

# i can vote

a guide for people with a disability, their family carers, friends, advocates and support professionals

victoria, australia  
february 2018





Inclusion Melbourne is a community support organisation that supports people with an intellectual disability to create more enjoyable and rewarding lives and participate fully in the community. Inclusion Melbourne was established in 1950 and was the only registered disability support provider to have transformed its services during the life of the 2002-2012 Victorian State Disability Plan, resulting in the sale of our premises and the delivery of all of our supports within the community, alongside community members.

Our vision at Inclusion Melbourne is for people with intellectual disability to live in an inclusive community, where everyone has the same opportunities to participate in community life and to take their place in society as respected citizens.

We believe our role as a disability support provider is to enable people with disability to achieve and maintain a high quality of life. We accomplish this by supporting people to develop highly personalised and flexible lifestyles rooted in activities and relationships in their local community and based on their needs and desires.

This guide was developed in partnership with the Victorian Electoral Commission. Inclusion Designlab thanks United Response's *Every Vote Counts* campaign team for its support of the *I Can Vote* electoral inclusion project. Inclusion Designlab visited sites of best practice in Canada, Sweden and the UK with the support of an Ethel Temby Scholarship, a Victorian Department of Health and Human Services program.

Inclusion Designlab also acknowledges the following local and global supporters: **Kjell Stjernholm**, Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, Sweden; **Dr Ann Simmeborn Fleischer**, Univ. of Gothenburg, Sweden; Inclusion BC, British Columbia, Canada; **Prof. Tim Stainton**, Centre for Inclusion and Citizenship, Univ. of British Columbia, Canada; **Dr Marcus Redley**, Cambridge Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Group, Cambridge; Human Rights Law Centre, Melbourne; Disability Research Initiative and Disability Human Rights Clinic, Melbourne Law School; **Sophia Tipping** and Prof. **Christine Bigby**, Living with Disability Research Centre, La Trobe University, Melbourne; **Dr Patsie Frawley**, Deakin University, Geelong; **Asher Hirsch**, Policy Officer, Refugee Council of Australia; **Dr Jane Tracy**, Director, Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria; **Sue Lang** and **Debra Taylor**, Victorian Electoral Commission; **Alexandra Lewis-Gargett** and **Jenna Hepburn**, Inclusion Melbourne.

Suggested citation:  
Despott, N (2018). *I Can Vote: A guide for people with a disability, their family carers, friends, advocates and support professionals*.  
Inclusion Melbourne: Melbourne.  
ISBN: 978-0-9954255-3-8



Inclusion Designlab is Inclusion Melbourne's engine room for research, innovation, communications and policy.

Our vision is to bring together people with a disability, community organisations, and the world's leading disability researchers to develop cutting-edge models of practice, choice and citizenship that shatter glass ceilings and promote a more inclusive Australia.

We develop, trial, and implement new systems of support and communicate our insights through a range of publications and media. We are also significant contributors to public policy and government inquiries.

The products and services created by Inclusion Designlab contribute to the continuous development of the disability sector through evidence based practice, accessible materials, and vital training for families and collegiate organisations.

Visit [inclusiondesignlab.org.au](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au) for more about our work.

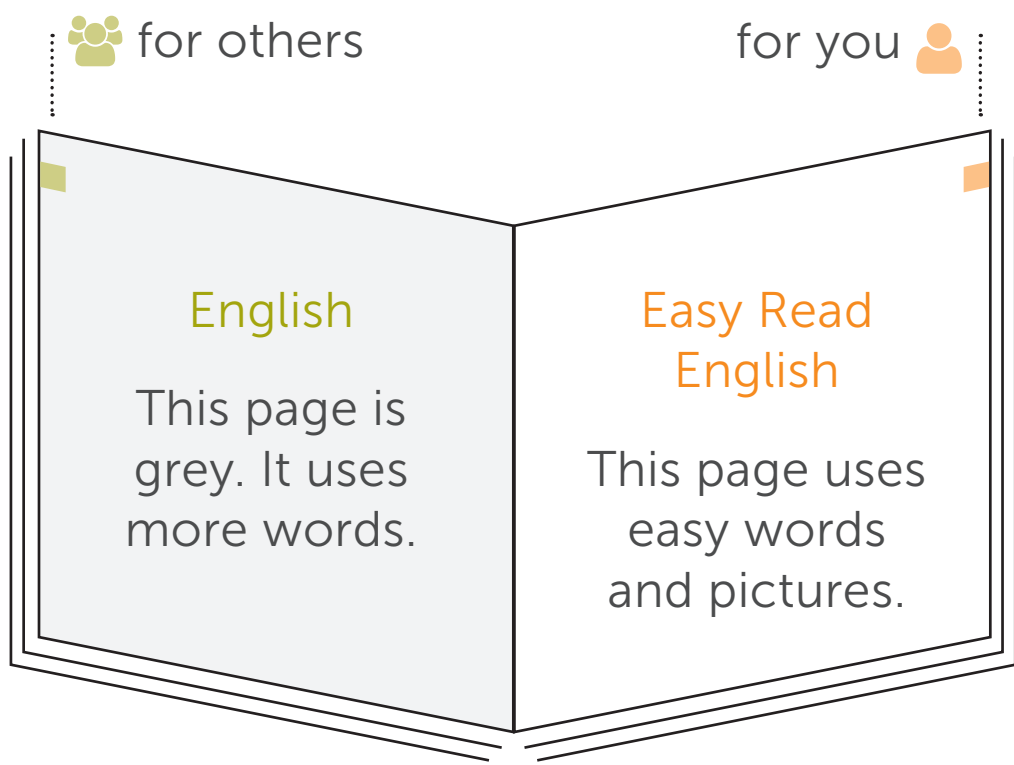


## how to read this book

*I Can Vote* is designed for supported reading. It works best if a voter with a disability and a supporter read it together. It is assumed that family members, support workers, friends and advocates of the voter will have a basic knowledge of democracy, voting, elections, and politics.

Most of the left-hand pages are written in plain language. The right-hand pages are written using easy-to-read language. This means that the text uses larger letters and there are pictures or diagrams to assist supported readers.

Supporters should read or skim the left-hand pages before making a time to support a person with disability to read the right-hand pages. In most cases, the ideas on the left and the right are the same.



### Tips for success



These boxes appear throughout this booklet. They provide advice and references to help you expand on the information presented on each page.

a note for disability support organisations

Disability support organisations, are required by law to support people with intellectual disability to experience social inclusion and belonging in their local communities, with meaningful employment in regular workplaces, education and training. Organisations can approach this in many ways. For example, Inclusion Melbourne’s model incorporates the engagement of natural supports, such as families and community building volunteers, to support people to attain meaningful social roles.

This means that people with intellectual disability can be supported to access areas of life like relationships, politics, faith, and careers if they choose. It also means that they have an opportunity to become politically engaged citizens who vote.

Sarah F is a support manager working in a personalised community-based model of support provision. For Sarah, assisting people to enrol and prepare for elections sits alongside supporting people to visit the dentist, arranging support for a Taylor Swift concert, and engaging in their faith community. In other words, electoral inclusion is part of her organisation’s practice.

