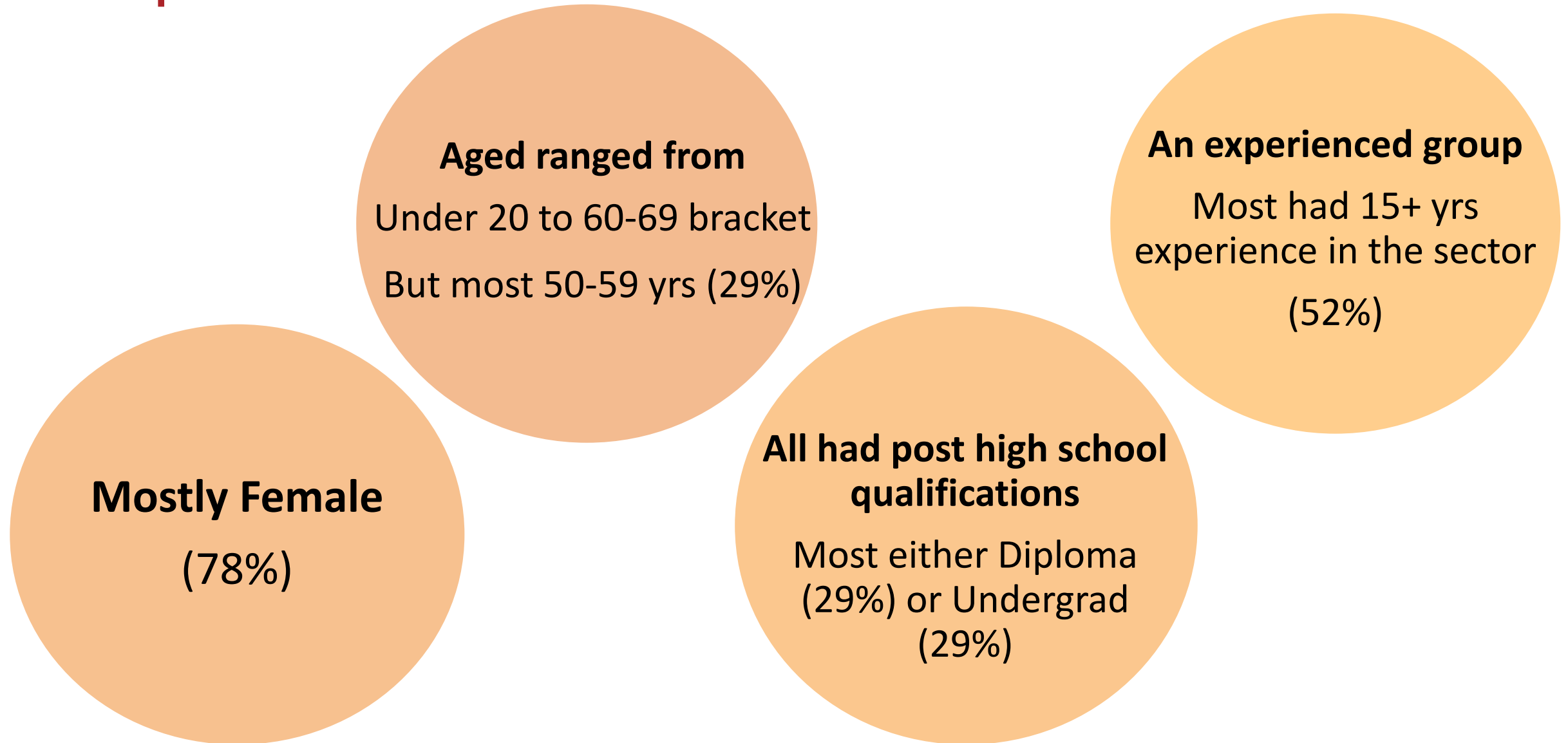
Participants – Personal Views