



EXERCISING THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP: PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND ABI EXERCISING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

A REPORT OF A ROUNDTABLE CONSULTATION
COMMISSIONED BY INCLUSION DESIGNLAB

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Executive Summary

An important part of being a citizen is the exercise of the right to vote in elections for local councils, state governments, or the commonwealth government. However, people with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) can find this challenging. Often their name has not been included on the electoral roll or has been taken off the roll. Commonly, they are not provided with the information or support they need to vote. Sometimes they have never been told about or encouraged to get involved in politics and voting.

In this project we asked three main questions. These are written in academic language below

Research question 1:

What are the supportive factors and barriers to the development of an inclusive approach to voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI, and what remains to be resolved?

Research question 2:

What is the extent to which an inclusive participatory approach can deliver an initiative which increases voting and civic engagement of people with intellectual disability/Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)?

Research question 3:

What is the ongoing appetite for people staying involved and included in the ICV work?

When using simpler language, these questions were asked as:

Research question 1:

What might help people with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) get involved in elections in Australia, and what might make getting involved in elections hard for people with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)?

Research question 2:

When we do projects about getting people with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) involved in voting, what do we need to do to make sure people are fully involved?

Research question 3:

Do people want to be involved in this sort of work in the future?

To answer the questions, we collected and made sense of information from:

- 1) the recordings of 2 inclusive Roundtable meetings
- 2) an online survey of participants after the Roundtable meetings
- 3) evidence and material in books, journals and websites about people with intellectual disability/ABI and voting.

This is what we found

Only a few people with intellectual disability/ABI vote in elections. This is different from people in the general public or people with physical or sensory disability. Many more people in the general public or people with physical or sensory disability vote.

All people need to be '*ready*' to vote. However, inclusion in voting for people with intellectual disability/ABI is hard.

In this report we provide a lot of information about what stops people being ready to vote. We also provide ideas about what might help people to get ready to vote.

We found that being 'ready to vote' involves people with intellectual disability/ABI:

- believing in their right to vote
- being supported by the public and people close to them believing that people with disability can vote
- exercising choice and control over every aspect of their lives
- being involved in their communities so that they can see how voting can make a difference
- learning about politics - political concept and ideas, political communication, and how government works
- learning about political parties, politicians, and local political issues
- learning about voting and elections
- having support to vote when there is an election

All of these things are important. People should get support with all of them. Ideas about what needs to be done are written in detail in this report.

If people don't know about or believe in their right to vote, do not make choices often or are isolated and not part of their community then they are much less likely to want to learn about politics and voting, or to seek (support) to vote. This means projects aiming to increase voting in upcoming elections will get the best outcome if they focus on people ready to learn about politics and voting. It will also be important to make sure the right supports are available so that people can do all the practical tasks involved in preparing to vote, and voting.

But the focus on people ready and interested to learn about voting should be accompanied by work to move more people towards 'values', 'choice' and 'inclusion' so that more people are ready for the training and support. This includes work to build the political citizenship of people with disability. That is, work that helps people engage in political conversation, understand how politics affects them, have political opinions, and experience support to experience inclusion in political activities, particularly voting.

There has been a lot written about accessible information about the act of casting a vote, physical access to polling stations, accessible voting booths and alternatives to in-person voting at voting centres. Less has been written about the systems and supports for people to vote and about developing political citizenship.

This project found there was a need for:

- support for people to get ready to vote and to be enrolled to vote.
- more resources and training for people with intellectual disability/ABI around politics and informed voting
- more resources and training for families and support workers who provide support
- increased disability leadership in training and in politics at every level
- a better understanding within disability services of the ways to defend, protect and ensure the right to vote for people with intellectual disability/ABI. These should empower support staff to engage with people around politics and voting
- testing and use of supported decision-making, circles of support and person-centred active support as practice-based approaches to increasing voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI
- collaboration among NGOs, advocacy groups and Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) as vital to achieving success locally and nationally.

Delivering an inclusive approach for future projects.

- Participants appreciated and benefited from the inclusive practices used in the Roundtable meetings and the survey found these worked well
- The survey showed a strong willingness to be involved in any subsequent ICV initiative, with the Project Advisory Group being particularly strongly supported
- However, as well as continuing the inclusive approach adopted for the Roundtable meetings future inclusion would also be dependent upon time, capacity and funding.
- The survey found strong support for developing consensus statements that can guide future initiatives around:
 - Making documents and videos for those who provide support for people with intellectual disability/ABI to vote
 - Support to learn whether each person is enrolled to vote, and to have tips for when each person is at a voting centre
 - Making easy language documents and videos about local, state and national issues
 - Sharing stories about people with intellectual disability/ABI making changes to government and community
 - Making easy language documents and videos, and holding events, about political parties and politicians.

Section 1 - Introduction

I Can Vote (henceforth ICV) is a project of Inclusion Designlab, a division of Inclusion Melbourne dedicated to research and policy innovation. The project commenced in 2014 with the initial aim of investigating the key drivers of voting, and conversely the drivers of low voter turnout, for Australians with intellectual disability. The project eventually undertook joint research work with the Victorian Electoral Commission and La Trobe University and was commissioned by the former to develop a report into key project findings and a dual-read accessible guide to politics, elections, and voting for adults with intellectual disability.

Between 2014 and 2018, the ICV project determined that the key needs of Australian voters with cognitive disability (including intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury) were *not* simply drivers linked to urgent legislative change, better physical access to voting centres, education about how to complete the physical and logistical requirements of voting on a given election day, or even support to be enrolled to vote. Rather, drivers linked to the foundational lack of support to engage with political ideas and discourse and self-agency, poor supported decision-making practices in the disability support sector, an excessive avoidance of risk on the part of supporters and advocates, and a lack of consistent and accessible information about politics, political parties, party policies, and party candidates, were the areas requiring greatest attention.

An immediately observable characteristic – one that is confirmed by most electoral inclusion project work, as evidenced by the knowledge review prepared for this project, and indeed by this project’s roundtables documented later in this report – is that the first list of drivers appears more concrete and episodic¹ (see Appendix 1), while the second list of drivers involve a complex set of systems and support relationships requiring focused and sustained attention over the mid-long term. Despite this a significant portion of global literature and campaign efforts in the area of electoral inclusion have almost entirely focused on this first list of drivers, despite these having had a limited impact on voter turnout.

In 2018, prior to the current project, ICV launched a campaign website addressing many of the key drivers listed above in preparation for the 2018 Victorian State Election with a degree of success in

¹ The Knowledge Review found a significant literature in these areas: Human Rights Watch (2017) . The Review also found a range of solutions to these problems which are shown in Appendix 1, where they are not otherwise reported from the Roundtable discussions set out below.

raising the awareness of the need for easy language content about political policies and carefully planned supports. In 2020, the findings of these campaigns were communicated in submissions to the Victorian and Federal parliamentary electoral matters committees. The ICV project team further determined that a stronger partnership was necessary were the project to launch a similar campaign prior to the 2022 Victorian State Election, which led to the current project.

To develop a follow-up initiative on voting, ICV commissioned University of Melbourne's School of Social and Political Sciences to undertake a further knowledge review (not published). This review updated evidence on policies, practices and initiatives in the past five years. The review was subsequently used to inform the development of two Roundtables with key partners and people with disability designed to explore potential issues and solutions with a focus on literature published across the timeframe of the ICV project².

The Roundtables were designed to be participatory and inclusive with a primary aim of seeding ideas for initiatives to support voting in future state elections in Victoria. The Roundtables were designed to explore the barriers and develop solutions that might be employed in future initiatives.

After the submission of the Knowledge Review, the University of Melbourne submitted a 'Solutions workbook' (Appendix 5) to support discussion at the Roundtables. This was sent out with other Roundtable materials prior to the first Roundtable but was substantively considered at the second Roundtable which took place two weeks later. Whilst it was originally intended that the Roundtable be run face to face, the COVID pandemic meant that it was organised as two online half day sessions.

The project team used co-design principles to establish a consensus on the key issues. A 'Consensus Statement' based on what was agreed during the Roundtables was developed to outline the key dimensions of future electoral inclusion campaign work. This process is ongoing at the time of writing and will allow Roundtable participants to engage in an iterative campaign development process. The University of Melbourne's School of Social and Political Sciences was also commissioned to undertake an analysis of the Roundtable discussions. They were further commissioned to undertake a

² The knowledge review from international literature confirmed the premise of the ICV work that people with disability were less likely to vote than the population of the countries studied. For example: Teglbjaerg *et al.*, (2021) explored voter turnout EU elections 2006 and 2016 finding the disability gap varied across countries and years, but that the average gap had increased from 3.45 percent in 2006 to 8.38 percent in 2016; van Hees , Boeije & de Putter (2019) in their study of the 2017 national elections in the Netherlands found that 90% of people with physical impairment voted but that for people with learning impairment the same figure was 46%; yet studies found the majority of people with intellectual disability express an interest in voting in Canada (McColl 2006) and the US (Agran, Maclean and Andren (2015). McAusland *et al.*, (2018) found low voting amongst older people with intellectual disability in Ireland

subsequent survey of participants which would evaluate the inclusiveness of the Roundtables and explore agreement with the consensus statement arising from the Roundtables.

The research upon which this report is based therefore involved an analysis of a transcript of the two Roundtables and associated documents and a survey after the two Roundtable sessions. The interpretation of data and the subsequent findings were informed by the earlier evidence review. The University of Melbourne team received ethics approval for the project prior to its commencement (Ref: 2021-22681-22650-3).

The questions set for this research were:

Research question 1: 'What are the supportive factors and barriers to the development of an inclusive approach to voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI, and what remains to be resolved?'

Research question 2: What is the extent to which an inclusive participatory approach can deliver an initiative which increases voting and civic engagement of people with intellectual disability/Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)?'

Research question 3: 'What is the ongoing appetite for people staying involved and included in the ICV work?'

Section 2 of this report, which follows next, addresses research question 1. This section of the report addresses the key problem of increasing civic participation and voting of people with intellectual disability and ABI. The analysis draws largely on what was said during the two roundtables since this represents the views and considerations of the partners who participated in the Roundtables.

Section 3 of this report addresses research questions 2 and 3. These sections draws upon an analysis of the inclusive approaches used by ICV in the Roundtables along with Roundtable evaluation data from the post Roundtable survey.

Section 4 of the report concludes with a broader discussion of the findings and recommendations. Throughout this report reference is made in footnotes to points related to the data which were identified in the unpublished Knowledge Review. Further, Key Points are off-set to the right of the page.

Section 2 - Barriers and solutions to voting

2.1 Background

This section of the report addresses research question 1; ‘What are the supportive factors and barriers to the development of an inclusive approach to voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI, and what remains to be resolved?’ The analysis draws largely on what was said during the two roundtables since this represents the views and considerations of the partners who participated in the Roundtables. Subsequently, it addresses the key problem of increasing civic participation and voting of people with intellectual disability and ABI.

2.2 Methodology

In the following section data from the two Roundtables are analysed. These data include: The transcripts of the plenary sessions and presentations; the breakout room transcripts; and the chat within the Zoom platform that took place during the meetings on each day.

The analysis was undertaken as follows. First, data were explored using content analysis to establish a basic framework and logic to the differing points that were raised about how inclusive voting for people with intellectual disability/ABI could be supported. Preliminary findings indicated that inclusion in voting for many people with intellectual disability/ABI involved a significant amount of change and that inclusion in voting was complex, requiring more than a simple unidimensional solution.

Key Point

Inclusion in voting for people with intellectual disability/ABI is a complex issue and achieving such inclusion requires a multidimensional approach.

As a result, the categories required to attain inclusive practices were ordered in a way that reflected ‘stages’, or stepwise requirements in each person’s *‘journey to being a voter’*. However, it was acknowledged that the complexities were such that the process might differ for individuals given different circumstances and experiences. The steps identified were:

1. The importance of underlying values, human rights and suffrage
2. Empowerment and an Inclusive Identity
3. Citizenship, informal networks and ‘politicisation’
4. Voting knowledge converted into a ‘will to vote’

5. Practical support in relation to the process of voting³

For each of these ‘steps’ (documented in the subsections below), analysis of the relevant Roundtable discussion is presented. Following the Roundtables, a draft consensus statement based on the discussions was circulated among participants and their responses, later used to refine the subsequent consensus statements, elicited via an on-line survey

2.3 Roundtable discussion results

2.3.1 The importance of underlying values, human rights and ‘universal suffrage’

A major proposition of presenters and participants at the Roundtables was that there was now a significant number of human rights instruments and associated legislation that supported the right to vote for people with intellectual disability/ABI. These instruments and laws vary in the degree to which they support this right implicitly, intrinsically, and/or explicitly. Yet, as will be seen, change in public attitudes, as well as the views of parents and those who provide support, is often slow to take place, causing a significant delay in the realisation of this right.

It is vital to understand that under principles of universal suffrage and as one person put it,

‘We have a right to vote’ (Plenary, Day 1)

The principle of universal suffrage lies in the right to vote without restriction due to gender, race, religion, social status, education level, or wealth. However, it was also recognised that many states have restrictions relating to ‘competence’⁴. In one of the break-out rooms it was suggested that:

‘Taking away legal rights on basis of mental capacity...the biggest barrier...’ (Break out, Day 2).

In a presentation on Day 2 setting the scene from the previous ICV initiative, it was pointed out that the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* established grounds to exclude people who are incapable of

³ These categories have a similarity to the five Pathways outlined in the original ICV initiative: see [I-Can-Vote-voting-pathway.pdf \(icanvote.org.au\)](https://www.icanvote.org.au/I-Can-Vote-voting-pathway.pdf)

⁴ In the Knowledge Review it was found that Canada is one of the few countries with no statutory exclusion based on ‘incapacity’. Ryan, Henderson and Boynton (2016) point to legal certification of ‘incapacity’ as well as the role of Guardians for people with intellectual disability and those with dementia in Australia. The European and Economic Social Committee (2019) estimate 800, 000 Europeans in 16 countries are denied the right to vote on these grounds.

understanding the nature and significance of enrolment and voting. (There was also recognition that exclusion also applied to prisoners serving a sentence of five years or longer).

The point relating to prisoners was raised by one participant (Day 1 Plenary) and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) representative pointed to their 'Post-release Prison Network' as an important group which addresses this issue.

In relation to the wider issue around the Electoral Act it was recommended that there was a need to:

'... shoot for the Commonwealth Electoral Act... I think it's something that maybe putting it to the Law Reform Commission to investigate the possibilities' (Report back – Break Out Group Day 2)⁵.

Some work by the Law Reform Commission has already been undertaken, however change in the law is often slow⁶. As such, whilst important to pursue, legislative reform itself does not represent something that could be accomplished within an initiative by ICV for future elections in the near future⁷.

However, the mechanisms through which people are currently deemed capable or incapable were a key focus of further Roundtable discussion. Unlike legislative change, these mechanisms have more of a chance of being addressed in the short to medium term. One participant reported that:

'...the other thing that struck me, and I think it was a sobering reminder that there are so many people, particularly with intellectual disability, who have been removed from the electoral roll as a consequence of albeit good, meaning people wanting to avoid them getting fined' (Plenary – Day 2)

In this view, the participant is suggesting that some people think it is better to take a person off the electoral roll, rather than risk a fine if they are enrolled but do not vote. Following such a strategy means the person would not be able to exercise their voting rights. As a generalisation, the public

⁵ The knowledge review showed how these rules differ across jurisdictions with just one having repealed them, Canada. It also describes in a bit more detail some of the arguments for repeal and what is happening internationally in this area.

⁶ The Australian Law Reform Commission, ALRC (2014) argues that identifying a 'status' (cognitive disability) as grounds for incapacity is discriminatory and others argue that legal and mental capacity should not be conflated (Ryan, Henderson and Boynton, 2016).