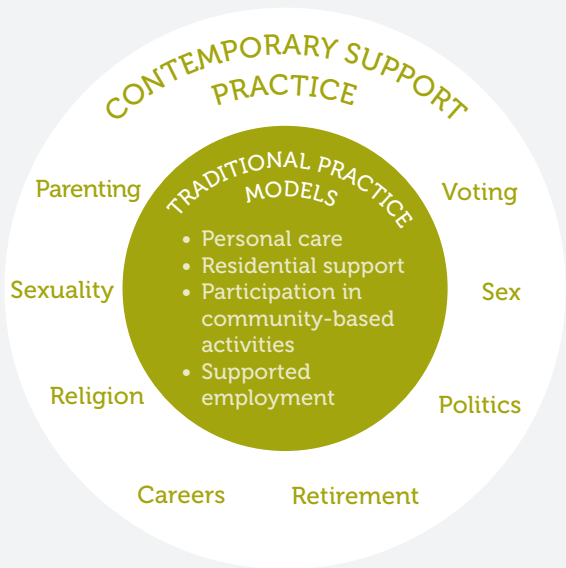


“Even some of the mundane practicalities of voting - such as organising a five-minute drive to a voting centre no more than once a year - often prove to be logistical impossibilities for many support services.”

Sarah F

However, people with intellectual disability have traditionally been shielded from engagement with areas of life like voting – as well as sex, sexuality, religion, and careers - due to outdated support practices and social attitudes.

It is not surprising that Sarah often encounters difficulties when organising transport or support for the voters with disability with whom she works. These difficulties include unreliable transport arrangements, the sincere concerns of others in the person’s life, and the inflexible support practices of adjacent support organisations.



*I Can Vote* may be the starting point in your organisation’s journey toward developing a practice model for supporting political citizenship. For more information, contact Inclusion Designlab.

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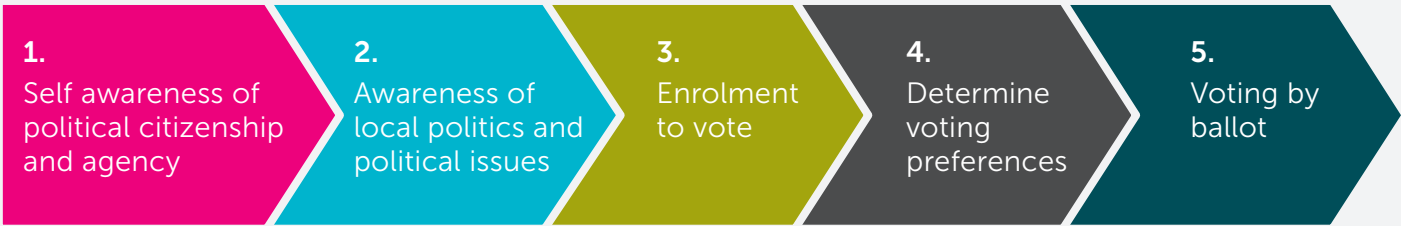
For more information about *I Can Vote* visit [inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting)



# part A: about voting and elections

## the pathway to voting

This booklet will provide you with a pathway that will help you support a person with intellectual disability to know their rights, become politically informed, and to vote. The pathway works best when combined with the principles of *Person Centred Active Support*.



If you are a parent, sibling, friend, advocate, leisure buddy, support worker, NDIS support coordinator, support case manager, house supervisor, or key worker and you want to support a person to become an informed regular voter, follow this booklet to learn about:

- ▶ Supporting the person to learn about their rights as a citizen
- ▶ Supporting the person to understand politics, political parties and voting
- ▶ Enrolling to vote
- ▶ Developing a voting plan
- ▶ Preparing for elections
- ▶ Voting with support
- ▶ Voting on election day

This booklet also provides background information about:

- ▶ Why people with disability have often been excluded from voting
- ▶ What the law really says about voters with intellectual disability
- ▶ Support practices you can use to assist a voter with intellectual disability, even if they have never engaged with politics in practical ways in the past

### Tip for success



Visit [vec.vic.gov.au/disability](https://vec.vic.gov.au/disability) to check out resources developed by the Victorian Electoral Commission, including free Electoral Education sessions, mock elections, and the Voting is for Everyone video.

### Tip for success



The pathway above is a version of the *Pathway to Citizenship* developed by Inclusion Designlab. To learn more about it, see *Page 29*.

### Tip for success



To learn more about *Person Centred Active Support*, see *Page 30*.



## your rights

this book is about you and your rights.

When you don't like something about your community or the help you receive, you don't need to stay silent. You can tell people how you feel. You have a right to have a say. You have a right to be heard.

### Here are examples of your right to be heard:

- ▶ If you go to classes to help you read and write and you don't feel comfortable about something, you can tell the trainer.
- ▶ If you live in a house with other people with a disability and you don't like the staff who work with you, you can complain. It is your right to choose what you eat, who you spend time with, and who helps you look after your personal needs.
- ▶ If the road outside your house has a hole in it, you can tell someone. Your local council looks after the roads in your community, so you can call your local council.
- ▶ If someone hurts you or takes something from you when you are at home, at a shopping centre, at church, at a training college, or anywhere else in the community, you can tell the police.







## political citizenship

Supporting people with intellectual disability to vote in local, State and Federal elections is a powerful way to demonstrate that they have a democratic right to have a say in how the country is run and how decisions are made.

More than four million Australians with a disability depend on government services to live and participate in their community. Roughly half a million of these are considered to have intellectual, developmental or cognitive disability. Despite these large segments of the population being affected by government policy on a daily basis – from pensions to employment rights and accessibility, many do not get to contribute their thoughts and opinions to the decision-making processes that produce this policy.

Often people with intellectual disability are invited to contribute to advisory committees or join self-advocacy groups. While these people have progressively been invited to offer feedback about the way policy affects the disability sector, inclusion and accessibility, people with disability are rarely offered the opportunity to contribute broader feedback. Until recently, few people with intellectual disability have been encouraged to become a political party member, offer feedback about industrial relations, contribute to discussions about food labelling, join economic policy think tanks, or share their thoughts about education policy, climate change, foreign media ownership, asylum seekers or migration.

### Tip for success



You can begin the process of supporting political citizenship by using every opportunity with the person to talk about the role politics plays in their lives. There are plenty of examples around you. Most of the major institutions in our society receive funding in state or federal budgets: schools, hospitals, stadiums, roads, public transport, and even the systems that provide support to people with intellectual disability. It could be as simple as pointing out these connections when you are out and about in the local community with the person.

### Tip for success



The Victorian Electoral Commission has a great tool to help secondary students learn about democracy. It's called Passport to Democracy. It features a visual activity called "Who decides?" that helps young people work out the different powers held by local, state and federal government. Visit: [passport.vec.vic.gov.au/decide/who-decides](https://passport.vec.vic.gov.au/decide/who-decides)



## democracy

Voting is our opportunity to decide who will be the best people to make decisions for us. These people become politicians. Politicians make the rules about what we can do and what we can't do. These rules are called laws.

We can choose who becomes a politician because we live in a democratic country. Democracy is when the people who live in a country get to decide who runs the country, or the state, or the local area.

In a democratic country, if you do not agree with the people who are in charge then you can vote in an election to try and change that. If you do agree with the people in charge then you can vote in an election to make sure that they become politicians again.



Politicians have to listen to the people that vote for them because, if they don't, people might vote for somebody else next time.

When you vote in an election, you are saying who you would like to represent your views when decisions are made.



Voting is about what you think and what you choose. No one can make you vote for someone you don't like. If you need to, you can take lots of time to think about who you want to vote for. Having the freedom to make your own choice is a really important part of democracy.





barriers to voting

In Australia, the right of people with intellectual disability to full democratic participation is protected in legislation, such as the *Disability Act (Vic) 2006*, including the right of people with a disability to “realise their individual capacity for ... social ... and intellectual development”. However, electoral law is a little different. The current wording of Section 93(8)(a) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* potentially allows people with an intellectual disability to be excluded from voting. Put simply, it states that people who don’t understand the nature or significance of voting may be excluded from enrolment or removed from the electoral roll. A medical practitioner and another registered voter need to nominate an individual, complete documentation outlining why that person is not eligible to vote, then submit the documentation to the relevant electoral commission. If the nominated person does not reply to defend their capacity to vote, the person’s name may be removed from the roll.