Towards Voting
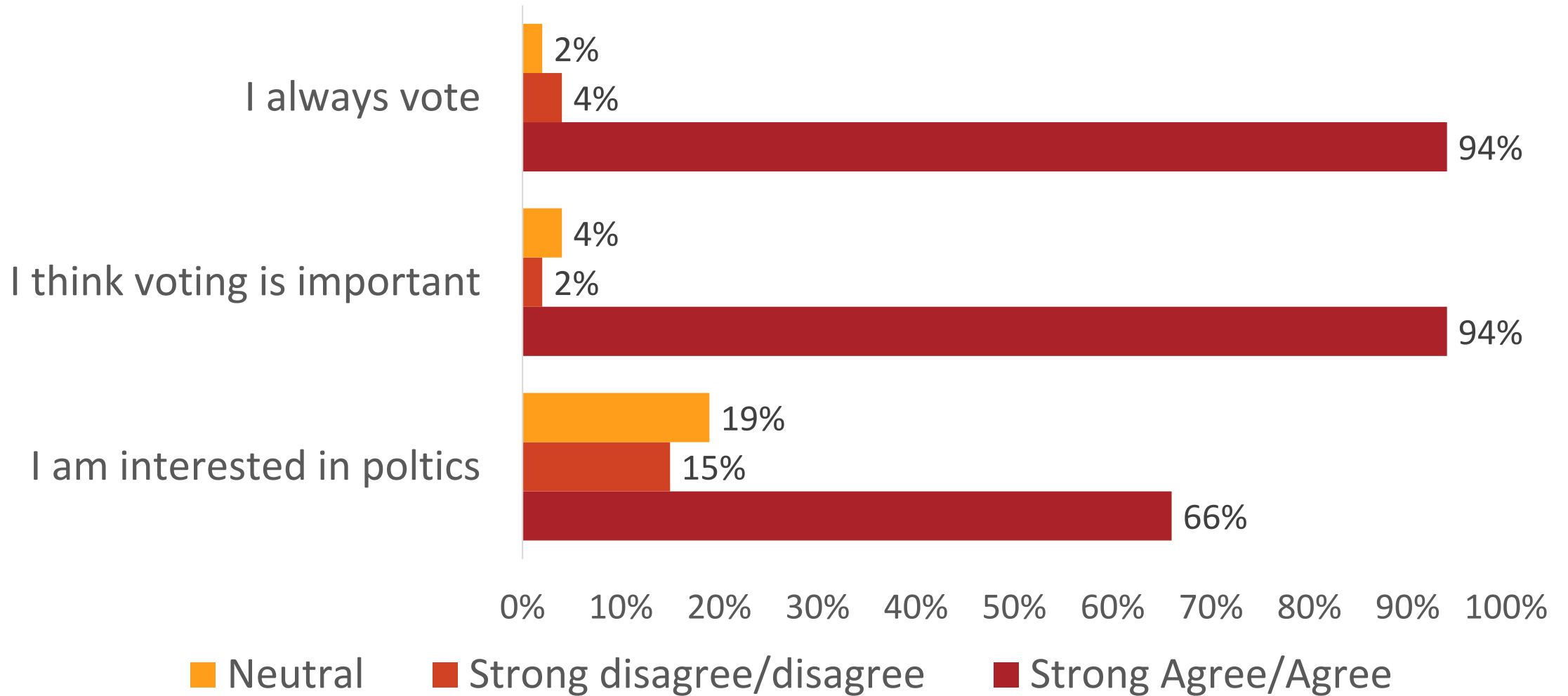
Findings – Phase 1