⁷ Debate continues on some of the fundamental grounds upon which to dispose of mental incapacity as a limitation on voting rights. ALRC (2014) and Harvey and Hatton (2018) suggest fraud and undue influence (such as husbands on wives in suffrage debates of the 19th century) are debates still to be 'won' for people with intellectual disability. Further Friedman and Rizzolo (2017) point to the move, particularly in relation to Guardianship from 'substitute decision-making' to acting on the 'will and preference' of the person, an area of current policy and practice debate in Australia.

(including many family members of people with disability) does not know or understand issues around the voting rights of people with intellectual disability/ABI. In this respect, Table 1 below summarises a finding from the post Roundtable survey in which participants were asked their level of agreement with a number of statements.

Table 1

Roundtable participant perception of the community's understanding of the right of people with intellectual disability/ABI to vote: *Please say how much you agree with the following statement: The community does not understand the right of people with intellectual disability or Acquired Brain Injury to vote.*

Response	Percentage (no. participants)
Strongly Agree	50% (6)
Agree	50% (6)
Neither agree nor disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

The table shows participants' blanket perception that the wider community does not understand the right of people with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury, to vote⁸.

Some participants asserted that many people with disability had not participated in the decision to take him or her off the electoral roll⁹. One participant mentioned that although there have been efforts to make the wording simpler, the complex forms associated with voter registration or being removed from the electoral roll meant that these documents might be filled out by someone other than the person with disability. Meaningful choice-making around voter registration and being taken off the electoral roll remains in question.

Although 1600 people in Victoria were reported to have been removed from the electoral roll in the last year, one participant commented that the...

⁸ The Knowledge Review also found misconceptions amongst different members of the public. Bigby et al., (2019) found such misconceptions among family. Interestingly, at a systemic level, it has been argued that politicians themselves operate a 'calculus of contact' (Spencer and Ross, 2019) and neglect messaging groups that 'do not vote'. Friedman (2018) and Priestley et al (2016) point to the very poor and people with intellectual disability as not drawing the interest of politicians. As Miller and Powell (2015) argue the cost of voting emphasises the need for new forms of cheaper 'convenience voting' approaches.

⁹ Baudot et al. (2020) compared disability registers with electoral registers and found significant numbers who had not been registered to vote.

*'...bigger issue, especially for people with an intellectual disability, **they have just never ever been put on the roll**. It's not mentioned to them as, as young adults. It's not... something that's ever sort of really discussed, unless they have somebody who is quite proactive in their life' (Plenary, Day 2).*

It was therefore suggested that getting people on the roll in the first place is still a crucial preliminary objective and prerequisite to them voting. If they are on the roll, it becomes the responsibility of the person with disability (and, by extension, their supporter's) to enrol to vote and to support them to vote.

However, trying to increase enrolment take-up is not necessarily easy. One person had been part of an initiative to disseminate and communicate information on enrolment to people with disability in the community. Getting this information...

*'...to hundreds of houses has often taken a lot of people and resources and then it hits a block right where it has been needed. We did this at the last State election through an App, and this was downloaded to every DHHS house here in Victoria, but many staff did not use or implement for various reasons...I think that it is **sad and frustrating** that of all your effort isn't working due to the **apathy of other people**', (Chat, day 2)*

Various solutions to the issue of enrolment were discussed. For example, the VEC is working with...

'GPs to get education out there too, to ensure that people who are taken off the roll ... not just sort of willy-nilly so to speak' (Plenary, Day 2).

It was also suggested that:

*'Perhaps the upcoming **electoral roll reminder ads** prior to the federal election should include people with visible disabilities as some of the actors to start a conversation about everyone getting registered' (Plenary, Day 2).*

Another was to target people while still at school, as they approached or turned 18. More is said of this later in relation to formal education.

Others in the Roundtable posted useful information and websites in the chat¹⁰. Concerns about the Electoral Act, enrolling on the electoral roll and a lack of awareness about the act of voting on a given election day are some of the more tangible barriers to voting. But there are more subtle issues as discussed below and as noted by members of the ICV team on the day.

Key Point

People not being enrolled to vote is a greater risk than people being taken off the register. Some supporters simply do not enrol, or provide support for enrolment to, people with intellectual disability/ABI. This lack of enrolment may be linked to negative stereotypes (discussed later) where people are seen as incompetent. Perversely, the concern that the person will be fined for not voting is seen as a greater issue than their right to vote. Multilevel change is required to challenge these experiences.

The law on 'capacity and voting' needs attention in the longer term. Focusing on enrolling people should be a short-term goal. Using available resources may help and education may be important. However, to the extent that negative attitudes to people with intellectual disability/ABI persist, the likelihood of all these succeeding reduces. There is a pivotal role in modelling, and helping people to recognise, the right to vote in association with changing attitudes.

There is a series of values and rights that have been universally recognised in relation to human rights. In his presentation on Day 1 of the Roundtable, I Can Vote project manager Nathan Despott outlined the key rights of people with disabilities as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 29¹¹ which will 'ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others' is just one relevant right.

Others mentioned: 'Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use' and 'guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities' as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, 'allowing

¹⁰ VEC suggested the following videos on voting: <https://youtu.be/WJ8sr9zWw8c> and accessibility <https://www.accessibility.sa.gov.au/>; as well as the Designlab at <https://icanvote.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/VEC-Discussion-Paper-Final-web.pdf>, all websites in this report last accessed 26th August, 2022.

¹¹ For full text, see, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-29-participation-in-political-and-public-life.html>

assistance in voting by a person of their own choice'. Other CRPD Articles also defend, protect and ensure the right to access to information, education, awareness-raising and equal recognition before the law.

Despott illustrated that Article 29 should be viewed as one manifestation of the culmination of these earlier Articles. Education for people with disability (and supporters) about politics, political parties, understanding media sources, democracy, and civics, might theoretically lead to demand for awareness campaigns about voting, good support, and the use of easy language and cognitively accessible methods in public political discourse which all fall within scope of the CRPD. Conversely, awareness campaigns and a more cognitively accessible political discourse may not emerge if a foundation of accessible political education has not been established. The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* 2006 also protects the right to vote and participate in public life.

In short, the human rights narrative frames a crucial set of values through which full citizenship is promoted for all people, including those with intellectual disability/ABI¹². As one person put it:

'We have the right to vote and the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, and the right to equality as three very important human rights' (Plenary, Day 1)

Yet, there are reasons why this set of values has not been adopted and is not widely known. Such human rights have not been a part of formal education (especially across generations) in mainstream nor in other schools. One person describes this at length,

'...That connection between a culture of human rights in society, that values everybody, as a rights holder, that people have rights, and that parents expect their children to have rights and to exercise their rights and community expect everybody to have rights and to be able... to exercise those rights... And therefore our parents and our families are not telling us that we have rights either. We don't have that culture of rights'. Not enough rights in Australia and parents and schools therefore do not tell their kids' (Plenary, Day 1).

As one person put it on Roundtable Day 2, there is a gap between 'citizenship rights and understanding of them', much less the duty to respect, protect and promote them.

¹² Despite this McCausland et al. (2018) point to the complexity of implementing human rights and assert that no states signatories have established a timetable for implementation of specific Articles of the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disability (CRPD), including those relating to voting.

Many of the solutions in relation to human rights are about people knowing them, knowing what they mean, knowing how to apply them, and making sure that each person claims these rights. This implies information, education and resources, areas considered shortly.

Key Point

To the degree that human rights are not recognised and valued, the necessary supports, initiatives, and resources are unlikely to be forthcoming to promote, protect or action these rights. In the absence of persons with intellectual disability/ABI claiming and exercising their rights, or demands for support to exercise their rights, the same outcome will occur.

While the above discussion sets the wider context within which voting rights for people with intellectual disability/ABI are ensured, it does not touch upon another wider set of contextual factors relating to the person and their exercise of rights on a day-to-day basis. This is considered in the following sub-section.

2.3.2 Empowerment and inclusive identity

Expressed by several Roundtable participants was the view that: *'voting is a 'big idea just so disconnected from people's day to day experience'* (Day 1 – plenary). In short, this observation points to a gap between the things that occupy many people as they go about their life without political engagement and voting as a feature of that life. Participants observed that many people with intellectual disability/ABI do not have the chance to express their choice in relation to the everyday things around them, much less voting and so, *'I can so see why people would wave and say, well, what's the point?'* (Break Out Report Back, Day 1).

The implication is that for a lot of people with intellectual disability/ABI that there is a wider issue about ensuring they have choice and control over the day-to-day life experiences before they can make the connection to political decisions that can have an impact on their lives¹³. *'You know, this is a shift from people who have often been very disempowered, and not had opportunities for choice making'* (Break Out, Day 3).

¹³ This was highlighted in by McCausland et al. (2018) in relation to older people with intellectual disability in which they found a significant number of everyday issues around choice were limited for this group. The more of these limitations the less the chance the person would vote. Additionally the more assistance with Daily Living required the less people were likely to vote. The latter highlights the vital importance of support from others for people to vote.

For many people addressing the gap between everyday choice and the impact of political decision-making on everyday experiences is a significant leap:

‘...Clearly, people aren't going to go to a workshop and suddenly learn. It needs to be something that I think people get to talk about, over a period of time. And I don't know about anybody else, but my political awareness has grown over the years’ (Break Out, Day 2).

In some cases, it was reported that people with intellectual disability/ABI have given up decision-making to others: *‘They have no idea They are looking for other people to tell them or tell them what to do’* (Break Out, Day 1).

Basic assumptions by others which stereotype people with disability may therefore play an additional reinforcing role: *‘people see a wheelchair and a person with disability and automatically assume they’re - that intellectually you’re not level with them’* (Break Out, Day 1); and *‘they might have complex communication needs or other physical impairments, which means people think that their cognition or thinking is different. And you know, so these labels are really not very helpful’*, (Report Back from Break Out Group, Day 1); and *‘Some people are overprotective and do not let people ‘speak for themselves and make their own judgement’* (Day 1, Plenary).

The views of the general public can also be mirrored by parents, service personnel or others – those who may have some responsibility for putting in place the supports necessary for the person to vote

...those who are most likely to be enablers of people with cognitive disability getting involved in the process themselves, not necessarily believing that people with intellectual disability might be able to be involved in the process’. (Report Back from Breakout Group, Day 1)

And:

‘where they're having to make a decision about voting, they just think, Oh, I'll ask mom and dad to make a decision, or a lot of support workers make a decision, because they have that power taken away from them for such a long period of time’ (Report Back from Breakout Group, Day 1)

And:

‘whoever did it, did the best marketing campaign ever. That people with disabilities don’t have to vote’ (Break Out, Day 1).

It was recognised that the history of discrimination and exclusion led not just to a view that people could not vote but, inertia, because of:

‘historical disempowerment, that because people with disabilities haven't been engaged in these processes in the past, we don't think about them being engaged in these processes’,
(Report Back from Breakout Group, Day 1).

For many people with intellectual disability/ABI the need to have and claim choice and control over their lives is a vital first step which is required prior to any others which place voting on their agenda. The problem with continued paternalism and negative attitudes of others who have power is that the person is unlikely to become engaged in any discourse around politics and voting. The following section discusses this discourse.

Key findings

Those without choices around their day-to-day life experiences are far less likely to think about voting¹⁴; they are often unable to conceptualise the ‘hidden hands’ of control in their direct environment, much less to think about how distant politicians and policy can impact their life.

People are highly unlikely to vote where:

They do not have choice and control

They are primarily concerned with their immediate day to day life experiences

They are not supported to conceptualise the ways in which politics has an impact on them

They are not welcomed into everyday conversations about politics and social issues in natural social, familial, or workplace settings

Those who might enable them to become political and to vote do not believe they can nor should vote.

Public attitudes reinforce exclusion based on the stigma of disability and assumed ‘incompetence’.

¹⁴ See McCausland et al. (2018)

Many people ‘fall out’ at this stage (see Section 4, Discussion, Diagram 1) and so an electoral inclusion campaign will not lead to an increase in consistent voting unless it is accompanied by, or strategically promotes, a significant change in values and actions based upon rights, empowerment, choice and control. Voting is in some ways therefore dependent upon the wider values about, and attitudes to, disability and political and civic engagement

2.3.3 Citizenship, informal networks and ‘politicisation’

It has been argued above that all people including those with intellectual disability/ABI, need to connect their everyday lives to wider decisions that affect those lives if they are to be informed voters. This means that learning about civics and politics is vital. This imperative is reflected in required curriculum content as mandated by state departments of education.

Table 2 presents data from the post-Roundtable survey that suggest participants felt it was hard for people with intellectual disability/ABI to learn about voting and democracy.

Table 2

Roundtable participant perception of how hard it is for people with intellectual disability/ABI to learn about voting: *Please say how much you agree with the following statement: It is hard for people with intellectual disability/ABI to learn about voting and democracy*

Response	Percentage (no. participants)
Strongly Agree	42% (5)
Agree	25% (3)
Neither agree nor disagree	8 % (1)
Disagree	25% (3)
Strongly disagree	-

We all learn first and foremost about civic participation through our informal relationships. In his presentation of the previous ICV initiative, project manager Nathan Despott related on day 2 the importance of family (as well as others):

‘...if you've never been raised in an environment talking about politics, and there's not easy language materials around and the people who support you don't talk about voting and your family doesn't talk about politics, then the idea of not understanding the nature or significance

of voting probably is more to do with the failure of the people around you and the community around you and less to do with your capacity' (Presentation, Day 2).

Yet, as already seen, families can often assume the person should not or cannot vote. It was pointed out in the plenary on Day 2 that while both the VEC and ICV project team¹⁵ have plans available for families to provide support to their relative to vote, there is a barrier whereby some families will not engage in that plan because of their negative views (and scepticism) about their relative voting. This takes us back to the choice and control exercised by people with disability.

Together, lack of choice and family intransigence to having their negative views changed offers a vicious circle from which the person is unlikely to be able to escape. One self-advocate suggested it was necessary to “tell the parent to stop gatekeeping” (Plenary, Day 1) but this is not easy for people with intellectual disability/ABI, even those who are involved in self advocacy.

Key Point

Family plays a central role in the lives of a lot of people with intellectual disability/ABI.

Some relatives do not have a history of engagement in politics. They do not discuss issues in a political way with their relative with disability and they may even think the person cannot or should not vote. Where these views dominate, and *where the person is isolated from other networks*, they are less likely to vote. Even where people with disability advocate for themselves, or where others advocate for them, it is often difficult to change the views and actions of relatives.

The above discussion highlights that for all people, becoming politically aware and active requires the prior step of making a connection between everyday life and politics. As one person put it:

'So, until you can work with things people can understand, I think the political process can be disillusioning as <name> said and you don't make the connections. Once you see the councillor wants to work with you, you might then want to help them get elected' (Break Out, Day 1).

Two participants had been involved with peer groups for people with disability and spoke of the importance of people having a civic life, i.e. being connected in to their communities. If the networks

¹⁵ Nathan Despott's presentation on the Plan to Vote has a section on the primary supporter, whether family, support worker, advocate or friend. However, even in this case, overprotective families can make it difficult for the person to vote even where others are taking a lead. It may be that discussion among a 'circle of support' would allow a greater chance to land on common ground in relation to the person exercising their voting rights. However, it was asserted by some that there are few other useable and substantive resources available to families to support their relative to vote (Bigby et al., 2019).

of people with intellectual disability/ABI are limited to those in the home, or to their day service then they become excluded to some degree from the wider community. Two participants suggested:

‘Maybe we need to start by working at a local level, and engaging people with local issues that are really meaningful for them, getting them involved in local council discourse at the local level. And building on that as a way of getting people involved in the bigger picture of a state or federal election, which can be incredibly abstract and hard to get your mind around’
(Report Back, Day 1).