This process may lead to some individuals with intellectual disability or cognitive impairment being removed from the roll even if supports are available that might assist them to exercise their right to vote.

A person can get back on the roll by completing a new enrolment form and providing a new medical certificate that indicates the person can understand the nature and significance of voting.

In practice, the majority of people taken off the roll for unsoundness of mind are people with dementia. Many people with intellectual disability do not find their way onto the roll to begin with.

Even if a person does get onto the roll and manages to remain on the roll, there are other hurdles facing voters with intellectual disability. These hurdles are usually presented by the various people they encounter when attempting to exercise their political citizenship. Listed below are some of the concerns that consistently appear in research globally.

Disability support professionals	Legal and human rights advocates	Electoral staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Political involvement, voting, and participation in elections seen as high risk.</li><li>▶ Capacity for decision making seen as low.</li><li>▶ Perception that a lack of resources to support preparation and participation in elections constitutes a legitimate barrier.</li><li>▶ Feelings of inadequacy related to discussing politics and elections with people with disability.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Decision making abilities seen as difficult to measure, particularly if the advocate views decision making as an event rather than a process.</li><li>▶ Exclusionary provisions in electoral legislation seen as a primary cause of low participation of voters with disability.</li><li>▶ Lack of knowledge of disability support practices that might be used to support a person to become an informed voter.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Inappropriate use of discretion at voting centres when engaging with a person with communication impairment.</li><li>▶ Support workers accompanying voters at voting centres seen as influencing the decisions of supported voters.</li></ul>

Some of these concerns may cause supporters or organisations to want to restrict people with intellectual disability from voting. Note that they are usually related to risk or ability. In most cases, these concerns can be addressed through the use of good support practice and planning.

A simple but effective way to respond to these concerns about capacity is to ask questions about how to overcome the barriers.



What are the barriers that prevent the person from enrolling to vote? What can we do to make it easier to prepare to vote and understand the voting process? How can we remove or get around these barriers?



voting

Voting is when you decide who you would like to be the leader of your community, your state or your country. The leaders of our community, state and country are called politicians. Usually, politicians belong to groups who believe similar things. These groups are called political parties. You can read more about political parties later in this book.

There are three levels of government:



local government

You can vote for the people who lead your local community. These people are called councillors. They are part of your council. Your council makes sure that your community is safe and clean.



state government

You can vote for the people who lead your state. These people are part of the State Parliament, the meeting place for state leaders. The party with the most people in the Parliament becomes the State Government. The leader of the State Government is called the Premier.



federal government

You can also vote for the people who lead your country. These people are part of the Federal Parliament, the meeting place for national leaders. The party with the most people in the Parliament becomes the Federal Government. The leader of the Federal Government is called the Prime Minister.



## elections and australians with a disability

If you are an Australian adult, it is almost certain that you have participated in elections and that you have voted. You are probably aware of how an election works. It is announced, campaigns are run, voting centres are designated, election day arrives, and coverage occupies most of the evening's broadcast news.

However, elections in Australia are about more than just having a say and voting for a political candidate.

Political candidates give special attention to the needs of large minority communities in their electorates. We see this at every election when marginal seats become the focus of greater attention and when promises are made to specific community groups.



So, when an election is called, this is more than simply a call to support a voter with intellectual disability to become informed.

It is also an opportunity to recognise the power that an enfranchised, active community of Australians with disability might have – not just at the ballot box but also in the lead up to an election when candidates are paying special attention to their constituents.



As you support a voter with intellectual disability to read through this *I Can Vote* booklet, encourage other support professionals and advocates to do likewise. Tell the local candidate that the voters with disability whom you support and your fellow support professionals are politically active and will be voting on election day.

### Tip for success



Although terms like voting, parliament, government, electorate, council and election may seem like simple concepts, many people with disability have not had a chance to understand or use these terms throughout their lives.

The content on *pages 9 and 11* provides a basic explanation of some of these terms, however you will need to come back to these terms frequently over time to help the person's awareness of these concepts grow.

### Tip for success



So much of the election preparation process requires careful planning. See the *Plan to Vote* information on *pages 20-21* of this booklet for more.



## elections

An election is the time when you will be asked to vote.



At each election, you will get to choose between a number of people – or **candidates** – in your electorate. Read below to learn about electorates.



There are local council elections. This is where you choose the councillors who make decisions about your local community.



Local council elections are in October. There will be elections in 2020, 2024, 2028.



There are State elections. The state is divided into local areas called **electorates** or **seats**. The person who gets the most votes in your electorate gets to join the State Parliament. This person will try to make things better for you and your local area. In other words, this person represents you in State Parliament.

State elections are in November. There will be elections in 2018, 2022, 2026.



There are Federal elections. Australia is divided into local areas. These are also called electorates or seats but they are bigger than the state electorates or seats. The person who gets the most votes in your electorate will represent you in Federal Parliament.

Federal elections usually take place every 3 years. The exact date and time changes from one election to another.

## your electorate

Your electorate has a name. If you do not know the name of the local council, state electorate or federal electorate you live in, you can go to these websites:

**vec.vic.gov.au** to find out the name of the state electorate you live in.

**aec.gov.au** to find out the name of the federal electorate you live in.

You can also ask a family member, friend or support worker to help you. The name of your state electorate will often be the name of a suburb or town near you. Your federal electorate will have a different name.

Once you are enrolled **and** you know the name of your electorate **and** you know the date of an election, it is time to get ready to vote!





## enrolment

For most new voters, the process of enrolling to vote is very simple. However, supporting a person with disability to enrol may add a new layer of complexity to the enrolment process.

Fortunately, the Victorian Electoral Commission has made the process of enrolling really simple. Start by setting aside 30 minutes to support the person to enrol, then visit [vec.vic.gov.au/enrolment](http://vec.vic.gov.au/enrolment)

At this website you will be able to:

- ▶ Check the person's enrolment
- ▶ Update the person's details
- ▶ Enrol for the first time

If you support a person to enrol to vote it is important that you communicate this fact to other people in the person's network so that they will be supported to vote at every election. This includes the person's family, supported accommodation supervisor, and circle of support. Read the following pages to learn about creating a voting plan. Even though the Victorian Electoral Commission willingly assists voters with intellectual disability who receive a notification of failing to vote, this scenario can be avoided if a voter support plan is in place.



Voting in local, State and Federal elections in Australia is compulsory for all Australian adults. The Victorian Electoral Commission may directly enrol an unenrolled person if that person is identified in data to which the VEC has legal access.

What if a person has been enrolled in the past under a different name?



What if the person does not have the type of ID required to confirm their identity?



## enrolling to vote

A group called an electoral commission manages elections and tells us the election results. Electoral commissions also make sure that elections are fair. The Victorian Electoral Commission – or VEC – has a list called the electoral roll. The electoral roll lists all of the people who are able to vote in an election. This includes you!

If you are over 18 years old, you need to make sure that your name and personal details are on the electoral roll.

Here's what you need to do to make sure that you are on the roll ▼

**1** Visit the Australian Electoral Commission enrolment website. You can find it at [aec.gov.au](http://aec.gov.au)

**2** Click the *Check Enrolment* button or go to [check.aec.gov.au](http://check.aec.gov.au). Fill out the form on the website. You need to type in your name, your middle names, and your last name. You also need to type in your date of birth, your suburb, and your street name. If you need help, ask a family member, friend or support worker to help you.