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

■ Strongly disagree/Disagree   ■ Neutral   ■ Strongly agree/Agree

People with <u>severe or profound</u> intellectual disability…

…have the same rights as everyone
- 4%
- 10%
- 86%

…have the right to vote
- 0%
- 10%
- 96%

People with <u>mild or moderate</u> intellectual disability…

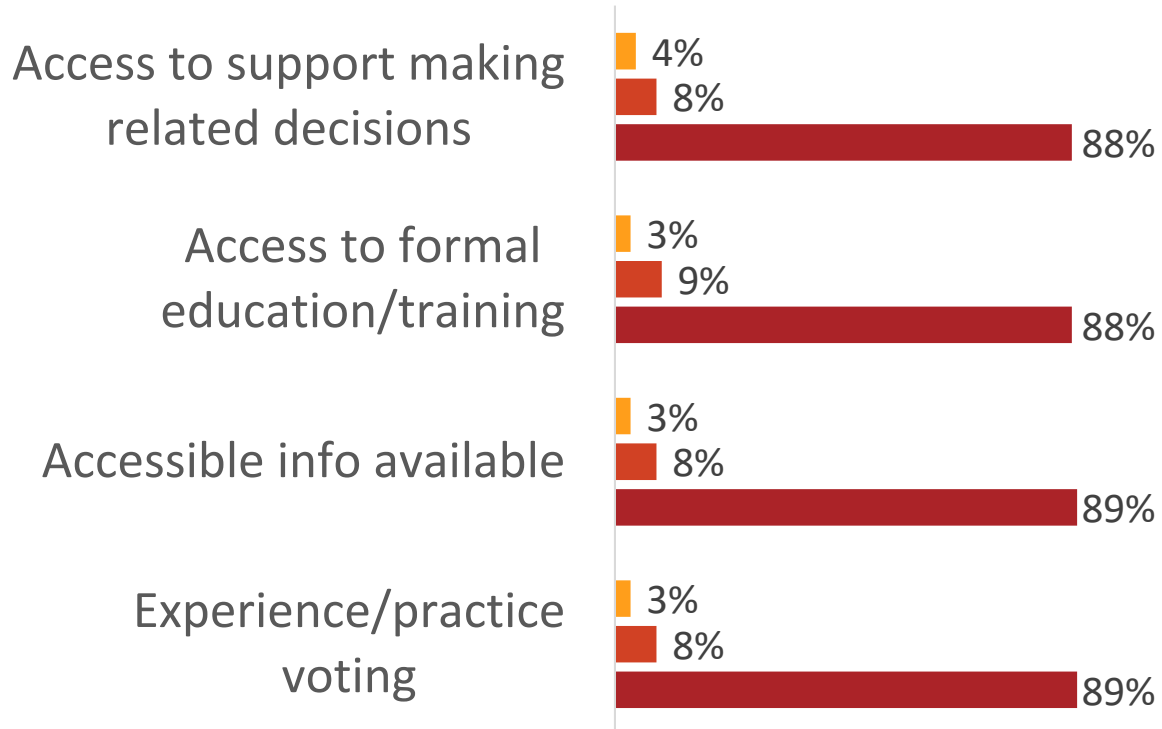…have the same rights as everyone
- 4%
- 2%
- 94%

… have the right to vote
- 1%
- 5%
- 94%

Good Will Among Staff – Practical obstacles

- Staff recognised the practical obstacles that get in the way of voting.

Legend:
- Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (orange)
- Neutral (dark orange)
- Strongly Agree/ Agree (dark red)