A successful example of engaging locally in the community related to an unsafe road crossing. In this case, contact by people with disability with a councillor led council to build a pedestrian crossing. The example shows:

‘Ongoing civic engagement, learning how to influence politicians on local issues – active local democracy’ (Day 1, Plenary)¹⁶.

Peer groups offered one solution. Other international approaches to building discussion groups through disability networks were also referenced such as Mitt Val (My Choice)¹⁷ in Sweden which used a model loosely blending aspects of volunteer neighbourhood house and circles of support models to coordinate political discussion groups involving people with intellectual disability and a number of supporters. Another example provided was of a volunteer network supporting people around voting in Neighbourhood Houses in Scotland,¹⁸ as well as the Distinctive Options civil engagement self-advocacy group based in Sunbury, Victoria.

Key Point

Civic engagement is one way in which people can make a connection between their everyday lives and politics. This approach also has the additional benefit of tying people with intellectual disability/ABI into their local communities.

¹⁶ This was referenced by Despott in relation to ICV Pathway Step 2 in his talk on Day 1 – ‘understanding local issues, understanding the things happening in your community, understanding who the political parties are, understanding how you can complain if something goes wrong in your street, and so forth’.

¹⁷ See Despott, N (2017) and Kjellberg and Hemmingsson (2013)

¹⁸ A number of further examples were identified in the Knowledge Review with some peer discussion groups being part of wider strategies or campaigns. These included: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/elections>, Mencap’s getting involved campaign involving amongst other things discussion groups on politics; <https://zeroproject.org/view/project/730489a2-9617-eb11-a813-000d3ab9b226>, Sweden’s Mitt Val (My Choice) project involving a national network of study circles; <https://www.enable.org.uk/get-support-information/membership/campaigns/our-campaigns/enablethevote/>, Enable The Vote Scotland which, among other things, organised accessible hustings (debates and speeches during an election campaign) for people with intellectual disability and families.

Additionally, the possibility of role models or leaders with intellectual disability/ABI was raised in this respect:

‘I can't help coming back to the notion that when we talk about people's rights, we also need to educate them about responsibilities, you know, civic engagement, and caring about community... you know, role models for your peers, or having leadership and people with disabilities and inspire others is a really crucial element of any of this stuff. You have to encourage people to get involved’ (Report Back, Day 2)

The VEC reported that they were working with groups on leadership programs but:

‘we have not been able to find or connect with leadership programs for people with disabilities... We look for people because of obviously then shown an interest and they want to then probably support others in their communities. Then we kind of take on skilling them up what we call democracy ambassador...’ (Break Out, Day 2)

Supplementing the roundtable discussion there was a recognition in the post roundtable survey that there was far too limited a public profile of leaders with intellectual disability/ABI as shown in the Table 3¹⁹.

Table 3

Roundtable participant perception of whether people with intellectual disability/ABI are seen in politics and community leadership: *Please say how much you agree with the following statement: People with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury are not seen in politics and community leadership*

Response	Percentage (no. participants)
Strongly Agree	75% (9)
Agree	17% (2)
Neither agree nor disagree	8% (1)
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

¹⁹ Waltz and Schippers (2021) exemplify this ‘democratic deficit’ by pointing out that while 15% of people in the European Union have an impairment, just 1% of elected representatives do. Waddington and Broderick (2020) argue that such participation is tested by legal, administrative, accessibility and institutional barriers. The International Foundation on Electoral Systems (IFES) <https://www.ifes.org/issues/research-and-publications> give significant examples around supporting voting by people with disability. They point to Uganda and Kenya which each have a quota system for people with disability being elected to parliament and local councils. The UK parliament has also started an ‘Access to Elected Office for Disabled Persons’, to support entry into politics.

The data shows that the vast majority of participants believed the political and leadership profile of people with intellectual disability/ABI as being low²⁰.

One contribution pointed to the UK:

‘Disability Parliaments where sometimes the local government would allow them to use the council chambers, once a month, and a group of people with disability who'd been elected by their peers would actually form a parliament, discuss issues, and then invite people to come and talk to them about, you know, things that were really important to them. And that this didn't happen just to the election time’ (Break Out Day 2.)

Key Point

Disability leadership and representation can be an important way of making sure initiatives are driven by people with disability. There is at present far too little public engagement by such leaders at this point in time.

It should be noted that the message often heard by people with disability that ‘voting is not for you’ requires a counter-narrative of similar strength. Building such a narrative into everyday life means the choices made will express an ‘inclusive community agenda’. Being connected to the wider community can lead to people understanding local issues and, indeed, wider political issues also, *‘policies and strategies if they are into, you know, climate change and other issues’* (Report Back, Day 2)

Most importantly, learning about issues in this way moves the person to ‘take a stand’ and to register a vote on the basis of their experience and beliefs. The use of informal networks (excluding the person’s family, which is considered later) may, however, not deliver the outcomes intended:

‘I run a self-advocacy group as well and some people are not interested. “Oh, I don’t need to vote”. And some people have a sense of helplessness or lack of power’.

The same is true of enrolling to vote, which was considered earlier.

²⁰ There were a number of campaigns identified in the knowledge review which sought to address this issue: In 2019 the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights developed and led a campaign which detailed Guidelines including more people to take up public appointments and public office, removing financial barriers to holding elected office; The European Disability Forum organised petitions, protests and actions such as lobbying for people with disability to be represented in administrative decision-making locally, regionally and nationally (Priestley et al., 2016). The role of Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) was crucial as a mechanism to mobilise people with intellectual disability/ABI in these campaigns.

'You can take a horse to water. You can't make it drink now. We can make people enrol ..it doesn't mean that they want to vote now. That's for anybody - disability or not' (Plenary, Day 2).

The point is true for all people; some people are politically engaged and want to participate in voting and other people are not, regardless of disability. However, it should be noted that many of the issues identified in the Roundtable as barriers to people with intellectual disability and ABI becoming politically engaged and seeking to participate in voting are not necessarily common to all people, and represent additional barriers, over and above those experienced by the wider community, to engage and participate.

Finally, if people with intellectual disability/ABI primarily or singularly live in settings in which connection to community is limited or at best fleeting or superficial, then it is unlikely they will be actively and meaningfully involved in civic society and politics.

Key Point

In their everyday lives, some people with intellectual disability/ABI may not experience, take part in, or even have access to discussions that would spark an engagement with politics – discussions that can in turn lead to voting. The wider the social networks and loci of engagement, the greater the chance political issues will be discussed and be seen as relevant to their lives. Links to community, peer groups and self-advocacy and leadership may all have a key role in helping people to see politics as part of their everyday life. In contrast, the more a person is isolated, the less chance they have to engage in politics and the more chance there is that they are controlled so that they do not end up voting. Barriers put up by gatekeepers such as relatives, staff, and others can mean that despite best efforts there will remain a lot of “outs”, i.e. that those people will not end up voting (see Section 4, Diagram 1).

Connection to community and the opportunities this provides to engage in political discussion is critical to raising people's consciousness of the place and importance of voting, and of providing the information they need to both demand and exercise their right to vote. However, if informal mechanisms such as those above fail, then what are the formal ways in which this development of political citizenship, can take place? This is considered in the section to follow.

2.3.4 Voting knowledge converted into a 'will to vote'

It is widely recognised that where primary socialisation in informal networks fails, that secondary networks (such as schools and workplaces) will play a more important role in learning. Consequently, it could be asserted that people with intellectual disability/ABI should be:

'Encouraged from early age to vote and understand [the] importance of voting... A lot of people with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, are not being taught about voting, civics or citizenship throughout their schooling' (Plenary, Day 1).

The importance of school was highlighted on a number of occasions.

'...Schooling. It needs to be schooling... And all sorts of schooling, not just high school. And special schools and everything like that' (Feedback from Break Out, Day 2)

The VEC reported that they have:

'now piloted in one special school to look at how we can change the resources so that they ... help... everybody in the way they learn best. So that's just starting, but our issue will be trying to get to all the special schools, (Break Out, Day 2).

Others mentioned that the:

'...democracy passport content is great on the VEC website for schools. But I guess, you know, imagine if we could have that in an easy language, much more broken-down. Things for people with... ID' (Break Out, Day 2)

And:

'There's a committee called the Electoral Matters Committee. And they actually put a heap of recommendations out about that whole thing we're talking about. There are elements of the curriculum that... do cover this, (Break Out, Day 2).

While formal education is therefore vital, participants noted that some people with disability are bored by certain forms of learning delivery. It was suggested that learning by having practical exercises or projects was better than teaching with just words. However, even practical exercises can have problems. In one example, the names of political candidates in an exercise of how to cast a vote

were named as colours rather than as real-world politicians with particular political views. This detracted from making the discussion grounded in a realistic context.

Once again, the importance of educational approaches which enthuse and motivate people was repeated:

'In my experience, doing it in a written form doesn't work. It's... just too hard to sometimes understand some of this stuff. It's... almost like you need a conversation. And you need to understand people talking, for example, about how that [makes a] difference in their community' (Break Out, Day 2).

'So coming up with some new, fabulous way relating to a new way of... introducing political debate about actual political policies from real political parties, rather than sort of more general information about enrolment and, you know, the ballot box' (Breakout Feedback, Day 2).

Key Point

It is vital to begin learning about civics, citizenship, voting and politics for all people during school years. The learning should, like all other learning, be based less on didactic and more on innovative and experiential models. Drawing on experts in learning and teaching delivery might pay dividends in this respect.

Content must prioritise real world examples of existing political parties, ideologies and policies, with connection to current issues and debates. It is outside the scope, indeed the power, of Electoral Commissions to facilitate the design and delivery of learning experiences and materials that incorporate much of this real-world political content.

Schools will play a role for certain age groups, but:

'...learning about it in schools is fantastic. But there's also a whole lot of people out there that have already left school, or at the end of their schooling, that wouldn't be able to benefit from a strategy around that. So we also need to think of some other ways around that', (Feedback, Day 2)

And:

'understanding your role as a citizen, which some people get a bit of it at school, probably. Maybe some people get a bit of that at home. But a lot of people with disabilities probably aren't getting access to this level of information,' (Break Out, Day 3).

It was observed that in terms of formal education for adults people with disability:

'...it's only in the work education and transition education programs...and some of their health specific programs that it's actually mentioned and taught' (Break Out feedback, Day 2).

Others mentioned:

'Political literacy courses at neighbourhood houses' (Plenary, Day 1)

And:

'VEC Electoral Education Sessions'²¹ (Plenary, Day 1)

Earlier peer groups were noted as a focal point for political discussion but there may also be a role for self-advocates in delivering education:

'People with intellectual disability often are on advisory groups about disability policy, but they can be in advisory groups that have a whole range of other things as well. But we don't see that as much. They can talk about education and climate change and industrial relations and foreign policy and media content, as well, which I know sounds like something that's not necessary to be said because it's so obvious' (Presentation, Day 2).

The extent of the effect of Neighbourhood House programs, VEC education programs, non-VEC education and inclusive voting campaigns, and self-advocacy is contingent upon the funding and their capacity to deliver training with real world political content²². It is not clear that the reach of past education programs has been sufficiently strong to affect a sizeable number of people with disability.

²¹ The VEC might deliver these sessions but, under their strict policies, must not be seen to favour any political party or candidate. Its policies also avoid engagement with practice models focused on supporting people with intellectual disability to access real world political discourse. Links to any party or to policies or candidates must be explored by the person themselves.

²² Earlier a number of campaigns and strategies in the UK, Sweden and elsewhere were mentioned that involved bringing together self advocacy groups, Non-government organisations (NGOs) and others as a focal point for learning, for campaigning and for protest and lobbying. But these are only possible to the extent they attract funding and this in turn depends on whether there is a commitment from government. It is by no means clear that Australia has either the political will to fund such initiatives to already stretched NGO and advocacy sectors.

However, it must be noted that the first I Can Vote campaign in 2018 – a pre-election campaign with elements of accessible civics education and delivered via non-face-to-face channels – achieved a reach of over 100,000 people by way of website hits, social media views, and video views.

Key Point

Post-secondary school, accessing education about citizenship, civics, politics and voting is not comprehensive. Face-to-face or relationship based self-advocacy programs, peer groups, formal training, and linkage to services or community groups are all good approaches but the capacity to deliver such initiatives to people with intellectual disability/ABI at scale has not yet been demonstrated.

Regarding formal approaches, disability support staff can also be ‘educators’ for the purposes of building political citizenship. (A further section below will consider more about their role in the mechanics of voting). Disability support staff (and their managers and the organisations for whom they work) may play a significant role in providing education and information which sets a context and provides the conditions within which people can vote.

However in many situations:

‘People do not have a rich diversity of people they know. It’s often paid people and we can’t underestimate this. Often they are more important than family because they are the people they spend a lot of time with’ (Break Out, Day 1)

The input by support staff may be informal (just discussion and exchange or conversation) or more formal (through, for example, the use of established resources). In day-to-day discussions, people in day services and in accommodation settings may be able to link those discussions to things happening in the local community of residents or clients. During such political dialogue, an ‘outward looking’ discussion might be around transport, access and other issues in the community, shopping centres, health and so forth, all which are capable of being couched in political terms. Complaints, for example about a health or NDIS service may offer opportunities for people to engage in ‘political activity’ at an everyday level around their rights. Being engaged with ‘User committees’ or membership of ‘peer-’ or

‘self-advocacy groups’ may also provide a link to leadership²³ and support learning about change-making through democratic decision-making processes²⁴.

Key Point

The processes of learning may be linked with the ‘processes of everyday life’.
Discussing my surroundings, the issues I have with a service, being involved in decision-making where I live or with other groups are all examples of ways in which everyday democracy works. These are an important dimension of education based in inclusive lifestyles and activities.

The discussion about the role of the paid workforce in raising political awareness or in training raised a number of issues. As one participant said,

‘... the paid workforce need to know, feel like, they can have some responsibility to raise it, and encourage it’, (Day 1 Break Out Room Feedback).

However, the content of the Roundtables suggested that this was problematic. Given a wider discussion about the limited knowledge of the public around politics and voting, one person asked of support staff:

‘How are you meant to speak or support someone with a disability if you’re not fully aware yourself?’ (Break Out, Day 1)

There is a chance then that some people working in disability support are not themselves in a position to support learning and engagement and, as one person observed, some have “low expectations” for their clients as well. If staff are to become more aware this might involve additional training but,

‘There are very small training allowances in the NDIS and support workers don’t get access to good professional development opportunities’ (Break Out, Day 1).

Moreover, it was suggested that disability support workers often felt they would get into trouble for ‘influencing’ the person. They might be:

²³ One person mentioned their work on ‘Voice at the Table’ training. See <https://voiceatthetable.com.au/get-involved/>

²⁴ It is noteworthy that in many of the examples of activity in the UK already suggested point, in comparative terms, to a healthy and well-funded NGO sector and significant recognition of the role of Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) in pressing for change based on the experiences of members with disability.

'criticised for going beyond their scope... don't rock the boat type of attitude...become one of them [ie. other staff] or get out... not popular with other staff...Too busy - they always have lunches to make, washing to fold ' (Break Out, Day 1)'.

Indeed, in one example where the VEC had organised with a disability support service manager to provide training around voting:

'...it was the staff who refused to come to the training' (Break Out, Day 1).

Some participants felt it was quite important, given the focus on choice and control, to ensure voting was in each person's NDIS Plan. It is, after all, a human right set out in the CRPD with Australia as a State signatory. Despite this one person related that:

'I know with [person with disability] the support workers don't feel they can initiate ideas - the NDIS says it is to be the person's control and choice but then if the person or their family don't raise it then nothing happens' (Chat, Day 1)²⁵.

This exemplifies how the parental or staff control based on stereotypes or negative views can be leveraged if organisations such as the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) are complicit in not supporting people in their rights. Another person who had been through several NDIS plans and reviews also said the Plans were varied and you often did not know what was going to come up.