**3** If your name is on the list, that's great! It means you are enrolled to vote. You may need to change your address. Go to [aec.gov.au](http://aec.gov.au) and click the *Change Address* button. Follow the instructions or ask someone to help you.

**4** If your name is not on the list, you will need to fill out the form to enrol.

## enrolling for the first time

If you are not enrolled to vote, visit [aec.gov.au/enrol](http://aec.gov.au/enrol). Click the *Enrol Online* button. You can ask someone to help you do this too!

You will now be at a page with lots of information and options. You can fill out the form yourself. You can also ask someone to help you.

You need to enter your name, date of birth, and address. You also need to prove that you are allowed to vote. The easiest way is to have another voter confirm your identity. You can enter their details into the form.

When you have completed the form properly, click the *Submit* button. You will receive a letter about two weeks later letting you know that you are enrolled to vote.

**congratulations! you are now enrolled to vote.**





## part B: support to vote

This section will provide you with steps to help you support a person with intellectual disability to become a politically informed voter.

### active support and supported decision making

If you are a disability support professional, you have probably learnt a little about how a person with disability can become a decision maker. This may have been through training in *Person Centred Active Support*, *Supported Decision Making*, *Choice making*, *Positive Behaviour Support* or similar practices.

Some of the foundational principles of these approaches are that:

- ▶ only the necessary support for individual circumstances should be provided so that a person's individual agency is maintained
- ▶ with time and support, people can build decision making capacity
- ▶ Promoting opportunities to experience a wide range of options and make self-driven choices is crucial to building decision making capacity

These principles of support are an important first step for supporting a person with intellectual disability to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens in our society.

For more information about Active Support, see *Part C* of this booklet.

There are many aspects to preparing to vote at an election, such as learning about the political parties, organising transport and voting on election day. However, it is first important to step back and consider some of the broad societal barriers that prevent people with intellectual disability from voting as regular citizens.

- ▶ Although studies in Australia are still forthcoming, research in the US and UK offers a picture of the role that assumptions play in restricting access to voting.
- ▶ In 2010, it was found that 44 American states had enacted provisions that prevented access to voting for people with an intellectual disability<sup>1</sup>. The *2015 Shriver Report*<sup>2</sup> found that 22% of Americans believed people with intellectual disability should not be allowed to vote in elections. Only 31% of adults with intellectual disability had voted in the most recent UK election when a study was conducted in 2001, compared with 72–73% of the general population.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Research has also found that even the best disability-focused voting campaigns only worked when backed up with clear guidelines for how to support people at every step of the journey. Without a connection to practice, information about the right to vote will not assist supporters, carers and family members to reliably address the risks and barriers faced by voters with disability.<sup>4,5</sup>

1. Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (2013). "You can't vote—you're mentally incompetent": Denying democracy to people with severe disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 38(1), 58–62.

2. Shriver Report Snapshot: Insight Into Intellectual Disabilities In The 21st Century. (2015). PR Newswire, July 24.

3. Keeley, H., Redley, M., Holland, A.J., & Clare, I.C. (2008). Participation in the 2005 general election by adults with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 53, 175–181.

4. Redley, M. (2008). Citizens with learning disabilities and the right to vote. *Disability and Society*, 23(4), 375–384.

5. Hawkins, R., Redley, M., & Holland, A.J. (2011). Duty of Care and Autonomy: How support workers managed the tension between protecting service users from risk and promoting their independence in a specialist group home. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 55(9), 873–884.



### getting help with voting

So now you have enrolled to vote. Well done!

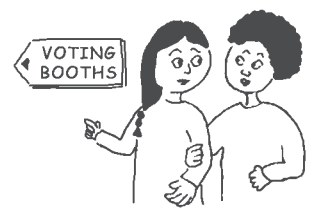
The next part of this book is about how to vote in elections. There is lots to learn! Don't be afraid – you can get help!



You can get help to learn about politics.



You can get help to learn about voting.



You can get help to vote on election day.





## learning about political parties

There is an important step that takes place between enrolling to vote and exercising the right to vote in an election. This step is learning about political parties. After all, what’s the point of becoming a voter if a person does not understand the people they are voting for! Unfortunately, it is not easy to gain access to easy-to-read materials about politics, political parties, and election policies.

One of the best ways to support a person to make informed choices is to assist them to read through the policies of a small number of political parties and have a conversation about them. An expanded range of options with an understanding of how each option affects them will lead to better choices.

After a week or two, read the policies of some of the other parties. After a few months, you will have discussed the ideas of many diverse political parties.

### Tip for success

A fantastic way to increase a person’s range of experience is to work at elections. The Victorian Electoral Commission encourages people with disability to apply for paid roles.

Visit [vec.vic.gov.au/disability](http://vec.vic.gov.au/disability) for more information.

### Tip for success

For more about choice making, see page 31 of this booklet.

In Sweden and the UK, advocacy organisations produce regular easy-to-read newspapers co-written by journalists with intellectual disability. Disability Matters Manitoba is a Canadian campaign that sees provincial political candidates submit their Easy English election materials in video format to the Disability Matters campaign website.



Easy News (UK)  
[unitedresponse.org.uk/easy-news](http://unitedresponse.org.uk/easy-news)



8 Sidor (8 pages, Sweden)  
[8sidor.se](http://8sidor.se)



Disability Matters (Manitoba, Canada)  
[disabilitymatters2016.ca/where-parties-stand](http://disabilitymatters2016.ca/where-parties-stand)



I Can Vote (Victoria, Australia)  
[icanvote.org.au](http://icanvote.org.au)

## people and political parties

We talked about political candidates earlier. This page will tell you about the groups that candidates usually belong to. These are called political parties. A political party is a group of people who join together because they have similar ideas about things. A political party can have ideas about how to run the whole country or the state. Other political parties have ideas about one thing that they think is important.

It is important to know what each political party thinks. This can help you decide whether you want to join a political party or vote for them at an election. We all have unique and different lives. This means that we have different needs and we want different things from our government. This is why people choose to vote for different parties.

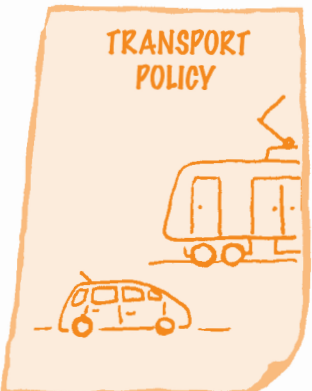
Australia has some very large parties and some very small parties. Most of the local politicians and members of parliament who help to run the country are members of a political party.

Not every candidate in an election needs to be a member of a political party. A candidate can be someone with their own ideas about things. These people are called independent candidates or **independents**.

The political party that has the most members of parliament after a State or Federal Election becomes the Government.

You can ask a supporter to help you learn about them.

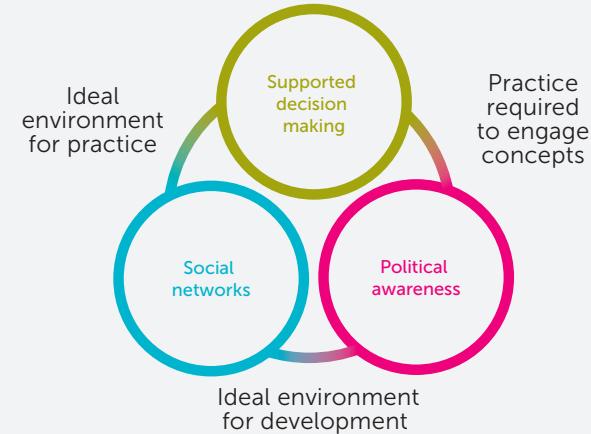
When there is an election, most political parties send people information about what they will do if they win the election. This information tells us what the party thinks about money, health, education, and even about different types of people. We call these different ideas policies.