Obstacles BEFORE voting

Access to support making related decisions
- 4%
- 8%
- 88%

Access to formal education/training
- 3%
- 9%
- 88%

Accessible info available
- 3%
- 8%
- 89%

Experience/practice voting
- 3%
- 8%
- 89%

Obstacles DURING voting

Minimal support to complete voting process
- 10%
- 15%
- 75%

Access to support at polling place
- 11%
- 13%
- 76%

Accessible voting materials (i.e. how to vote cards, ballot)
- 9%
- 14%
- 77%
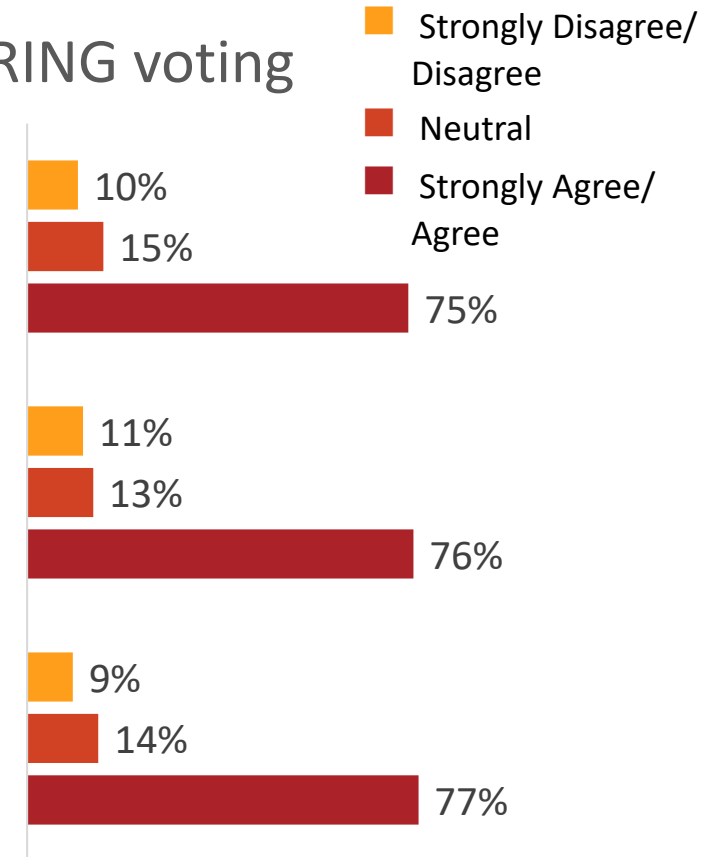
Good Will Among Staff

• Staff also recognised the structural obstacles that get in the way of voting.

Widely held negative attitudes	Impact of widely held attitudes	Changes to systems necessary

"[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**

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

"it's not the easy read that needs to change – it's **the complicated process of voting**"

Findings – Phase 1

Good will

Minimal Action

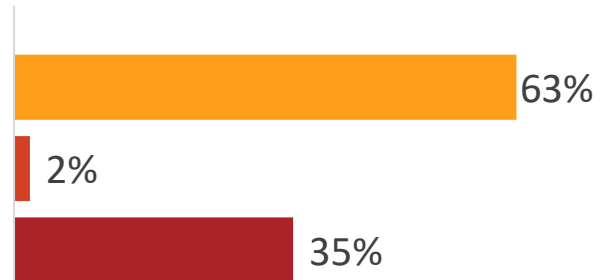Uncertainty

Minimal Action - Front Line Staff

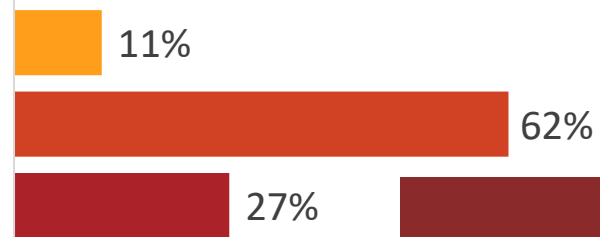- Most direct front-line workers had not supported people to vote.

Nature of support…

Direct Front-line workers

Legend: No (orange) | Unsure (red-orange) | Yes (dark red)

Have you ever supported someone to vote?
- No: 63%
- Unsure: 2%
- Yes: 35%

...in recent Victorian or Federal elections?
- No: 11%
- Unsure: 62%
- Yes: 27%

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
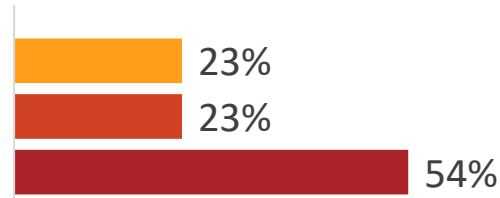
Minimal Action - Indirect Staff