Key Point

Unless there is a requirement placed upon disability services to facilitate or create opportunities for education around civics, citizenship, politics and voting, the decision upon whether to do so will rest with the provider. In situations in which there is no policy and practice guidance, it will fall to staff. In such circumstances there are a number of tensions for staff in undertaking this work. Despite being a human right, many providers and the NDIS do not systematically respect, promote and ensure these rights are met and do not systematically meet the requirement of human rights instruments. Conversely, evidence-based practice guidance and resources that assist support staff to guide people with disability through the voting pathway may alleviate many of these tensions.

²⁵ Beckman (2014) sees the lack of rules and requirements for support workers and for families as reinforcing negative stereotypes. These in turn simply lead to inertia in election periods, where no one takes responsibility to support voting.

On several occasions during the discussion about disability support for people with intellectual disability/ABI, two central evidence-based approaches for the delivery of that support were mentioned, namely 'person-centred active support' (PCAS) and 'supported decision-making' (SDM). For one person employed in the sector:

'The NDIS coming through it is about individual supports, individual views and we have a real focus on person centred active support, so gone are the days when staff ...it is all about the customer leading that and their goals', Break Out, Day 1)

But it would be fair to say that not all disability services are quite so focused as in the first example noted above. Indeed, one person knowledgeable in the area of Person Centred Active Support (PCAS) observed that they had seen it well implemented in just a small minority of places. Details were not discussed in the Roundtable but the use of this approach was recommended.

Building choice-making for some people may require self-advocacy development in order to learn about rights. However, there might also be a need to employ other approaches.

'But then there's also people that need support and having conversation and expressing their... preferences' (Report Back, Day 1)

Supported decision-making was proposed on a number of occasions as one way of seeking to support a person in making their political decisions.

'Like any supported decision making... most of you know that, you know, one of my concerns is that there's always a group of people who don't communicate formally... or perhaps don't communicate intentionally, that are left out of conversations around any kind of enhancement of autonomy or self-determination... If we do it carefully and well and within a circle, using supported decision-making approaches, we can build those that will... tap into this' (Report Back, Day 1).

Like PCAS, how this would be implemented were not detailed. However, there was a strong argument that supporting people to make decisions went hand-in-hand with 'dignity of risk', with the person:

'Making own decisions and learning from consequences' (Plenary, Day 1).

In this respect, it was observed that people with intellectual disability/ABI might vote because they liked the way a person looked and this might be an issue. However, the VEC related a research study which showed that 43% of people made their decision about voting in the queue to cast their vote. Moreover, just like the general population there will always be people who vote for a person 'because

they look nice’ or because ‘someone [a politician or councillor perhaps] had spoken to them’. The idea of universal suffrage means that the diversity of people and interests is reflected in the vote. People with intellectual disability/ABI are simply no different. As one person with disability observed in relation to the VEC’s point about how the general public make their voting decisions,

‘That’s double standards – why finger people with disabilities then?’ (Break Out, Day 1)

The concept of supported decision making was also linked with easy language, a topic considered more fully in the next section.

It is worth noting that for many people with disabilities the support they receive and the environments in which they receive such supports can be less than ideal. In such circumstances,

‘How do they get encouraged and supported if they’re still sort of locked away in little silos?’
(Break Out Report back, Day 1)

Since disability support workers have a key role in supporting people to vote, working with these staff and the organisations for whom they work may be vital to ensure they are providing all the supports necessary to lead each person to exercise their voting right.

It was notable in the Roundtable discussions that a focus on practical solutions such as PCAS, circles of support, supported decision making featured strongly as mechanisms that could be adopted by disability services around supporting people to become more conscious of issues in their lives and communities, to build civic identities and to express their views through voting. Interestingly, these solution-focused approaches were more a feature of this discussion than they were in the literature accessed in the knowledge review.

Key Point:

Person centred active support and supported decision making are important evidence-based practices which can be used to support learning and decisions around voting for some people with intellectual disability/ABI. While resources to support application of these practices exist (eg. I Can Vote practice and planning tools), what the scaled application of these practices might look like in terms of delivery in diverse contexts is yet to be determined. Much work is required to adopt these but more broadly to work with disability support organisations to establish voting and facilitate access, while removing barriers, to spaces that will enhance political citizenship as a key responsibility for them – with policies and practices to match this responsibility.

The role of Political parties and politicians:

In terms of being informed and learning, there will also be a role played by politicians and political parties²⁶. However, there is a:

‘Lack of awareness among political parties and politicians, that there is this constituency, this group of people out there who could be involved’ (Report Back, Break Out, Day 1).

One of the themes across **all** areas in which solutions were suggested included the need to use easy language when communicating with people with intellectual disability/ABI²⁷. The complex and often garbled and soundbite language of politicians came in for particular criticism in this respect.

‘Vote portals should be a consistent place to go...but on top of that easy language materials, ... supported decision-making, Article 12 of the UN...to make sure there is easy language...’
(Plenary, Day 1)

Easy language would, many participants argued, be useful not just to people with intellectual disability/ABI²⁸:

‘The only problem with the politicians is they’re not required to make things into Easy English which sometimes frustrates and annoys me because I have a disability. If they were required to do it would be a lot easier’ (Break Out, Day 1)

And:

‘A plain language website gets more clicks than the usual’ (Break out, Day 1)

And:

‘Many people will benefit from plain language So it not just people with disability. Universal design principles’ (Break out, Day 1)

However, it was also noted that there was just ‘too much information’ to take in. In that sense, not everything can be translated into easy language.

²⁶ In our knowledge review it was found, among other things that links to politicians and trust of politicians was linked to higher voting by people with intellectual disability (see <https://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/nysr/nysr-e.pdf>, section 4.6.4). Kyei and Dogbe (2020) found a greater likelihood of voting where people had spoken with a political representative, attended political meetings, written to politicians to change something they did not like or agree with.

²⁷ Mencap’s elections advocacy work <https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/elections> involved lobbying political parties to publish plain language manifestos and they have had significant success over a number of years now in relation to political elections and elections to public positions. The Mitt Val (Op.cit.) in Sweden managed to organise discussions with 49 politicians.

²⁸ Teglbjaerg et al.(2021) found that people with disabilities were more likely to vote in countries where election information was provided in accessible formats. In a study of 415 people with physical and sensory disability

Political parties and politicians therefore need to be aware of the needs of the constituency of people with intellectual disability/ABI and ensure their documents are delivered in accessible language²⁹.

Key Finding:

A commitment to accessible language and formats in all information, educational and learning resources and communications generally is a constant feature across all of the 'solutions' suggested for any ICV initiative and should be adopted.

In considering what people should learn in terms of politics it was suggested that

'Learn about what key areas are covered by council, State and Federal governments e.g. health, social services, jobs and economy etc... It HAS to be issue based. Its needs to be about the experience, and less about teaching the content. Starting with the people and the issue',
(Break Out Solution 3 – Learn about Politics, Day 2)

Some participants raised concerns that it was impossible to know the work of all candidates at all levels of state and Federal Parliament and that this would make it very difficult to be fair to all the candidates where information was being provided. As discussed earlier the issues about 'fairness' are interesting given that mainstream media companies seldom give an equal platform to all politicians. Some people suggested media such as websites, videos, blogs, social media and TV were useful, particularly for the younger generation but also recognised the digital divide and the limitations for many people with intellectual disability/ABI accessing these resources³⁰.

In one break out room discussion, participants reported that political party documents are largely too complex and detailed. Easy language applies to documents, emails and anything using the written word, but also simply understanding what politicians are saying. There was a recognition that people with intellectual disability needed to be aware of a number of policy areas and debates making this even more testing³¹. How then is it possible to:

'Make sure they understand what voting is for and make decision about who to vote for'
(Plenary, Day 1)

²⁹ However accessible language and formats were found to be required more widely across the voting process and the knowledge review lists countless strategies adopted not just about political information but at polling stations and booths also (see EESC 2019, for example).

³⁰ The knowledge review Trevisan (2020) says social media, newsfeeds and other platforms can have a positive effect on engagement in politics. Interactive platforms could play a similar role while Friedman (2018) found similar results for those who had used TV, radio and newspapers. Despite this 61% of Friedman's sample had trouble with the complexity of issues

³¹ It was also argued in the Roundtable that 'it's alright to vote on one issue' just like many of the wider population might choose to do.

This links to the importance of easy language described earlier. People with disability also complained about:

‘Politicians bagging each other on TV’ (Plenary, Day 1)

‘Politicians use jargon and don’t use easy words – messages unclear’ (Plenary, Day 1)

As a result, not everybody does, nor will everybody trust in politicians³².

In his presentation on the previous ICV initiative, Nathan Despott felt, however, that it was not just the politicians’ responsibility:

‘Talk about politicians producing them, but it’s all our responsibility. Get as many people with disability engaged as possible’. (Presentation, Day 2)

Despott talked about being struck by the United Response *Every Vote Counts* initiative in the UK,

‘which was to have people with disability interviewing politicians, and... running an accessible website through an organization... had the means to put it up. And that it’s by people with disability for people with disabilities’ (Break Out Discussion – Solution 4 learn about political opinion and political parties)

Whilst the previous ICV initiative had found politicians positive about easy language, some - particularly small parties - had issues with funding this work. As one person observed apart from the larger parties who had funds:

‘Candidates don’t get funds until after votes counted so they don’t have money to create information and advertising’ (Break out, Day 1).

The solutions identified across the roundtables for ‘translation’ of complex into easy language may not therefore lie wholly with politicians and political parties, and yet such translation was vital if informed decisions about voting were to be made.

Furthermore, the VEC, whose work is vital to increasing voting but had to be seen to be politically impartial also raised the issue of being fair when translating materials from politicians and political parties.

This issue of fairness to all political parties and candidates was an issue discussed in the second plenary. Some people responded:

³² In the knowledge review distrust of politicians and negative attitudes towards them were found in a number of studies (Schur and Adya, 2013; Reher, 2020; Rahahleh et al 2021)

‘where it says, you know, all political parties were approached equally... well, [if] we need to do it perfectly in a perfectly even way, then it means it will never happen. So I think there's something there about making it clear to the general population that everyone's been contacted’ (Plenary, Day 2).

Putting some of the discussion together suggests a range of solutions which are likely to make politics and voting more understandable. Solutions suggested included:

- Education campaigns grounded in community awareness and/or discussion groups such as in Mitt Val (noted above) in Sweden and in Neighbourhood houses in Scotland which were helpful forums in which to unravel and discuss such complexity in a safe space.
- The ICV initiative which had previously used an easy language website, translating complex documents as well as a space for sharing stories.
- Political literacy courses.
- One person suggested *‘Whenever the election may be called, I'm wondering whether you've [The ICV project] considered partnering with Vote Compass, either through the VEC or directly with the company. And having them being able to do that in Easy English’* (Presentation discussion, Day 2) though it was pointed out that this approach did not contain information on local issues and candidates.

From the perspective of those wedded to a peer action in local communities, solutions were also seen to be about:

- Local peer and action groups learning to influence politicians
- Running ‘small projects’ and ‘Making connection between issues [people with intellectual disability/ABI] care about and voting’.

So far in this section consideration has been given to factors that need to be in place that would maximise the chance that employing a plan and practical arrangements to vote would be successful. Such practical arrangements are considered in the sub-section to follow. First though a summary of some key themes that have emerged so far.

Key Points

In this section to date the focus has been upon 'contextual areas' that featured in the Roundtable discussions around the everyday lives of people with intellectual disability/ABI and

- a) The background values driving any ICV or other initiatives around civics, citizenship and voting as basis upon which the case is made for people with intellectual disability/ABI voting and having the rights to do so.

The finding from Roundtable discussions indicated that,

- b) The importance of their right to assert choice and control over everyday life is a precursor to each person having the power to express a choice around voting
- c) Wide social networks and social engagement are crucial. Limited networks and isolation can ensure that others do not have the sole power to dictate whether a person with disability votes. Low or no expectations of others despite the desire or capacity of people with disability to engage in the political system, together with the unchecked exercise of power and authority by others, are likely to prevent voting. Wider networks and particularly an engagement in communities can make politics and local issues more real, can prompt social action and lead to politicisation. As a result, these people are more likely to take a position on what they think about issues in their communities and perhaps more widely and are more likely to vote.
- d) The vital importance of practical and experiential knowledge which is 'outward looking' to communities, states, and nation, is therefore a vital antecedent condition to 'politicisation' and to meaningful voting.
- e) There are differing forms of education and information offered by different people and groups that will either hinder or aid politicisation and prompt voting. Forms of education need to be innovative and practical, experiential and support engagement. This includes with politicians and political parties.

The *context* for inclusive voting practices is therefore multi-layered and complex. This context cannot easily be changed overnight. Some things that make for success have been identified, however the implementation of successful practical initiatives to increase voting may be further delayed if advocates are to wait for every preliminary risk-based or logistical concern to be sufficiently addressed. Ultimately, many people with intellectual disability/ABI will continue to be the

“outs” in the voting stakes unless inclusive voting campaigns are trialled and implemented sooner rather than later, in parallel with the longer-term work of addressing fundamental contextual issues (see Section 4: Diagram 1).

As one person puts it though, even after all this:

‘Even then some people just do not want to vote but... We don't give up. We have to keep trying. We have to change the belief systems. We've got a lot of work to do’ (Plenary Day2)

In the section to follow an examination is made of what was learned in the Roundtables from participants about how to deliver support for the processes involved in the voting process itself. Once again, to reiterate, these can only succeed for the many where the issues addressed in the above sections of the report are addressed.

2.3.5 Delivering practical support in relation to the process of voting

Previous sub-sections of this report were based on discussions by Roundtable participants which were about the ‘conditions’ and ‘context’ necessary prior to the practicalities of supporting a person to cast their vote. The sub-sections considered issues around who could or should provide support in relation to each of those areas.

This section now moves to the practicalities of supporting a person to vote in a more substantive way. It considers the importance of having a plan to vote and dealing with the complexities of casting that vote on the day. It was noteworthy that in the post Roundtable survey a majority of respondents agreed that getting the support required was hard, as shown in the Table 4 below.

Table 4 Roundtable participant perception of the level of difficulty people with intellectual disability/ABI have in getting support to vote: *Please say how much you agree with the following statement: It is hard for people with intellectual disability and Acquired Brain Injury to get good support from paid or unpaid supporters.*

Response	Percentage (no. participants)
Strongly Agree	50% (6)
Agree	25% (3)
Neither agree nor disagree	25% (3)
Disagree	0

Having a Plan to vote was one of the most important ways of making sure there was a process in place to ensure a person votes. One person said it was vital to

'put in place mandated planning... to see it as a sacred kind of thing that doesn't fall off the radar' (Break Out, Day 1).

Workshop facilitator, Nathan Despott, presented the elements of the previous ICV initiative and in which Pathway steps 3-5³³ were used to develop a detailed plan for voting.³⁴ Only high-level details are presented below as the contents of the presentation are available elsewhere. One interesting point was the reticence of funding agencies to be involved in funding initiatives relating to politics and this left a resultant struggle for ICV to use limited resources to maximum effect. The second was the importance of working with allies and through alliances. In this respect VEC, whose work is vital, had to be seen to be politically impartial and this had an effect on their participation in initiatives led by others.

Participant discussion on day 2 of the Roundtable provided some examples addressing each part of the voting process, though in very little detail. Resources were seen to be vital for the person but also those providing support, but time did not allow discussion of what such resources might contain³⁵.