# learning in a group

Several Swedish researchers have concluded that people with a disability, like all members of the community, need a strong social network to empower them to actively participate in citizenship. Their work shows that having a social network creates opportunities to meet people and discuss social and political questions, which in turn leads to the development of the citizens' political knowledge. The researchers' work demonstrates that small groups are an ideal way to help people grow in their exposure to diverse political opinions in a safe environment.<sup>6</sup>



Forming a small study group of people with intellectual disability with the support of a number of friends and advocates to talk about politics might be a great way to start. For instance, you could:

- ▶ Form a group of 3-4 people with intellectual disability and 4-5 supporters.
- ▶ Meet once per fortnight for 3-6 months before an election.
- ▶ Watch political videos, discuss policy brochures, facilitate conversation about group members' opinions about community and politics.
- ▶ Use this booklet as a foundation document.

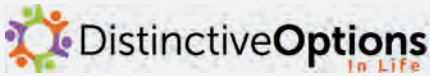
You might also want to investigate starting a *Circle of Support*, however this is very different to the Swedish study groups noted above. *Circles of Support* focus on a person with disability and include several people who are close to the person meeting regularly over the long term to empower the person to live a better life.

For more information about forming a *Circle of Support*, see page 32.

A Swedish organisation (Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan) ran a voting campaign using some of the ideas discussed above. The My Vote (Mitt Val, [www.sv.se/mittval](http://www.sv.se/mittval)) campaign saw small study groups of people with disability come together to learn about politics and voting. The groups were led by volunteer trainers. The studieförbund concept is a Swedish learning model that resembles a cross between Victorian TAFEs and neighbourhood houses.



R&R



R&R (Rights and Responsibilities) Network is a self-advocacy group, supported by Distinctive Options in Sunbury, Victoria. Community participation, concerns and celebrations play a big part of weekly meetings. Visitors have included politicians, accommodation, recreation, communication, human relations and health and well-being services. Regular agenda items include voting opportunities, staying safe, bullying, public transport access and entitlements. Fundraising causes have included Movember, Red Cross, Sunbury Careworks and Country Fire Authority.



"It's all about our rights and responsibilities. They go hand in hand" - Stephanie

"We learn to speak up, to have a say" - Simone

"I love having visitors. I love asking questions" - Stefan

"It's our chance to be heard" - David

"It's our right to make decisions in the community" - Emma

"It's a chance to fix things in the community, to make things better" - Stephanie

"We practice our right to vote" - Kiara

"We take on being responsible" - Mary

"We learn new skills" - Maurice

The door to self-advocacy is open to all. We meet as a group because we like to learn from each other.

For more about R&R, visit [distinctiveoptions.com.au](http://distinctiveoptions.com.au)

# talking about politics

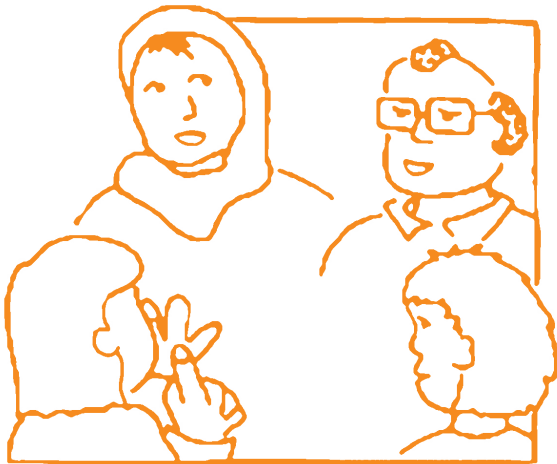
## Learning about political parties can be a lot of work!

Knowing what a candidate plans to do can help you decide if you want to vote for them or not. There are many ways you can learn about each candidate's policies.

- ▶ You can look at the pamphlets that candidates send out when there is an election coming up.
- ▶ You can go to each candidate's website and see what they say about the election.
- ▶ You can go to their Facebook page to see what they say and what their supporters say.
- ▶ You can also find out what candidates are saying by reading the newspaper, listening to the radio, or watching the news and television. Politics and political parties are in the news almost every day!
- ▶ You can even write to your local candidate and ask them questions. You could ask your local candidate "What are you going to do about the environment?" or "What are you going to do to make my community more accessible for people with a disability?"

## Talking about politics and political parties with a group of people can make it easier.

You can form a group of people to help you discuss politics. 4 or 5 people would be a great group size. You can meet once every month and talk about what you have been learning. You could also watch online videos together or read pamphlets from political parties together.



6. Kjellberg, A., & Hemmingsson, H. (2013). Citizenship and voting: Experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities in Sweden. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 10, 326–333.

planning

One of the most important aspects of good support practice is planning. A regular plan that is adopted by the key supporters in a person’s life can lead to the implementation of predictable and reliable support in the long term. There are communication plans, behaviour support plans, learning plans and many more. Voting is no different.

creating a supported voter plan

Starting the planning process

The plan needs to be developed with the focus person and family, supporters or advocates. It may also be developed by a *Circle of Support* ([www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/circles](http://www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/circles)).

Schedule a meeting and think of all the people who are in the person’s circle of support, or those people who are interested in supporting the person’s political citizenship. In your invitations, you can add statements from the person about their desire to be an informed voter.

During the first meeting, provide group members with the opportunity to discuss any concerns they have. This is your chance to take a problem solving approach to these concerns.

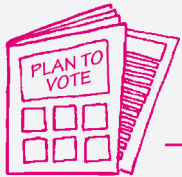
Content of the plan

The plan should be easy to read and in a format that can be shared easily. It should include:

- ▶ **Timeframes:** Will you spend 12 months, 6 months or 3 months learning about politics? What will you do the day before the election?
- ▶ **Responsibilities for support:** Who will support the learning process? Who will take the person to the voting centre? What will you do after voting to talk about the experience?
- ▶ **Learning about politics:** What local community resources or groups exist that could support the person’s political journey?
- ▶ **Transport**
- ▶ **Liaison with the supports that exist in the person’s life:** Who is the central point of contact? Do other people need to know about this plan?

Managing the plan

- ! Once the plan has been developed, it needs to be incorporated into the systems that surround the person. You can do this by:
  - ✓ Asking house staff to put a note next to each election date in administrative diaries or planners as soon as an election is called.
  - ✓ Ensure voting is added to the person’s Person Centred Plan and, if appropriate, the person’s NDIS plan.
  - ✓ Asking the management of your support organisation to send out voting alerts to all staff when elections are called to (a) remind them to check service users’ voting plans and (b) remind them about voter support practices.



You can create a plan to vote by using the form at: [www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting](http://www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting)

planning to vote

It is really important that you take time to learn about voting. You don’t have to rush. The best way to make sure you get all the help you need is to make a plan.

Planning to vote means working out who is going to help you to:

- ▶ learn about politics
- ▶ learn about political candidates
- ▶ learn about voting
- ▶ get to the voting centre on election day

You can write out a list of these things and put the list on your wall or your fridge. You could give it to a friend, a family member or a supporter to look after it if you want. You can ask your *Circle of Support* to help you if you have a Circle. It’s your choice. Ask one of these people to remind you to follow your plan.

Go to [inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting) to complete a *Plan to Vote*. You can do this yourself or ask someone to help you.

voters voice

The Victorian Electoral Commission has created an app for your mobile phone or tablet called Voters Voice. This app will help you learn more about how to vote. You can use it by yourself or with your friends or supporters. The app will ask you questions about yourself that will help you get to your nearest voting centre.