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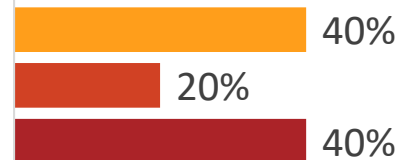- However, few had implemented initiatives - even fewer successfully.
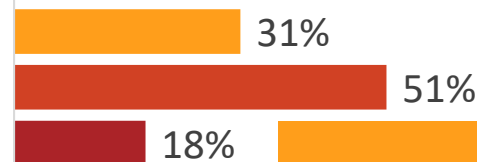
Indirect staff

■ No ■ Unsure ■ Yes

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: 40%
- Unsure: 20%
- 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 -
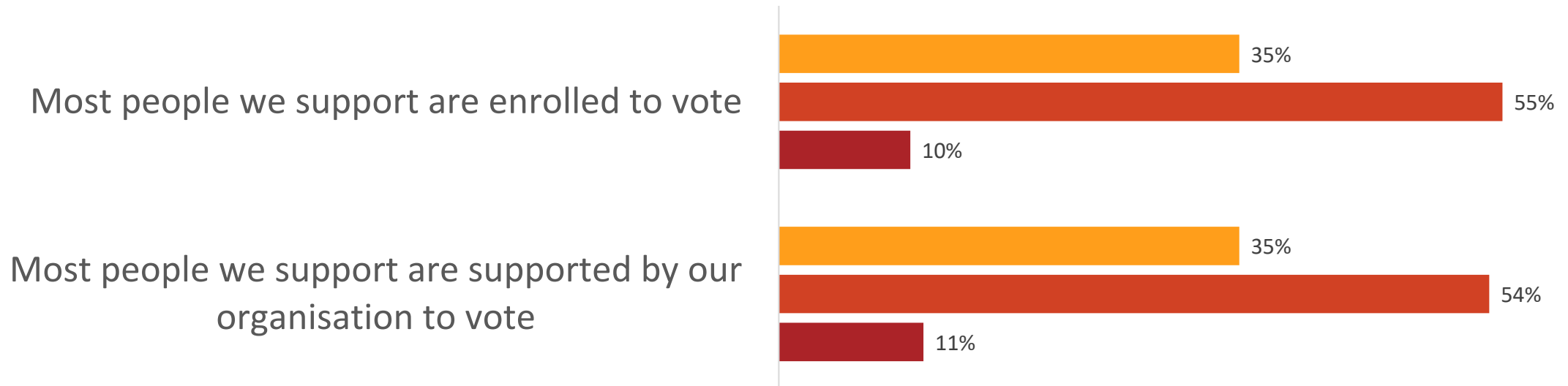
- Both direct & indirect workers were not confident that the people they supported:
  - were enrolled to vote, or
  - supported to vote

Confidence in voting support

■ Strongly Disagree/Disagree   ■ Neutral/Unsure   ■ Strongly Agree/Agree

Most people we support are enrolled to vote
- 35%
- 55%
- 10%

Most people we support are supported by our organisation to vote
- 35%
- 54%
- 11%