The previous ICV resource, details of which were related in the presentation suggest the following:

- How you will learn about the election and voting:
 - The development of an inclusive voting campaign website with back-end portal in which politicians can have policy text translated to easy language.
 - The use of accessible instructions and a standardised presentation of information allowing people with intellectual disability/ABI to navigate the website easier than if accessing each political candidate's content from a diverse range of websites.
 - Easy language content about politics and accessible videos.
 - Workshops with groups of people with intellectual disability (which were described by the ICV team as 'very successful').

³³ See <https://icanvote.org.au/> and for Pathways see: <http://icanvote.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/I-Can-Vote-voting-pathway.pdf>

³⁴ See <http://icanvote.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Plan-to-Vote-Jan2018.pdf>

³⁵ A similar lack of detail about resources for families, support workers and polling staff was also found in the knowledge review, leaving any potential initiative to make decisions about how such resources should be populated and delivered.

- VEC-commissioned dual easy and plain language print and online resources for people with intellectual disability/ABI and support workers. These were a printed guide and the Plan to Vote form. The resources utilised principles of Supported Decision Making and Person Centred Active Support.
- A Facebook page promoting the campaign materials broadly, with added paid boosting of key posts.

In relation to using resources one person who delivered ICV training said:

'We found that many of the people who were in those groups had done some kind of workshop about filling out a ballot paper before and had checked their enrolment. But we're not used to discussing... the political policies... or the candidates' (Presentation, Day 2).

The ICV resource also included:

- A space to name and detail the primary supporter
- Information on enrolling to vote
- A place to put electoral area, preference for vote and for polling station
- Practical issue questions such as transport, access to the site and booth
- What people could do after voting

In the 2018 I Can Vote initiative, it was found that promoting the campaign via a social media campaign with a relatively low budget boosting strategy produced much greater reach and interest than more expensive broadcast channels, such as via the Radio Release service. A similarly lower budget approach, direct engagement via mailouts to supported accommodation and private residences, was suggested by one participant:

'Sending out, packages to disability homes and that and group homes is that you're going to get the staff on board to actually help the people understand the information or go through with it' (Plenary Day 2)

However, despite having a plan to vote there are often unpredictable things that can get in the way:

'Support is in place - but then you get to the actual process of doing it and that person's away sick, or the taxi that you booked to get to the voting centre doesn't turn up' (Break Out, Day 1)

Casting a vote remains a problematic area that requires careful consideration and the provision of practical support. This area, like others in relation to voting, is complex and made up of a number of parts. VEC reported that:

‘People do not understand what supports they actually can give’ (Plenary, Day 1)

This includes people providing many forms of support from registering, providing information on parties, to helping cast a vote, but perhaps not all.

The VEC reports that:

‘...we are trying to just let people know, of course, you can't tell the person who to vote for but you can be with them, you can help them step through the process, you can fill out the ballot paper under their instruction. So this, we are trying to address it, but it is a big one’ (Plenary, Day 1)

People with intellectual disability/ABI (and others it should be said!) often fill out their ballot paper incorrectly. One solution rehearsed was that:

‘at the table with everything laid out all the different how to vote, maybe online videos, like being supported to do that process, and it would be great. And maybe even to like fill out the ballot, they're on the table, but then to be able to go to the centre on the day, and transfer what you've written’ (Plenary, Day 1).

However, as reported earlier, practice with mock ballots does not always work and the VEC still reports ‘informalities’ (spoiled voting papers). However alternative ways of casting a vote were also mentioned³⁶ by participants as useful to ensure the person votes, such as alternative ways of casting the vote

‘you received the pack in the mail, you have all the different political parties in front of you with the descriptions, and then you get some assistance where you can then send that back via the post’ (Plenary, Day 1)

While polling station staff had training on supporting people and on what support others can provide for the person, there have been “mistakes” where staff have been overzealous in limiting what

³⁶ The Knowledge review submitted to ICV covered a number of alternative suggestions for casting a vote. These included not just postal or electronic voting but also such things as mobile voting stations, electoral commissions notifying disability services who is registered to vote from their address and so forth (see also Appendix 1).

accompanying support can do, as well as sometimes being over vigilant and interventionist with people with intellectual disabilities. A VEC member stated in this respect that

‘At both Australia and Victoria elections you can always have another person help you to vote at the voting screens. You can ask for a new ballot paper if you make a mistake, by taking your ballot to an election staff member to swap to a new blank ballot. You can take your time. You can ask an election staff member to help you at the voting screen too. They can stand or sit with you and write down your choices for you, they just cannot make the choice for you’ (Plenary, Day 1)

It should be noted that the solutions around the practicalities of voting are a small part of a much bigger literature³⁷. Time in this part of the Roundtable ran out, leaving additional points around the practicalities of voting still to be considered.

2.4 Consensus statement development

After the two Roundtables the ICV team wrote a consensus statement based upon the discussions that took place over the two Roundtables. These statements recognised that out of all the solutions that had been discussed, priorities needed to be identified. The consensus statements reflected what had been decided. Five key strategies designed to support the development of an initiative in 2022 and designed to increase voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI were identified as part of the consensus statement. (It should be noted that the consensus statement was seen as a ‘living document’ so it could continue to evolve over time). However, the post-Roundtable survey (n= 13 participants)³⁸ explored the agreement of participants with these strategies asking the following five statements:

Statement 1 - To support people with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury to vote, we could make easy language documents and videos about local, state, and national issues.

Statement 2 - To support people with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury to vote, we could make easy language documents, videos, and events about political parties and politicians.

³⁷ The unpublished knowledge review submitted to ICV previously had a significant number of international examples. It also covered a wider range of areas relating to support (see Appendix 1).

³⁸ The survey was distributed to 21 people with 13 responding, a response rate of 62%.

Statement 3 - To support people with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury to vote, we could share stories about people with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury making changes to government and community.

Statement 4 - People with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury could be supported to learn how to vote, finding out if I am enrolled, and some tips for when I am at a voting centre.

Statement 5 - To support people with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury to vote, we could make documents and videos to help paid or unpaid support learn about why they should support a person with Intellectual Disability and Acquired Brain Injury to vote

The participants responses to each of the five statements, indicating their degree of agreement are shown in Figure 1 below.

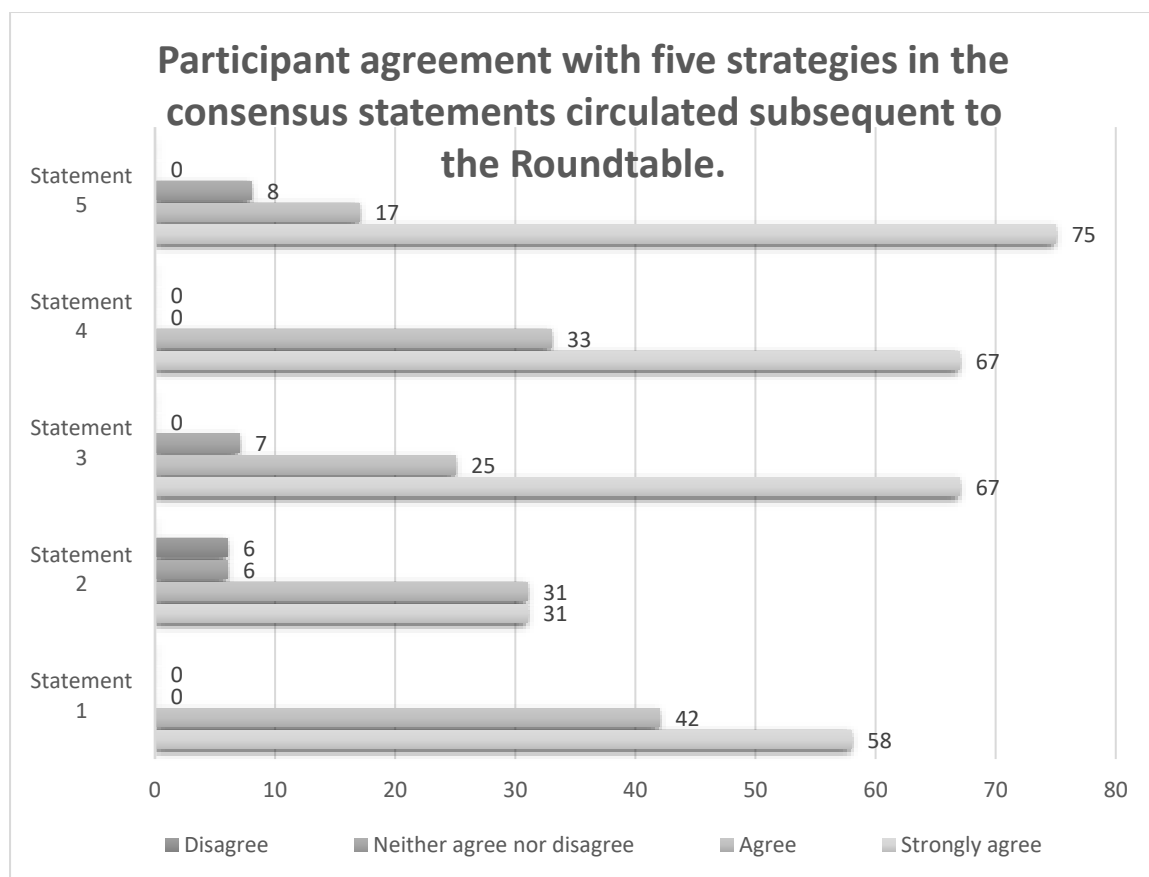


Figure 1

Participants' percentage level of agreement with the five proposed strategies

As can be seen, there was majority agreement with four of the strategies and almost majority agreement with the fifth, with the greater proportion of participants responding with 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. The strategy with most votes was supporting people with intellectual disability/ABI to make documents and videos to help paid and unpaid support to learn why they should support learning and offer practical support to vote. The least supported strategy related to making easy language documents about politicians and political parties.

Key Point

The majority agreement with four of the five Census statements found in the survey subsequent to the Roundtables provides a strong agenda to ICV for those areas upon which they should focus in any subsequent initiative.

An open-ended question was also asked in the survey about additional strategies that respondents '...think was agreed at the Roundtable that has not been mentioned'. Two suggestions were made.

The first was to 'Employ more people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities to work raising awareness of enrolling to vote'. Indeed, it might be suggested that this inclusive engagement by ICV would be part of all the work they did in any initiative and would reflect the attempts across the Roundtables to ensure participation and inclusive practices.

The second suggestion was that,

'I would like to see a focus on how we can support people who communicate informally to have their will and preference acknowledged, interpreted, and acted upon (through supported decision making) and therefore represented through their vote'

This contribution is a reference which encompasses the findings of this study. It should not be assumed that those who communicate in different ways are any less capable of decisions relating to voting nor that they cannot be involved in communities and learn civics. Nor should it be assumed

that informal and formal information and learning is impossible. For people in this category support across these areas would benefit from the employment of supported decision-making approaches.

This finding also points to the need to apply supported decision-making in all areas discussed as barriers in this report. As was noted in a Roundtable PowerPoint presentation on day 1:

‘The ‘social model of disability’ suggests it is NOT capacity or ability to access voting that helps people vote but ‘the capacity of SOCIETY to put in place the right supports so that people do vote’.

The Roundtable Solutions documented in Appendix 6 is in many ways a consideration of what these supports might be across the areas required to move each person with intellectual disability/ABI to a position where they do cast their vote. The discussion in section 4 of the current report explores these issues in some more detail.

Key Point

There was broad agreement with the strategies suggested by ICV in its consensus statement. The importance of leadership by people with intellectual disability/ABI was also highlighted. If more awareness of political citizenship and agency and of political context³⁹ were already achieved, it is likely there would be more demand for accessible materials (such as easy language translations) from politicians and political parties than was expressed in the survey.

³⁹ See the Inclusion Melbourne pathway on page 20 of their publication to be found at: <http://inclusionmelbourne.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/electoral-inclusion.pdf>

Section 3 - Inclusive practices and the Roundtables

3.1 Background

Section 3 of this report addresses research question 2 (What is the extent to which an inclusive participatory approach can deliver an initiative which increases voting and civic engagement of people with intellectual disability/Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)?') and question 3 (What is the ongoing appetite for people staying involved and included in the ICV work?). This section draws upon an analysis of the inclusive approaches used by ICV in the two Roundtables, along with Roundtable evaluation data from the post Roundtable survey.

As already reported, the roundtables were chosen as the preferred mode of gathering feedback and insight from participants as the ICV team would be able to facilitate and encourage discussion and debate around proposed interventions. However, the COVID-19 Pandemic and associated public health requirements necessitated the two roundtables being conducted online.

The organisation of the Roundtable involved extending invitations to a range of people with an interest in voting and more particularly voting and intellectual disability. Given the attendance of the Victorian Electoral Commission, who had been involved in previous work with Inclusion Designlab, it was not possible to invite politicians to the roundtables.

The background design of the day was also considered by the ICV team in a way that sought to maximise inclusive practices. It was agreed that the approach should be participatory and inclusive of leaders with intellectual disability and ABI. Indeed, some elements of a co-design approach were adopted. As a result, one of the outcomes of the two Roundtable discussions was identified to be a consensus statement upon which an initiative could later be developed.

3.2 Inclusive practices adopted for the Roundtables

3.2.1 Engaging with the Roundtable participants

A number of devices were used by the ICV team to maximise an inclusive and participatory approach to the Roundtables themselves. Here it was important to consider carefully the invitation list, to ensure it included people:

- i. who brought theoretical knowledge (e.g. academics)

- ii. who brought specific knowledge around voting (e.g. the VEC)
- iii. whose role it is to oversee the protection, defence and promotion of human rights (Office of the Disability Services Commissioner, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission)
- iv. from government departments such as the Office for Disability (DFFH)
- v. with responsibility for the delivery of services – disability support professionals, and representatives of the NDIS
- vi. from disability advocacy organisations – some who were resource units for disability advocacy and some which ran peer support groups and protected rights
- vii. who were self-advocates: People with intellectual disability and acquired brain injury. In this group there were self-advocacy leaders, one of whom had been involved with ICV in the 2018 initiative, and who came with experiential knowledge.

It is notable that three of the participants also had a relative with intellectual disability who they had either supported or would support to vote. The make-up of the roundtable invitation list therefore included, as a collective, people who could establish theoretical foundations for the debate, those who held responsibility around human rights, those with experience of voting, those who had responsibility for support, and those with first-hand experience of the voting process for people with intellectual disability and ABI. All were able to deliberate and bring to the table their experiences based on a common goal.

Key Point

The invited participants were in a position to link *theory to practice* through a range of relevant experiences – and to use the evidence of the two Roundtables to establish the dimensions of a future initiative.

3.2.2 The distributed documents

Like all documents that participants received, the documents sent out prior to the Roundtable were developed in easy language to make them widely accessible and understandable to all. This included:

- The Invitation to the Roundtables (Appendix 2)

- Voting and intellectual disability roundtable: information pack (Appendix 4)⁴⁰
- The agenda for each Roundtable (Appendix 3)
- Tips for an Inclusive Zoom Meeting (Appendix 5)⁴¹
- The PowerPoints delivered on each day:
 - I Can Vote Knowledge Review (Day 1 – Paul Ramcharan)
 - Human rights Law and Voting (Day 1 – Nathan Despott)
 - The Story of I Can Vote (Day 2 – Nathan Despott and Cameron Bloomfield)

At each stage of contact by email from ICV staff, participants were asked to contact the ICV organisers if they needed additional support. Participants were also asked whether they required additional support at the two roundtable sessions, or in preparation to attend.

Key Point

The documents sent to participants (see above), the use of easy language, and the offer of support where required can be seen as ways of maximising the participation and inclusion of all participants. Accessible information allowed participants to be as informed and prepared as possible (so long as it was all accessed and used) and helped to form a view which could be brought to the Roundtables. The opportunity to request support allowed all participants to enquire further about things they did not understand or to ask for one-to-one support where required.