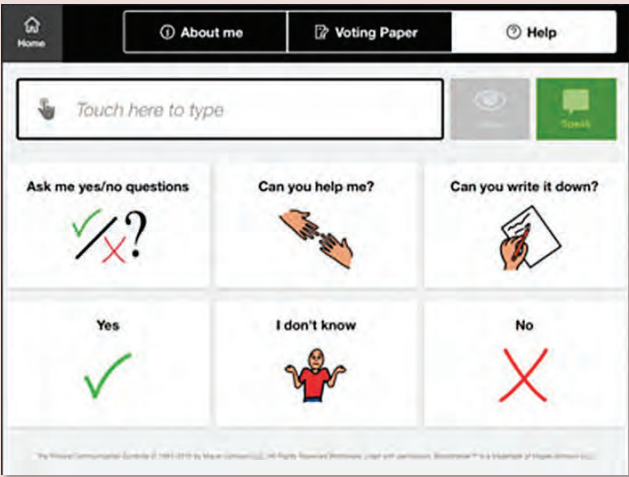
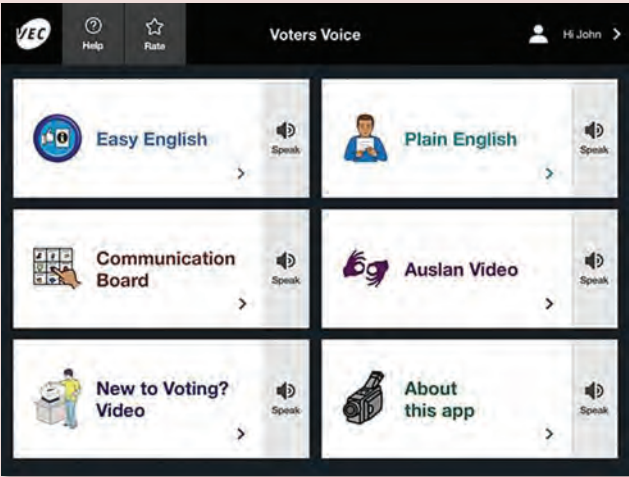
You can use this app when you go to the voting centre to vote.

You can download the app a few months before council and State elections at the iTunes store or at Google Play.



For more information about Voters Voice, go to [vec.vic.gov.au/votersvoice](http://vec.vic.gov.au/votersvoice).

Here are some pictures of what the app looks like:






# voting on election day

## for supporters

Voting at a voting centre – in person – on election day can be a daunting experience for anyone, let alone for a person with intellectual disability. People with disability are entitled to attend voting centres in person and to be assisted by a supporter to complete ballot papers.



In the weeks leading up to an election, the electoral commission website and the Voters Voice app will provide details of voting centre locations, as well as a list of accessible sites. If a voter with disability has reduced mobility, make sure the centre they attend on election day is one of the accessible sites.


For further easy read information about completing ballot papers, visit [vec.vic.gov.au/disability](http://vec.vic.gov.au/disability) to see:

- ▶ the *Voting is for Everyone* video
- ▶ the *Easy English First Past the Post* guide produced by the Communication Resource Centre at Scope


Although people with intellectual disability are entitled to vote in person at voting centres like everyone else, it is possible to vote via post.

To seek a postal vote form, visit [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) once a state election is called. For federal elections, visit [aec.gov.au/Voting/ways\\_to\\_vote/](http://aec.gov.au/Voting/ways_to_vote/)


To view the requirements for postal voting status, visit [vec.vic.gov.au/Voting/PostalVoting.html](http://vec.vic.gov.au/Voting/PostalVoting.html)



Voting centre staff are not required to assess the capability of voters with intellectual disability.

**Tip for success** 

Feedback from people with a disability and their supporters shows that confidence and clarity on the part of supporters can not only allay the concerns of voting centre staff but also garner support and assistance from them.

**Tip for success** 

Use the diagram on these pages to discuss the voting centre environment with the person.

**Tip for success** 

This booklet is about the support required in the years and months leading up to an election. For high quality resources about attending voting centres and completing ballot papers, check out [vec.vic.gov.au/disability](http://vec.vic.gov.au/disability)

# election day

- 1**

Welcome to the voting centre! When you arrive to vote, there may be a lot of other people waiting to vote. You may have to wait in a line to vote.

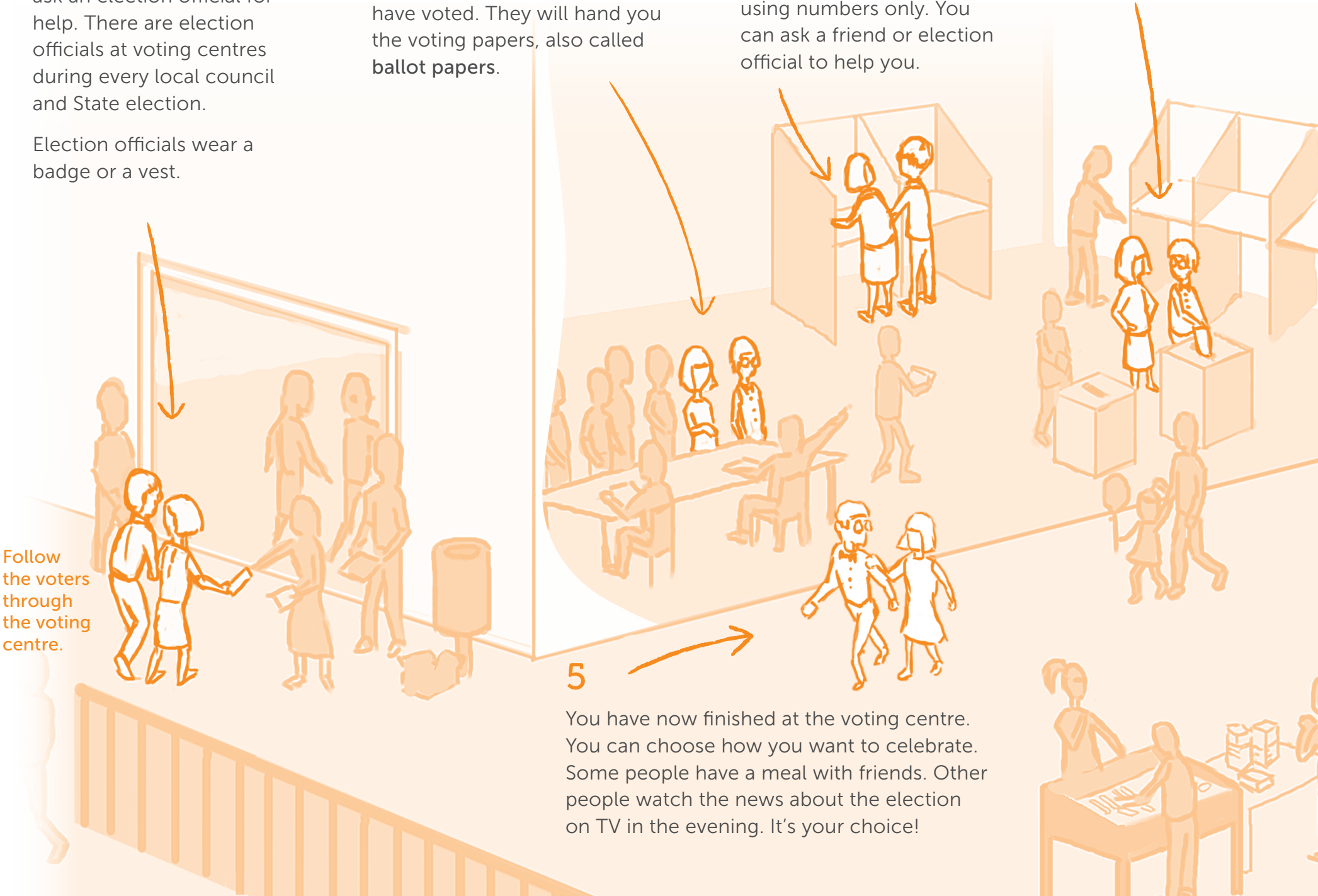
If you need help, you can ask an election official for help. There are election officials at voting centres during every local council and State election.