Findings – Phase 1

Good will
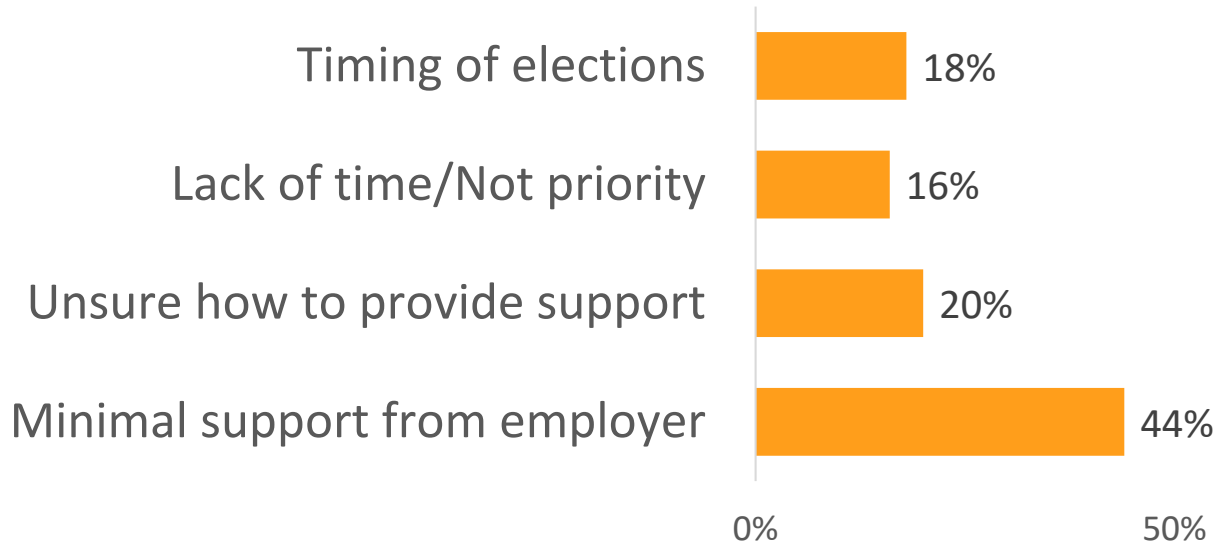
Minimal Action

Uncertainty
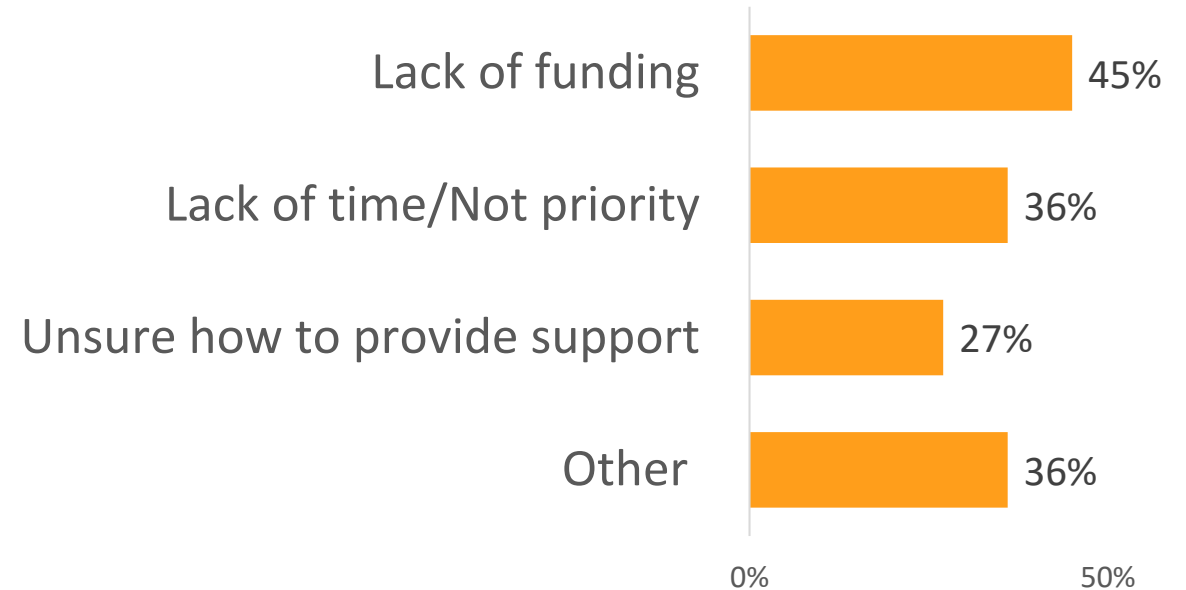
Uncertainty – Support & Influence

?

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

**Direct workers –
Reasons for NOT providing support**

**Indirect workers –
Reasons for not implementing programs**

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

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

Axis: 0% — 50%

Indirect workers chart:
- Lack of funding — 45%
- Lack of time/Not priority — 36%
- Unsure how to provide support — 27%
- Other — 36%

Axis: 0% — 50%

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

Good will	Minimal Action	Uncertainty

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

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Thank you

Thank you to our partners:

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And the many other organisations & staff that supported recruitment.