The information sent prior to the Roundtables was intended to be used by participants to think about their contributions ahead of the event. As part of these pre-roundtable resources, based on the knowledge review undertaken by the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne, a Solutions Workbook (Appendix 6) was prepared.

The Solutions Workbook was a large document in which participants could explore ten key areas related to voting by people with intellectual disability. It was written in easy language with instructions about its use as a tool to support discussion prior to distribution by ICV. Subsequently the ten solutions were split amongst three breakout sessions at the second Roundtable.

⁴⁰ The Information pack (Appendix 4) is a large document. It states using colour coding what is in easy language and what is not. It includes: the solutions workbook (Appendix 6) and link to it); I Can Vote: A Guide for People with a Disability, their Family, Carers, Friends, Advocates and Support Professionals (with web address); the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) Disability Inclusion and Access Plan and web address; and links to the *VEC Voting is for Everyone – Facilitator Guide* and *Easy English Worksheets*

Key Point

Given the size of the Solutions Workbook it may have been better to allocate people to the three discussion groups prior to the Roundtables and to ask participants to consider a smaller set of proposed solutions. This would have helped provide focus in these groups and help manage the volume of content and proposed solutions people were asked to explore.

In terms of reception, only one breakout room facilitator asked whether the participants had read the Solutions Workbook. It appeared that some participants had not used it even if they had read it to a greater or lesser degree. One person with intellectual disability said

'...it's probably good like the formatting. It's quite good. At the same time it does seem like quite a bit of information to absorb at the same time. Yeah, yeah. I don't think it's in anyone who has intellectual disability...' (Break Out, Day 2)

Another ventured that

'overall, I just wanted to say a lot is looking super comprehensive. And I think the overall thing I probably should have said this, first open it up, but it's lots to take in.' (Break Out, Day 2)

Recognising this another suggested:

'even with the most eloquent and best of plain language, it's always a challenge. And for me, these sorts of materials are always best as a tool for a conversation between two trusted people' (Break Out, Day 2).

No similar questions were asked in the Breakout groups about the Roundtable Information pack (Appendix 4) which was also a long and detailed document which contained its own information about people with intellectual disability/ABI voting, but also many web links which could be followed up. But unlike the Solutions Workbook this document was more focused on providing roundtable participants with background information, rather than being designed to support substantive discussion during the Roundtables.

Key Point

Even easy language documents can be long and complex. Sometimes it is better to share and discuss such documents prior to meetings in which they are used.

Planning small workgroups prior to the Roundtables may have helped to support the discussion.

3.2.3 Maximising participation through the rules and activities of the Roundtable

The Roundtables were introduced on both occasions using parts of the *Tips for an Inclusive Zoom Meeting* (Appendix 5). Part 1 of this document was about helping people to feel included in the Roundtable and Part 2 had some helpful tips when using Zoom. Participants were instructed to:

1. Be respectful to everyone
2. Be patient and understanding with everyone who is talking, we are all here on a different playing field
3. Say your name before you talk so that everyone can follow the conversation
4. Talk in easy language
 - a. Do not use jargon
 - b. Do not use acronyms
 - c. If you *have* to use jargon or acronyms, please explain what this means
5. Check that everyone has understood what have said
 - a. Ask “*Does everyone understand?*” when you finish speaking, or at the end of a point/idea
6. If you have a question do one of three (3) things:
 - a. Press ‘Raise Hand’ or
 - b. Write your question in the chat box or
 - c. Hold up something **yellow** or **orange** in front of your camera
7. If you do not understand something and need it explained more, hold up something **red** in front of your camera.
 - a. The person speaking will stop and ask which part you would like explained

The approach therefore sought to place all people on an equal footing in terms of their chance of contributing, to have equal understanding of what was being discussed and to have a specific mechanism at hand, to challenge or ask for clarification.

Key Point

Making sure each participant has an equal chance to contribute, an equal chance to understand, the right to ask questions whilst doing all this respectfully, were key features of the roundtables operating in an inclusive manner.

Raising questions was evident across the two Roundtables, whilst raising a red sheet to ask for clarification of language terms that were not understood happened on five occasions over the two days.

Each day people were asked to introduce themselves. This allowed all the participants to know who was at each event. At the second Roundtable, time for these introductions was afforded to the new participants who were unable to attend the first day). It was noteworthy how people introduced themselves most particularly the way in which the participants proffered their 'credentials'. In amongst the credentials used were:

- Being part of a support organisation and community (staff, service users or members)
- Belonging to key advocacy groups and sub-groups (including leadership roles)
- Having lived experience personally or through a relative
- Having official roles around human rights
- Having specific roles relating to voting and inclusion
- Having specialised knowledge relevant to the task.

In the introductions, credentials, information, experience, role responsibilities, and (implied) willingness and capacity to actively work on making change established a common bond between participants around a shared view of the world. The personal introductions built trust and reinforced that all participants were contributing based on the same values – those which recognise the right of people with intellectual disability/ABI to be full citizens and to exercise their right to vote.

Key Point

The participants in the Roundtables indicated through their credentials what they brought to the meetings in terms of knowledge, information, identity, experience and activities all linked to the key recognition of the right of people with intellectual disability/ABI to be full citizens and the vote. This built trust and helped all to understand that what would be contributed came from diverse backgrounds.

As can be seen from the agendas for each Roundtable (Appendix 3a and b), the sessions were designed to inject knowledge through presentations and to inject experiences through first person accounts with the chance for questions and for clarification at each stage. Subsequent to hearing these narratives smaller discussion groups in break-out rooms were organised to harvest views about the issues and barriers in Roundtable 1 and the solutions in Roundtable 2. This approach ensured that a resultant initiative in the future was designed to accomplish this increase in voting and was driven by the Roundtable participants themselves.

For the moment it is important to note that once again the platform for discussion in groups was based on an effort to bring together knowledge, information and first-person experience into a common agenda for future work.

Key Point

The Roundtable agenda (Appendix 3a and b) were designed not just for participation. They provided a logic which moved people from information and experience, through to deliberation on evidence around issues and solutions thus allowing an informed contribution to the codesign of a future initiative.

3.3 Evaluation of the Inclusive practices adopted for the Roundtables

The second overall question for this research project was to what extent could an inclusive participatory approach deliver an initiative designed to increase voting and civic engagement of people with intellectual disability/Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). Furthermore, the third and final question asked 'What is the ongoing appetite for people staying involved and included in the work'? To address these questions, an on-line survey was conducted with participants following their involvement in the Roundtables. The survey was delivered to 21 such participants, with 13 responding (a response rate of 62%).

Eight statements were presented in the survey to gauge agreement:

Statement 1 – The information sent out before the Roundtables was very easy to understand.

Statement 2 – The information sent out before the Roundtables helped you make up your mind about what you wanted to say at the Roundtables.

Statement 3 – I feel I had enough time to say the things I wanted to say at the Roundtables

Statement 4 – I feel people listened to what I had to say at the Roundtables

Statement 5 – I liked the way the Roundtable was organised

Statement 6 – The presentations at the Roundtable really helped me to think about all the problems people with intellectual disability/ABI voting and being involved in their local community

Statement 7 – The workshops where we talked in smaller groups at the Roundtables really helped me to understand the difficulties around voting and to come to a decision about what I thought would be a good solution

Statement 8 – Overall I think the Roundtables worked really well. They will lead to a project that will support people with intellectual disability/ABI to learn more about voting.

The findings are summarised in Figure 2 below with respect to participants' percentage agreement with each statement.

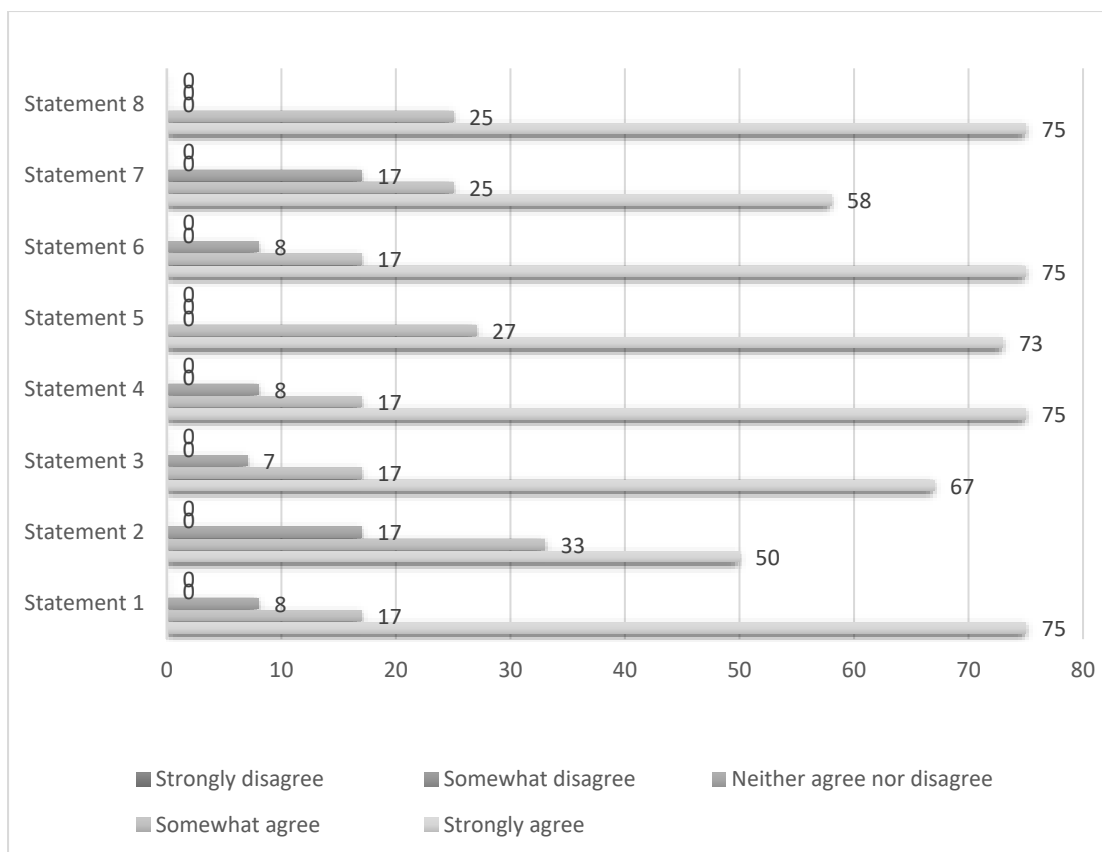


Figure 2 Evaluation of the ICV Roundtables by Participants.

Figure 2 indicates a positive response to the information sent out prior to the Roundtables, to the content including presentations and to the way in which the Roundtables were organised with opportunities for discussion in workshops. All agreed the 'Roundtables worked really well'.

Key Point

Our survey indicates that participants experienced strong levels of inclusion and participation and that they felt the way in which the Roundtables had been organised would help to achieve the goals of increasing voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI.

Indeed, when asked whether they would attend another Roundtable like this one, 10 participants (out of 11 who responded to this question), (91%) said they would. In an open-ended question about other things that might have made the roundtable better than it was, a few suggestions were made. These can be summarised as:

- Holding a third Roundtable to discuss solutions further.
- A Face to face meeting, instead of online, was suggested by two people.

- Hearing more from people who have been affected by their voting experiences. This was mentioned twice.
- Hearing more from the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) and Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) about what is being done to support more inclusive elections.
- The 'solutions document' was rather complicated. A separate meeting with self-advocates to run through the basic contents of the document could have been held prior to the roundtables.

For the overall project, research question 2 asked: What is the extent to which an inclusive participatory approach can deliver an initiative, which increases voting and civic engagement of people with cognitive disability? The current findings suggest, most participants felt the Roundtables to be inclusive and participatory.

The third question for the current research asked 'what is the ongoing appetite for people staying involved and included in the work'? To address this issue, the online survey asked a series of questions, the results of which are summarised below.

Twelve respondents (of 13 who submitted a survey) said they would like to be involved in future I Can Vote project work

Participants were asked about roles and tasks they might wish to be involved in, with smaller numbers indicating such a wish in each area:

- Five participants expressed a wish to be a member of the project advisory group (see below for additional responses)
- Four participants expressed a wish to: Work on a solution to get people with intellectual disability and ABI registered to vote; make resources for family, support workers and others
- Three participants expressed a wish to: Work with people with intellectual disability/ABI to raise awareness of I Can Vote; Develop a campaign to support people with intellectual disability and ABI to vote; Making plain language materials; Help schools, disability services (including day programs), employers and others to make a plan to support people with intellectual disability and ABI to vote
- Two participants expressed a wish to: Make videos and other materials for people with intellectual disability/ID to watch; Help make material for websites; Try to get self-advocacy groups, services and other to be involved in the project; Try to get politicians interested in the

vote of people with intellectual disability/ABI; Supporting people to put together a plan to vote; Do training for people with intellectual disability/ABI, families and disability services

- One participant expressed a wish to; Help make political material into easy language that helps people to decide how to vote; Work with the media such as newspapers, TV and radio about the voting rights of people with intellectual disability and ABI; Work on the law reform aspects of the project.

Participants were also asked about what supports would need to be in place to facilitate any involvement in a future project. The following supports and enablers were mentioned:

- Being paid for time and expertise
- Easy English/Easy Language support
- Time
- Correct information on next meetings and plenty of warning time
- Longer breaks at meetings
- Clear guidelines on what we want to achieve and how
- Some kind of research grant to support formal research
- Training to understand the role
- Wheelchair accessibility

Further questions were asked around the Project Advisory Group and the extent to which they would like to be involved in 2022. Three participants said they would 'really like' to be a member of this group, 1 that they would 'like' to be a member and 7 that they would 'take part if invited'. This indicated that participants saw themselves in continued leadership roles across any subsequent initiative. Once again factors that would support this contribution were listed as:

- Access to online meetings
- Plenty of notice of meetings and topics to be discussed – a month, then two weeks then day before
- Subject to capacity and time
- Payments
- Colour code the information

Despite the appetite for membership of a project advisory group, smaller numbers wished to contribute to ongoing initiative tasks. However, in both cases this was subject to capacity, time and resources. Clearly funding, easy language and good planning would be considered key factors in

supporting continued engagement. That the inclusive practices on the Roundtable work were seen in a positive light indicates such inclusive practice is now already bedded-in as part of the ICV ethos and approach.

Summary and final points:

The participatory and inclusive mechanisms designed by ICV for the Roundtable were generally well-received and supported the engagement of self-advocates in the Roundtables. However, the Solutions Workbook was considered too big and required pre-work to make sure it had maximum impact in the Roundtable discussions. Active involvement in any subsequent ICV initiative by the participants was most likely to be in continued leadership on the Project Advisory Group, rather than the smaller operationalisation of elements of the initiative. This raises the importance of ICV developing further partnerships to maximise success in any future initiative. Further funding for participation is important to ensure inclusive practices are always adopted and so that co-design drives any future initiative as it did this one.

Section 4 - Discussion

4.1 Summary and overall findings

This project addressed three research questions: ‘What are the supportive factors and barriers to the development of an inclusive approach to voting by people with intellectual disability/ABI, and what remains to be resolved?’; What is the extent to which an inclusive participatory approach can deliver an initiative which increases voting and civic engagement of people with intellectual disability/Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)?; and ‘What is the ongoing appetite for people staying involved and included in the ICV work?’

To address these questions, we conducted an evidence review, prepared a suite of resources to promote discussion and debate; conducted two on-line round table sessions; and followed up these sessions with an on-line survey of roundtable participants.

Overall, we found the experience of the people with intellectual disability and ABI with respect to their involvement in the electoral process in Australia not to be in accord with the expectations of various human rights instruments and not to the satisfaction of people with intellectual disability and ABI. It was evident that there were many institutional and societal (values and attitudes) that arose as substantial barriers to people with intellectual disability and ABI being included and exercising citizenship at the ballot box.