Election officials wear a badge or a vest.
- 2**

A VEC staff member will ask for your name and address. They will also ask if you have already voted somewhere else for this election. They will make sure you are voting in the right electorate. They will mark your name on the electoral roll to show that you have voted. They will hand you the voting papers, also called **ballot papers**.
- 3**

An election official will tell you to go to one of the voting booths set up around the room. These are set up so that no-one else can see who you are voting for. Go into the voting booth then write on your ballot papers using numbers only. You can ask a friend or election official to help you.
- 4**

When you have written on the ballot papers, you must place these in a special ballot box. An election official will show you how to do this.





## compulsory voting and fines

Voting in Australia is compulsory for all Australians over 18 years of age.

If a person does not vote at an election, they will receive an *Apparent Failure to Vote* notice asking for an explanation. It is important that the person respond promptly to this notice using the contact details provided.

### removal from the roll due to unsound mind

If you have:

- ▶ Supported the person to understand the nature and significance of voting and democratic participation using the techniques outlined in this booklet
- ▶ Engaged an advocacy or support organisation for assistance
- ▶ Sought assistance from other people in the person's life
- ▶ Created a plan and logistical supports to assist the person to participate in elections

...then there is a high likelihood that a person once considered unable to vote will become an informed, supported voter.

However, for those who need more time or who fall outside the scope of these techniques, supporters may visit the Victorian Electoral Commission website to obtain a *Removal of Elector's Name from Roll* form. This form is used to confirm that the person is "incapable of understanding the nature and significance" of voting.

#### Tip for success

If you intend to support a person to respond to a notice issued by an electoral commission, prompt, instruct or guide the person to get in touch with the commission themselves. *Doing with* is better than *doing for* when it comes to helping to build a person's capacity.



## what happens if you don't vote?

People who are enrolled to vote must vote. This includes you! This is the law. If you do not vote, you will get a letter in the mail. The letter will ask you to explain why you did not vote. If you do not have a good reason then you will get a fine. This means you will have to pay money to the government.

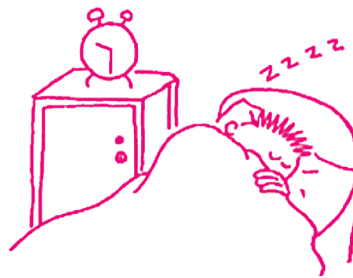
If you have a good reason for not voting, you can call the Victorian Electoral Commission and tell them. Here are some good reasons:

- ✓ You live in a house with other people with disability and support workers. The support workers were not able to take you to vote.
- ✓ No one helped you understand the election. You did not feel comfortable voting.
- ✓ Your taxi did not come.



Some reasons are not good reasons. You will get a fine. For example:

- ✗ You did not feel like voting on the day.
- ✗ You don't like politics.
- ✗ You forgot to vote.
- ✗ You have a disability.



If you get a fine, ask a family member, support worker or friend to help you work out how you can pay the fine.

You can call the Victorian Electoral Commission on **13 18 32**.



## voting and the NDIS

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides individual funding to people with intellectual disability based on their needs and goals.

### voting and political citizenship

People with disability who receive costed support plans – and funding to action their plans – can have support for voting included in their plans. Voting is a clear function of the broad goal of being a more active citizen.

The NDIS may fund:

- ▶ Support to engage in advocacy and self-advocacy roles
- ▶ Support to prepare for voting (as capacity building)
- ▶ Support to attend training or support groups to assist people with intellectual disability to develop their political citizenship



- ▶ Support to vote at elections, including support to attend voting centres with support professionals
- ▶ Support for transport on election day. It must be noted, however, that funding for taxis will generally not be included in plans unless there is good reason for this. Transport in the NDIS will instead focus on utilising support professionals' vehicles and public transport.

For more information about the specific items, supports and activities that will be funded by the NDIS, participants and their families or advocates are encouraged to contact their current support organisation or local advocacy organisation.

## voting and the NDIS

You may have heard about the NDIS. This stands for National Disability Insurance Scheme. It's OK if you don't understand everything about the NDIS right now. Your family, friends or support workers will help you learn more about it.



The NDIS was created by the Australian Government. It is a new way for you to receive the support you need to live your life.



When you meet with an NDIS planner, you can ask for support to learn about your rights, including your right to vote. You can learn in a class, or with a support worker, or in another way that you choose.

You can also ask for someone to support you on election day. You may want someone to take you to the voting centre. You may also need someone to help you when you fill out the ballot paper.



Ask your family, your friends, or your support workers if you want help with the NDIS.



# part C: practice toolkit

This section features background information about rights, empowerment and evidence-based practice models to assist you in your role as a supporter.

## united nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) supports the full inclusion of people with disability globally. Article 29 of the Convention instructs signatories (including Australia) to support the full and robust development of all social and logistical systems required to allow people with disability to become politically active and to vote. However, article 29 should not be viewed in isolation. The foundations for political citizenship are in fact laid in several of the preceding articles, particularly articles 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 21, 24 and 30. The most successful inclusive voting campaigns demonstrate the UN CRPD in some of these ways:

### article 5: equality and non-discrimination

Equality and anti-discrimination policies embraced by electoral commissions, disability support organisations and advocacy groups, particularly in relation to political citizenship.

### article 8: awareness raising

Raising awareness of the right to vote through targeted communications campaigns in media and advertising, with voting and political citizenship included in the practice frameworks of disability support organisations.

### article 9: accessibility

Accessible polling arrangements, with all voting centre attendants and staff fully trained in communication practices and the rights of voters with intellectual disability.

### article 12: equal recognition before the law

Equality before the law and the separation of legal and mental capacity.

### article 21: freedom of expression and access to information

Accessible information about politics, candidates and elections available from a range of sources, produced by diverse organisations and readily available via media.



## voting pathway

The following pathway reflects the various stages of political citizenship along which people with intellectual disability may progress on the journey to sustainable electoral participation. It can be used as a helpful way of tracking a person’s growth as a political citizen.







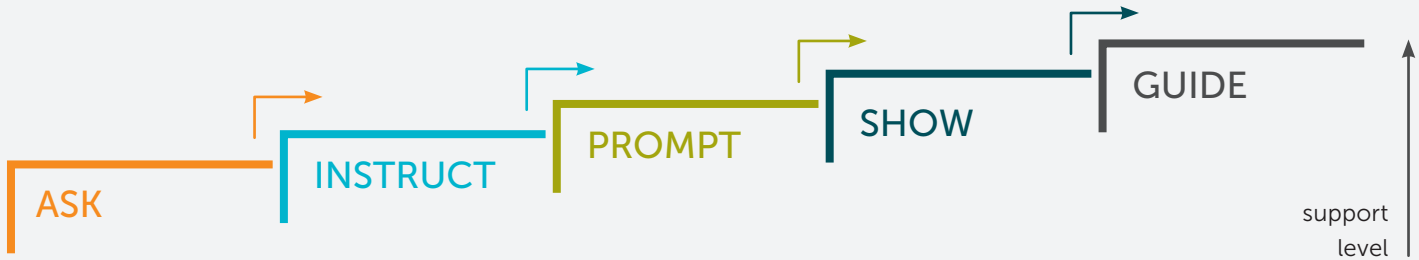
practice

The chart below sets out some of the practices and techniques that are available to direct support professionals and support organisations. The next few pages will outline some of the practices that can be used to support a person to become an informed voter.



person centred active support

*Person Centred Active Support* is one of the most important evidence based practice models available to disability support organisations at the current time. It is a model that places the person at the centre of organisational planning, organisational processes, staff training, scheduling, and interpersonal relationships. “Every moment has potential” is a central theme of Active Support, ensuring that people with intellectual disability are supported to experience genuine engagement and capacity building in all activities – from household activities, to social recreation, in employment and education, and in accessing the community. The principles of Active Support allow a person with intellectual disability – whether mild or profound – to grow their skills and build stronger relationships.