Among the several barriers was the relative ease with which people could be removed from the electoral roll. Often this action was taken by people who had good intentions, but low expectations of the capacity of people with intellectual disability and ABI. Systemic action is needed to address this tyranny of low expectations, if people are to get the support they need and exercise their rights as citizens.

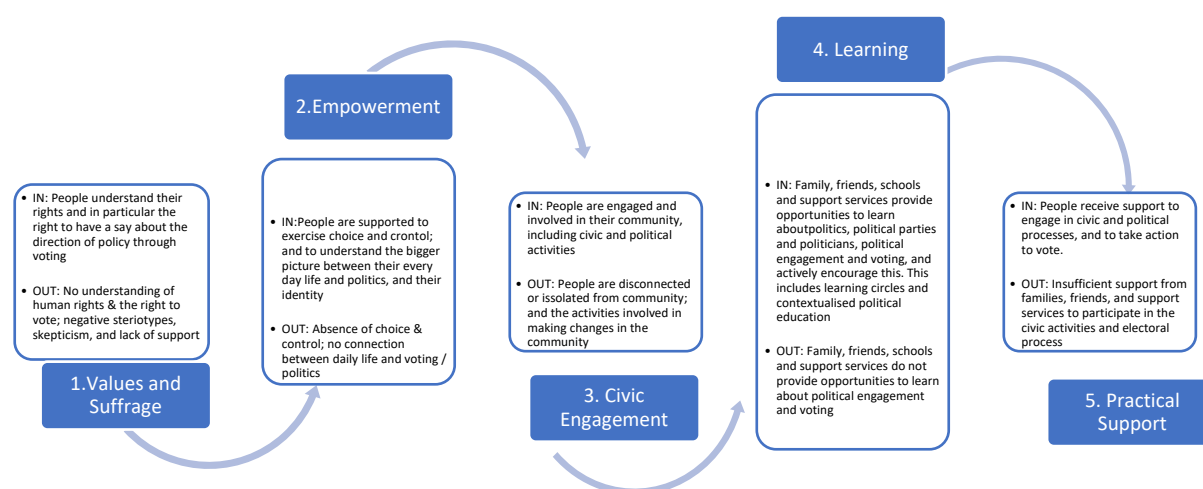
Communication of information about electoral processes and voting, and about candidates and their policies in elections were not readily available in formats that would assist people with intellectual disability and ABI to participate in the electoral process in an informed way. While some efforts had been made in this area, a concerted effort and associated funding was required to support this. That funding has been very difficult to access. It may be that widening the approach across Australian states and territories will be more successful in this respect.

Most importantly though was the need to engage the wider population of people with intellectual disability and ABI in civic activity and political engagement as a precursor involvement in voting. People need more than simply to be on the electoral roll and provided with information in a format they understand. They need to be engaged in the political issues that affect their lives and know that they have a role to play in shaping their community, and that they have the ability to do so. However, they also need to be supported to have the opportunity to engage in political discourse about issues that do not directly affect their lives – an opportunity readily afforded to the rest of the voting population. They also need to be fully supported in practical arrangements to ensure where they choose to vote that support is sufficient to ensure this to be the case.

4.2 Considering the pathway forward and future initiatives

The analysis of Roundtable data suggested a five-component model to inform a pathway forward – see Figure 3 below. This model is similar to the earlier pathway identified by ICV and the incorporates key elements identified in the evidence review supporting the current project.

Figure 3- Exploring what needs to be achieved in a stepwise manner to support people with intellectual disability/ABI to vote.



Whilst supporting a person to vote is not a linear process (as implied in the diagram) and many of the sub-categories in the diagram are interrelated it is nevertheless a useful heuristic. The model suggests that people fall out at each stage and given this, are unlikely to benefit from later stage inputs until the prior stage has been completed. However, the point at which people encounter and enter the process might also be subject to individual experiences and opportunities.

Accepting the process need not be strictly linear based on individual circumstances and experiences, not knowing about rights and the negative view of others (1 above) in relation to disability will mean many people are less likely to vote. These people are also unlikely to move to stage 2, having choice and control over their lives (stage 2). At that stage many people with intellectual disability/ABI still do not have choice and control over the lives and decisions and, likely not to express the choice to vote either. These people are more likely to drop out at this stage without more decision support, support

for choice-making and challenges to paternalistic and protective attitudes in which other people speak for the person.

As asserted in the Roundtable discussions an engagement in the life of the local community (3 above) often makes politics real and decisions about issues of concern or interest a focal point for people to seek change through the political process. Such civic engagement is not possible where 'institutionalised' practices within disability-only settings dominate their lives or where they are isolated. In such circumstances these people are unlikely to vote and will fall out at this stage.

For those who remain 'in' at this stage there is a range of learning in relation to voting ranging from registering to vote, learning the political issues for any election, and learning about the practicalities of casting a vote (4 above). Such learning may be delivered or indeed be mutually reinforced by informal relations such as family and friends or through more formal mechanisms through schools or disability support workers. It was also found in the data that the decisions about voting can be mediated by the messages learned from politicians themselves and picked up via social and other media. Without such learning people are less likely to have the practical knowledge nor the discernment of preference required to express their vote in the ballot and are more likely to fall 'out' at this point.

Finally, many people with intellectual disability/ABI may have moved through all 4 'stages' but may still require practical support to undertake all the procedures required for voting as well as support to get to polling stations and cast their vote on the day (5. Above). It is perhaps most disturbing that Roundtable participants related stories of people with intellectual disability/ABI whose only impediment to voting was the need for the right support with practicalities. This highlights the importance of ensuring social models of disability are adopted. It is the lack of support that prevents the exercise of the person's right to vote and not their disability. Social, relational and human rights models of disability should, therefore, be a driving force for change.

A few things are important as a result.

- 1) The lower down the stages a person has reached, the smaller the number of people with intellectual disability/ABI for whom an ICV initiative will be successful without addressing these prior stages.
- 2) Secondly, it is a waste of resources to target an initiative 'blindly'. A 'scattergun approach' will have less impact than targeting people who have successfully met the criteria set out in

previous stages. It is therefore recommended that targeting for impact is adopted to maximise any ICV initiative outcomes and impact or that applying some assessment criteria in relation to each person will provide a focus for each intervention in ways that accomplish each of the stages.

- 3) The mechanisms, resources, information and other inputs provided by any ICV initiative will differ dependent upon what stages are focused upon. More information from these can be seen in the Appendix 6 (Roundtable Suggested Solutions)
- 4) ICV should be aware that outcomes can be maximised where ICV consolidates its approach with partners. The choice of partners will depend upon the stage but also on what the intention of the intervention is. But it is proposed there will be much strength in partnerships.

It is noted that in the strategies adopted in its Consensus statements that ICV has focused largely on items 4 and 5 as depicted in figure 3 above. However, it is proposed that a number of possible mechanisms can potentially be employed for each person with an intellectual disability/ABI in ICV initiatives that may have an impact in relation to items 1 – 3. This is based upon the observation that there are ‘conditions’ in place at each item in the process, and that these conditions are based on underlying ‘values’.

Starting from the left of the diagram once again the conditions for suffrage requires a change in the Commonwealth Electoral Act, 1918. The current ‘condition’ allows issues related to mental capacity to mediate voting rights. The values relating to human rights are yet to have ‘made the case’ sufficiently well to change the legislation in most jurisdictions. Similarly, whilst the NDIS is based on ‘choice and control’ it is more about such choice and control *in a market*. If the negative stereotypes around people with intellectual disability/ABI remain then it is still possible to see situations in which a person may have a *service* ‘of choice;’ but one in which the person continues to have little choice and control over their lives, to be isolated or trans-institutionalised. These circumstances would not support civic engagement, the next stage of the process.

In relation to civic engagement Article 19 of the CRPD in particular would suggest inclusive lives for all people with disabilities in their local communities. Yet it remains to case that hidden values may reinforce the parallel and excluded lives many people have faced in relation, for example, to housing or to day services and employment. In relation to ‘learning’, negative stereotypes relating to empowerment by informal or formal supports are likely to lead to little education. In this respect pre-

existing values and conditions in previous stages of the diagram have an impact on whether person is offered opportunities to learn.

In other words, pre-existing values impact later stages in a circular manner. For example, formal conditions and laws may themselves be based on values that reinforce negative stereotypes (e.g. that suffrage is based upon capacity). Established values can be based on challengeable assumptions (e.g. that choice and control can only be expressed through the market) which sets the conditions for the NDIS. Competing values, for example support staff choosing cooking and washing as opposed to supporting people to (learn) to vote, are reinforced where the formal conditions to support voting are not in place. In short formal conditions depend upon values and these values are deep-seated starting right back with government assumptions about suffrage and about how services are structured to deliver choice and control.

In the above respect Clarke and Finnegan (2005) argue that legislation cannot be too far ahead of public sentiment because political parties will not choose policies that do not serve them at the ballot box. As such changing public opinion and pursuing high profile campaigning and lobbying for change can have a major impact on public sentiment. As public sentiment changes, so will the conditions in place at each stage of the Diagram 1 above. Co-production and co-design have been likened to the basis upon which conversations can take place between rights holders and duty bearers. In this respect the NGO sector including disability advocacy and Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) can have a major role in this dialogue based upon rights.

The (stated) regular production of plain language manifestos in the UK led by Mencap⁴¹, the setting up of an office and website for Disability and Parliament in the UK⁴² and the Manifesto for the rights of people with disability to vote amongst many other examples demonstrate how NGO and DPO sector alliances can change the language and narratives. However, as pointed out in the previous sections of this report, funding to Australian NGOs is not at a level that supports this. A wider all-Australia approach may prove more profitable than a Victoria-only focus, however it must be noted that mobilisation for advocacy in this area varies across the country.

⁴¹ See <https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/elections/general-election-2019-easy-read-manifestos>

⁴² See <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/house-of-commons-commission/hoc-diversity-inclusion-strategy/disability-and-parliament/>

The findings from the Roundtables also point to the importance of how best to support interactions with people with intellectual disability/ABI in relation to voting. The first is to employ a circles of support approach. A circle of support with the person at the centre drawing in a range of supports around their decisions with members working together over time to put these in place may ensure their voice is heard and structure the planned response and responsibilities for implementation of supports around voting as well as other life areas.

Learning and teaching across the life course and in relation to civics, responsibilities and to voting can take place in a number of settings both informal and formal. However, in more formal service-based settings having both the support of the organisation and management to plan for voting may be enhanced by applying principles and practices of person-centred active support in delivery of learning. It is possible for staff using innovative thinking to work with the person to identify things that are a problem for them in the community and support them to think about what might be done about these issues and how voting might make a difference.

Finally, not everyone can communicate their decisions in an episodic or momentary manner. Some have problems conceptualising these decisions and others communicate in non-normative ways. Employing supported decision-making in such circumstances may, over time allow the will and preference around voting preference to be recognised and the systems of support to accomplish this to be better understood and applied.

Although the details relating to the above strategies were not detailed in the Roundtable discussion, they implied support for disability support strategies that are both in vogue and have shown promise in extending choice and control into the lives of people with intellectual disability/ABI. Despite all best efforts and support, however it should be noted, as the diagram shows, that like the general population, not all people with intellectual disability/ABI will vote even if they have been through all the stages and, in addition, been part of any planned ICV initiative in 2022. And this is also perfectly reasonable.

The factors outlined in Figure 3 above therefore need to be taken into consideration in addition to addressing the barriers and summarised in the Roundtable Suggested Solutions (Appendix 6). The diagram used in setting out arguments in this section help put some nuance into answering research question 3, 'What are the supportive factors and barriers to the development of an inclusive approach to voting?' and, in particular, 'what remains to be resolved?'.

4.3 Limitations and future directions

The current data and analyses represent an evidence-base delivered through data collected from two Roundtables, complemented with further surveying of Roundtable participants, and interpreted considering an earlier review of existing evidence. Evidence is important in several respects, not just to identify what needs to be done to achieve the desired goal but also in raising the profile of the issue, on legitimising that issue and, consequently in searching out further funds for initiatives. There are finite resources available to support the initiatives proposed by ICV, and it is critical that these resources are expended in ways most likely to be acceptable and meaningful to people with intellectual disability and those with acquired brain injury.

This report is limited in that it relies predominantly on data from participants of two Roundtables and this means that even whilst it is hugely important, especially in testing the temperature of the sector and its knowledge and support, it is inherently a limited dataset. Maximising evidence is an important additional factor that should be taken into account by ICV.

Therefore, the knowledge review submitted to ICV by the School of Social and Political Sciences will also provide important information and evidence-informed directions, complementing and extending the findings of this report. As detailed in the knowledge review, there remains a lot to learn from initiatives abroad as well as the work previously undertaken by ICV.

There is also a wider emergent evidence base around solutions to voting by disadvantaged groups and those with low literacy⁴³ and solutions around support to schools⁴⁴. There are existing resources and evidence of how best to use these resources to support adolescents in the wider population to adopt approaches that operate as mini polities through which youth develop a sense of what it means to be a member of a collective. Meaningful opportunities to practice political skills and behaviours can be fostered in schools and communities, via social media, and through policy change' (Wray-Lake, 2019)⁴⁵. Finding ways to engage adolescents with intellectual and other cognitive disabilities in these processes will be critical going forward. So too engaging parents and teachers in this conversation will be critical, as they act as gatekeepers to both knowledge and opportunity.

⁴³ See Summers, K. et al (2017)

⁴⁴ See Deimel, D., Hoskins, B. & Abbs, H.J. (2017)

⁴⁵ See Wray-Lake, L. (2019)

It is intended that the evidence delivered in this report will be available to support I Can Vote to maximise the chances that its initiative to support people with intellectual disability/ABI in 2022 and beyond is targeted and successful whether in Victoria or at a national level.

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Appendices

This shortened version of the Report contains Appendices 1, 2, and 4.

Appendix 1: Summary of literature outlining concrete episodic supports to increase people with disability casting a vote

Appendix 2: Invitation to the Roundtables

Appendix 3: Agenda Roundtables – Not in this version

Appendix 4: Voting and intellectual disability roundtable: Information pack

Appendix 5: Tips for an Inclusive Zoom Meeting – Not in this version

Appendix 6: Solutions Workbook – Not in this version

Appendix 1: Summary of literature outlining concrete episodic supports to increase people with disability casting a vote.

Accessible information

Present knowledge shows a patchwork of resources and inconsistencies across jurisdictions. This may be because the likely areas in which accessible information applies is vast as are the mediums and technology required. There are also issues about who should take responsibility for resources and costs for delivering each form of accessible information and whether this of equal breadth and depth as information to the general public.

Adding to this, no studies are reported as having explored the impact of each strategy systematically, nor combined strategies in terms of increasing the overall impact on voting. Indeed where such initiatives have been implemented there is a chance that the Hawthorne Effect applies, in which simply raising the profile of voting has as much impact as the additional information itself. This needs to be disentangled. Examples listed by Human Rights Watch (2017) included:

- Ireland ballot with photographs of candidates and large print copy of ballot
- Spain – all documents in Braille
- Germany – blind can order a braille template
- Ghana, Sierra Leone and Spain – tactile ballot guides
- Jordan – Interpreters at polling stations
- Australia – trial of electronic voting for 200, 000 people with visual impairment in Federal election
- US – easy read and audio ballots and headphones to listen to candidate information
- Costa Rica – magnifying glasses, ergonomic pens and flashlight
- Sweden – easy read, sign language and audio on Election Committee website
- Finland – accessible information in braille
- Canada – British Columbia – Braille candidate lists, large print poster and ballot papers

Physical accessibility of polling stations

Femec, Kis-Glava and Masic (2017) Polling stations and ballots do not allow equal access to voters with differing disabilities. A number of studies, some of them based on research have found physical accessibility to the polling station an issue. Amongst the issues reported have been:

- Difficulties finding the polling station Schur, Ameri & Adya (2017) and polling stations in difficult surroundings or inaccessible physical environments (Friedman, 2018; Rahableh, 2021)
- Difficulties in getting into the polling station Schur, Ameri & Adya (2017) or lack of ramps (Friedman, 2018)
- Difficulties waiting in line, Schur, Ameri & Adya (2017)
- Signage was not disability friendly not at the right size nor height (EESC, 2019)
- In an empirical study James, Harvey and Hatton (2018) found statistically significant increase in voting where disability services provided transport and assistance with access to polling stations.