Graduated support – or graded assistance – is one small element of *Person Centred Active Support*. It is employed when supporting people to develop and use daily living skills, for example, in verbally prompting a person to make dinner or guiding the person with hand-on-hand support while preparing dinner. However, it also applies to using transport, shopping, education, and political citizenship. Broadly, Active Support is a person centred practice model that stands apart from other forms of practice, such as models that instead place staff, carers or resources at the centre of practice. Support organisations that employ *Person Centred Active Support* will be more likely to view the people they support as citizens of their local community.

For more information, visit the *Every Moment has Potential* website [www.activesupportresource.net.au](http://www.activesupportresource.net.au) to access online modules developed by Greystanes Disability Services and La Trobe University.



support for choice

For most of us, decision making skills are developed from our earliest years, through childhood, adolescence, school life and then throughout our personal and professional lives as adults. Sometimes we are not even aware that these skills are being developed!

Inclusion Melbourne, RMIT and a group of advocacy organisations produced the *It’s My Choice!* toolkit in 2013 to train people in decision making and choice for people with intellectual disability.

There are 9 principles of choice. Principles 5 and 6 are particularly relevant to people with intellectual disability who need to build stronger political awareness. *Person Centred Active Support* and *Circles of Support* both embody these principles.

Together, these two principles tell us that people can make better and more complex decisions when they are supported to have new experiences and to distinguish between new options. Principle 6 also tells us that some of the barriers that prevent people from having new experiences and making new choices are unacceptable. It is the work of supporters and advocates to challenge these barriers.

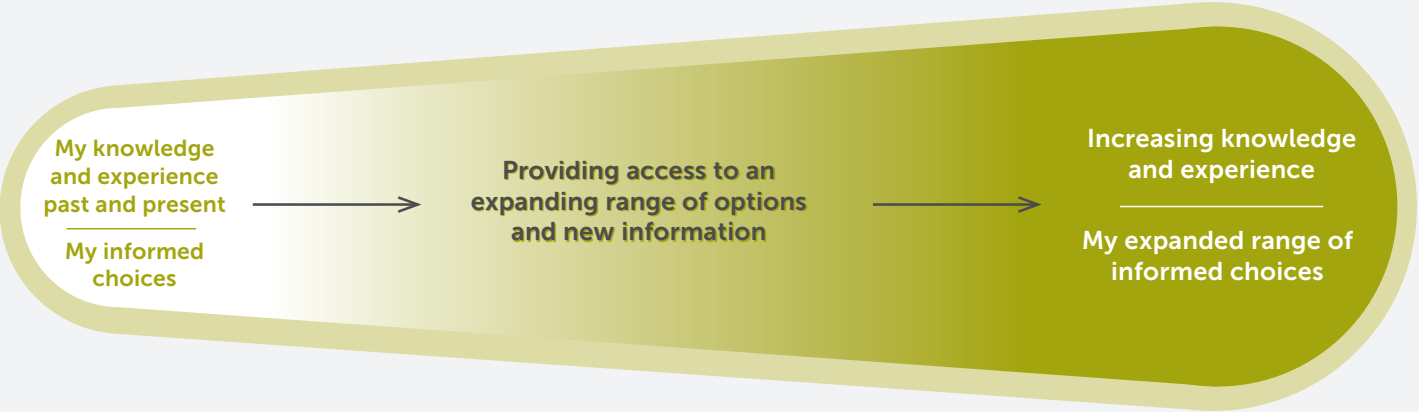
You can read more about them at [www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/choice](http://www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/choice)

**Principle 5**

My choices are likely to be greater and more ‘expansive’ where I have more knowledge and experience to inform my choices. Building knowledge and experience is important to making choices informed by past experience.

**Principle 6**

My personal experiences may be limited by money, experience or what is possible. Nobody is completely free to choose and pursue any choice they wish. What is important is whether the limitations I experience are reasonable or not.





## circles of support

Developed in the 1980s and 1990s in the UK, the US and Canada, the *Circles of Support* model has recently been used in Sweden as an innovative practice for building self-awareness of political agency, increased political awareness and election readiness in people with intellectual disability. *Circles of Support* create opportunities for people to learn about political citizenship from diverse sources and voices in a safe environment.

### what is a circle of support?

A *Circle of Support* aims to formalise informal networks to provide valuable and authentic support to a person with a disability.

Communities and organisations around the world have had enormous success in improving the lives of marginalised and isolated people with a disability through the use of various models of *Circles of Support*.

*Circles of Support* are beneficial because they support the person with a disability over the long term, act as a mechanism that promotes communal responsibility, and support families, carers and advocates.

### who is in a circle of support?

The group is formed by people who care for, respect and have a common wish to support the individual to achieve short and long term goals.

### when do you start one?

*Circles of Support* can exist at any time in a person's life to support them long term, through both trouble-free and crisis situations.

*Circles of Support* generally take time to plan, establish and grow. It is never too late to start a *Circle of Support* - during childhood, adolescence, middle age or later in life.

### who can start a circle of support?

Anyone can support a person with a disability to start a *Circle of Support*. The people best equipped to support this process are parents, family members, friends, or people that have a meaningful and constant relationship with the person. These people are known as Primary Supporters. Paid facilitators can also be used to assist with the establishment of a Circle.

### what is a circle of support?

A *Circle of Support* is a group of people that come together, on a regular basis, to assist a person with a disability to develop, support and action their goals and aspirations.

### what is a circle of support not?

- ▶ A temporary arrangement that serves one purpose for specific individuals.
- ▶ Intended to be a tool for one-off formal planning and service delivery.
- ▶ Contingent upon, or solely dedicated to, the management of funds.

For more information about *Circles of Support*, visit [www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/circles](http://www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/circles) or contact an organisation that facilitates circles of support such as:

- Belonging Matters (VIC)
- Community Living Project (SA)
- Community Resource Unit (QLD)
- Imagine More (ACT)
- Microboards Australia (WA, ACT)
- Pave the Way (QLD)
- Resourcing Inclusive Communities (NSW)
- UnitingCare lifeAssist (VIC)



for more publications visit:

inclusiondesignlab

[inclusiondesignlab.org.au](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au)



### circles of support

A guide for family carers, friends and advocates who want to start a *Circle of Support*.



### your dental health

A guide to oral hygiene, dental health and the dental system for people with a disability, their families and carers.



### it's my choice! toolkit

A guide to decision making and planning tools for people with disability, families, advocates and organisations.



### taking that extra step

Taking That Extra Step (2nd Edition) offers all organisations the opportunity to become more inclusive of people with intellectual disability.

for more information visit:

Victorian Electoral Commission

[vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

[vec.vic.gov.au/disability](http://vec.vic.gov.au/disability)

[vec.vic.gov.au/votersvoice](http://vec.vic.gov.au/votersvoice)



[unitedresponse.org.uk](http://unitedresponse.org.uk)



[everyvotecounts.org.uk](http://everyvotecounts.org.uk)

To learn more about *I Can Vote* and to complete your *Plan to Vote*, visit:

[inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au/voting)







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