A vast range of solutions have been identified as laid out below

Human Rights Watch (2017):

- Austria – each municipality has at least one accessible polling station
- Australia - Electoral Commissions worked with people with disabilities and architect to design an ‘accessibility checklist’ posted on their website and at each site at least one voting machine accessible to people who use wheelchairs.
- Nicaragua – Foundation for Election Systems built ramps at polling stations across the country which led to a ten-fold increase in voting by people with physical impairment
- Costa Rica – Upgraded railing, pavements and ramps to major polling stations
- Zambia held the Electoral Commission guilty of unlawfully discriminating against persons with disabilities by failing to provide disabled voters a way to vote in private without assistance

EESC (2019)

- Austria – At least one accessible voting booth in each voting district
- Bulgaria – A film on voting
- Croatia – A certificate allowing person to vote at any polling station
- Hungary – a person with disability can indicate the need for an accessible polling station up to two days prior to the election.
- Ireland – Those registered on a long term care voting list have a returning Officer visit them so they can cast a vote
- Italy - transport laid on for people with mobility issues
- Lithuania - map of accessible polling stations

- Poland – polling stations set up in long term care homes with over 15 residents
- Slovenia – Electoral Commission sends a list to long term care establishments telling them how many people are registered to vote
- EESC (2019) speak of the need to allow a voter to change to an accessible polling station in situation in which there are physical accessibility issues.

Other

- British Columbia⁴⁶ - All advance voting places and most general voting places are wheelchair accessible. Voters who can't enter a voting place can vote outside the building (at the curb or in the parking lot).

Accessibility at the polling station

Schur, Ameri and Adya (2017) point to difficulties: in reading and seeing the ballot; understanding how to vote or use the voting equipment; difficulty writing on the ballot; operating the voting machine. Moreover many people with disability have found problems with the attitudes and interaction with polling station staff as these authors point out.

Inclusion Europe (2011) found polling station staff were not sufficiently trained, and experienced a lack of clarity about how to manage situations and uncertainty around a person's capacity and how to manage situations in which this capacity was called into question. However, the literature found a lack of training packages or guidelines for polling staff in this respect. Since electoral commissions in each jurisdiction do run such training, it may be useful to know these in more detail.

Solutions suggested in the literature were:

- Timor Leste – granted voters with disabilities priority in voting queues (EESC, 2019)
- France - Children can help adult relatives with a disability at the polling station (EESC 2019)
- British Columbia, Canada⁴⁷ - Voters can bring a translator to help them at the voting place. The translator must make a solemn declaration that they are able to act as a translator and will do so to the best of their abilities. Elections officials are trained to assist voters with hearing impairment and will have visual aids available at the voting place. Voters may also be accompanied by a sign language interpreter

⁴⁶ <https://elections.bc.ca/voting/what-you-need-to-vote/voting-accessibility/>

⁴⁷ <https://elections.bc.ca/voting/what-you-need-to-vote/voting-accessibility/> -

- New Zealand - electors can nominate a person to assist them – read and mark voting papers – vote in advance – nominate another person to register them (NZ Office for Disability Issues, 2010).

Alternative to the Polling Station

Alternatives to voting at polling stations have been recommended by many observers. For example, EESC (2019) in a study of voting in long-term institutions and hospitals found that a large number of people were not registered to vote. They advise not relying on family only and that ‘closed polling stations’ within the institution would be a better option.

In Australia, Karlawish and Bonnie (2007) say the system was reluctant to adapt balloting systems (AEC, 2010). However, in the 2010 election, Australia produced a guide to assist persons with disabilities in audio, braille, large print, TTY, and e-text formats. The guide explained accessible polling places and how a voter could cast an early vote if he or she was unable vote in person.⁴⁸ (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

EESC (2019) lists several alternatives to polling stations:

- Early voting - Allows local authorities to get in place transport (e.g. Czech Republic
- More staff available during week in long term care
- Postal voting - Depends on simplicity of registration process and no fees, getting information in their chosen accessible format
- Mobile ballot box voting - Used when condition prevents them from travelling to polling station
- Electronic voting - Requires significant investment and rules which need to be accessible to people with disability
- Proxy voting - Process for delegation is vital
- A system allowing assistance to mark ballot paper by family carer, qualified elector or voting officer

⁴⁸ Australian Government, “Part B - Participation in political and public life (article 29),” 2011, http://www.ema.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandanti-discrimination_PartB-Participationinpoliticalandpubliclife%28article29%29 (accessed August 29, 2011).

Appendix 2: Invitation to the Roundtables



inclusiondesignlab 



- Are you a voter? Are you interested in politics?



- Do you have an intellectual or cognitive disability?
This includes Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



- Do you want to help make voting easier?
- Do you want to help make learning about politics easier?



- You could help by coming to an online meeting with other people interested in voting!

Email, Text Message, or Call Jenna Hepburn from Inclusion Melbourne to talk more about the meeting if you are interested.



projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au



0432 152 555

inclusive voting for people with intellectual or cognitive disability

an online roundtable for change



It is a right of all Australian adult citizens to vote.

However, we know that many people with intellectual or cognitive disability who can vote do not vote.

**We invite self-advocates and leaders in disability, politics,
and elections to join us and explore how we can change this.**

Inclusion Designlab and the University of Melbourne School of Social and Political Sciences is hosting a roundtable to discuss strategies to support people with intellectual and cognitive disability to become informed and active voters in Victoria.

The Roundtable will look to develop an initial consensus on accessible and inclusive practices for supporting people with intellectual disability to become informed, long-term voters. Attendees will be asked to review and debate existing and proposed interventions to increase the number of people with intellectual disability who vote and improve the experience of preparation and participation.

! Research into the consensus making process is planned, and we will be seeking your consent to record the roundtable to explore the impact of the initiative.

This will come as an informed consent form prior to the Roundtable.

The I Can Vote team at Inclusion Designlab undertook a feasibility pilot of an inclusive voting campaign in the 2018 Victorian State Election. Since then, we have presented the barriers to voting and inclusive voting to State and Federal committees, and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

For more information about I Can Vote and to view the 2018 resources, visit icanvote.org.au

roundtable date and time

online
event

Please join us online for 2 half day roundtables to discuss barriers and strategies for inclusive voting.

Wednesday 10th November 1-4:30pm

Wednesday 24th November 1-4:30pm

A link for the roundtables will be sent closer to the event.

**Please respond with your interest by
Wednesday 13th October.**

RSVP via email: projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au

RSVP via phone or text: 0432 152 555 to speak with or text Jenna. Please include your name if you leave a message or a text.

With your response, please let us know:

- Any accessibility requirements for online meetings
- If you require a translator or interpreter
- If you will have a support person with you
- Anything else you think we should know to create a safe and welcoming online meeting

For further information and questions, please email projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au, or call Inclusion Melbourne on 9509 4266 and ask for Nathan Despott or Jenna Hepburn.

icanvote.org.au

inclusive voting for people with intellectual or cognitive disability

an online roundtable meeting



It is a right of all Australian citizens to vote.

A lot of people with intellectual or cognitive disability do not vote.

You are invited to join community and government leaders to talk about
how we can support more people to be voters.

Inclusion Melbourne and The University of Melbourne have been looking at some accessible and inclusive voting ideas from around the world. These ideas can help people with disability become voters.

We have invited some very important people to talk with us about some of the problems with voting. We will also talk about some ways to fix these problems.

We have invited:

- Self-Advocates with Intellectual or Cognitive Disability
- Politicians and people that work in Government
- People from Disability Support Organisations
- Lawyers for disability and human rights
- People that organise elections

You will be asked to read some information about inclusive voting before the meeting. This information is to help you learn more about problems and how to fix them before the meeting.

roundtable date and time

There will be 2 online meetings

1. Wednesday 10th November 1-4:30pm
2. Wednesday 24th November 1-4:30pm

A link for the roundtables will be sent closer to the event.

Please let us know if you can come to both of these before Wednesday 13th October.

You can let us know by sending an email to projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au or by texting or calling Jenna on 0432 152 555. Please make sure to include your name in any message you send.

We will call or email to ask you about your access and support needs for the meeting.



For further information and questions, please email projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au, or call Inclusion Melbourne on 9509 4266 and ask for Nathan Despott or Jenna Hepburn.

icanvote.org.au

voting and intellectual disability roundtable: information pack

There is some information that we ask everyone to look at before coming to the Roundtable.



This is so that we can spend more time talking about the problems, and how we could fix the problems.

These will introduce you to the I Can Vote project, the research, and what is available to support people with intellectual disability when voting.

You do not have to read or look at everything on this list, but it can help you to understand some ideas before the Roundtable.

There is a link to the internet [that looks like this](#) for everything we would like you to read or watch. You can click on the blue and the information will download.

If you have trouble getting to any of the information, please call Jenna on 0432 152 555, or email projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au

Most of the information we ask you to read is in easy language.
Some is not in easy language.

Unfortunately, we do not have the ability to make everything easy language for this roundtable.

For anything that is not in easy language, we will talk about at the roundtable. You could also ask a support person to help you read and understand these.

EASY LANGUAGE information will have a pink heading like this

These might be fully in easy language, or they might be dual read. Dual read is designed to be read with a support person.

We ask **ALL PEOPLE** to read the easy language information.

NOT EASY LANGUAGE information will have an orange heading like this

These are not designed to be accessible for people with disability.

We ask **people who feel confident** to, to read the information that is not in easy language.

You might find it helpful to read with a support person.

Easy Language:

How can we make voting more inclusive in Australia? - Workbook

This workbook has been made for the Roundtable. It was made to help everyone think about some of the ways that we could make voting more inclusive.

This workbook has a lot of ideas about what we could do. We will talk about these ideas at the Roundtable.

It can help you to talk about your ideas and what you think about each idea if you write them down first.



There is also space for you to write your own ideas. Things that we have not thought of.

This workbook was in the same email as this document. You can also download it if you cannot find that email.

[Click here to go to the dropbox and download the workbook](#)

Please let Jenna know if you are having trouble accessing the workbook.

Easy Language:

I Can Vote: A Guide for People with a Disability, their Family, Carers, Friends, Advocates and Support Professionals

This dual-read guide is for people with a disability and their supporters. It guides voters through:

- ▶ What democracy is
- ▶ What elections are
- ▶ How to enrol to vote
- ▶ How to learn about politics and politicians
- ▶ Planning to vote
- ▶ What happens on election day
- ▶ What happens if you do not vote



It also gives tips for learning about politics and practicing citizenship.

It can be read alone, but it best read with a support person.

This booklet can be downloaded from

<http://inclusionmelbourne.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/I-Can-Vote-publication.pdf>

Easy Language:

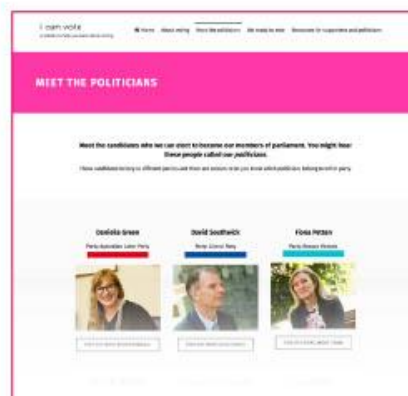
I Can Vote 2018 Website

This website has information to help people with intellectual disability and cognitive disability with voting. It was made to help people with the Victorian State election in November 2018.

The website has videos from election candidates (politicians) and parties explaining that they believe in and will support in government. These videos were made to help people choose who they want to vote for.



There is also information about democracy and politics. There is information for people who support other people to learn about voting.



Please explore the website, and watch some of the videos.

The main website is <https://icanvote.org.au/>

The videos of political candidates and parties can be found by clicking "Meet the Candidates" on the main page, or by going to <https://icanvote.org.au/meet-the-candidates/>

Not Easy Language:

Electoral Inclusion: Rights, Barriers and Global Campaign Strategies for Voters with Intellectual Disability

This report is about how research into political citizenship of people with intellectual and cognitive disability has made a difference in how people are supported. It talks about:

- ▶ The rights and laws of voting with an intellectual disability
- ▶ The barriers to being a voter
- ▶ Disability support that can help people with intellectual disability become voters
- ▶ A pathway to being a voter
- ▶ What other countries have done to support people with intellectual disability to become voters



This booklet can be downloaded from:

<http://inclusionmelbourne.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/electoral-inclusion.pdf>

Not Easy Language:

I Can Vote 2018 Report

This report was written after the 2018 Victorian State election.

This report talks about what the project team did to make the I Can Vote project, and talks about some of the research that was used to make the project.

The report suggests some ideas that could be done differently for the next election.

The report is not available online yet. We ask that you do not share this too widely until it has been published.

This workbook was in the same email as this document. You can also download it if you cannot find that email.

[Click here to go to the dropbox and download the report](#)

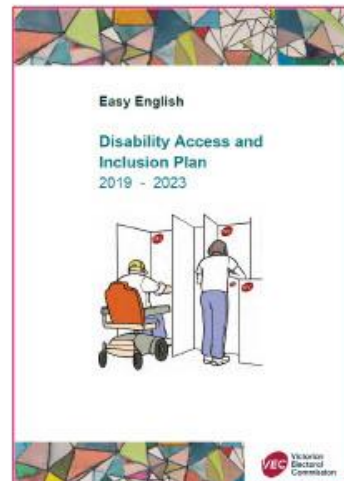
Easy Language:

VEC Disability and Inclusion Access Plan

This document is available in both easy language, and non-easy language.

The Disability and Inclusion Access Plan is for the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC). The VEC wrote this document to tell people what they think they can do to improve voting for people with disability.

They also say how they plan to make things better for people with disability when voting in elections.



[Click here to start downloading the PDF in Easy English](#)

[Click here to start downloading a Word Doc in Easy English](#)

Not Easy Language:

[Click here to start downloading the PDF \(Not Easy English\)](#)

[Click here to start downloading the Word Doc \(Not Easy English\)](#)

Easy Language:

VEC Voting is for Everyone Facilitator Guide

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) made a video with SCOPE about voting for people with intellectual disability.

It talks about why voting is important, enrolling to vote, and being supported to fill in the ballot.

[Click here to watch the video](#)



If you are Deaf, or have difficulty hearing, you can read the words that are said in the video. This is called a transcript.

If you want to read the video transcript. You can [click here](#), and scroll down the webpage until you see the video. After the video there is a button called "Transcript" that you can click. This will show everything that is said in the video.

Easy Language:

VEC Easy English Worksheets

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) made worksheets to help people with intellectual disability learn about the local council election in August 2020.

It talks about voting, what local councils do, and how to complete the voting ballot.

You do not need to fill out the worksheets.

You can look at them and think about your voting, would this help you to vote?



[Click here to start downloading the Easy English Worksheets \(Word Doc\)](#)

Not Easy Language:

It's in the Practice

This paper talks about citizenship going further than being about social and community inclusion.

It talks about Australian Law, the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability), and disability practice.

The paper brings these together to talk about voting and political citizenship for people with intellectual disability.

Despott, Nathan & Leighton, Daniel. (2017). It's in the practice: commentary on "The Value of Citizenship" (Duffy, 2017). *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. 4. 35-41. 10.1080/23297018.2017.1314766.