



People with disabilities are less likely to vote than people without disabilities (Schur, Adya, & Kruse, 2013). Moreover, when people with disabilities do vote they often face barriers. For example, polling places may be physically inaccessible for wheelchair users, and voting equipment may also be inaccessible for people with cognitive disabilities. Attitudinal barriers may also make voting more difficult; people with disabilities may need support from providers and Direct Support Professionals, but these people may not believe that voting should be a priority.

Approximately 1 in 5 people living in the United States have a disability (United States Census Bureau, 2012). If everyone with a disability voted, people with disabilities would have significant voting power and could draw attention to issues important to the disability community. For this reason, this study explores what factors increase or decrease the likelihood of people with disabilities exercising voting rights. To do so, this study analyzed Personal Outcome Measures® interviews completed by approximately 900 people with a wide range of disabilities collected in 2015. The key findings are described below.

DISABILITY DIAGNOSIS

Compared to people with other disabilities, the likeliness of exercising voting rights is:

- **2 times less** for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- **2 times less** for people with autism spectrum disorders
- **2 times less** for people with seizure disorders / neurological problems



No significant relationship was found between exercising voting rights, and complex behavioral or medical support needs.

COMMUNICATION METHOD

Compared to people who primarily use verbal communication, the likeliness of exercising voting rights is:

- **4 times less** for people who use face or body expressions as their primary communication method
- **6 times less** for people who use sign language as their primary communication method



Of those people in the survey responding that they are exercising their voting rights, 92% use verbal or spoken methods of communication.

DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

Compared to those who have full guardianship, the likeliness of exercising voting rights is:

- **2 times more** for people who are their own guardians



Of those people in the survey responding that they are exercising their voting rights, 35% are participating in independent decision-making.

¹ Exercising voting rights means someone who wants to vote is able to do so. It also means someone has the choice to not vote if they do not want to vote.



RESIDENCE TYPE AND SIZE

Compared to those people with disabilities who live in their own homes, the likeliness of exercising voting rights is:

- **2 times less** for people who live in family homes
- **8 times less** for people who live in state-operated ICF/DDs



As the number of housemates with disabilities and total housemates goes up, the likeliness of exercising voting rights does down.

BARRIERS, SUPPORTS & ORGANIZATIONS

The likeliness of a person with disabilities exercising voting rights is:

- **2 times higher** when organizations get to know the person's preferences about exercising rights
- **2 times higher** when rights important to the person have been identified
- **2 times higher** when barriers to fair treatment have been identified by the individual
- **2 times higher** when the person is provided with the support needed to exercise their rights



Of the total number of respondents participating in this survey sampling:

- 46% report that preferences about exercising rights were solicited by the organization
- 46% report that rights important to them are being or have been identified
- 46% report that they are provided with the support needed to exercise their rights
- 64% report that fair treatment issues have been identified by the person
- 42% report that the organization solicited information about rights violations or fair treatment issues from the person



Voting allows people with disabilities the ability to contribute to decisions that will indirectly and directly impact their quality of life. Because they are one of the largest social minorities in the United States, if more people with disabilities were engaged in the voting process they would have enough collective power to draw attention to issues that directly result in increased community access and equity of opportunity. Along with the right supports, attention to barriers can ensure people with disabilities are able to make use of their civil right and participate in this crucial form of civic engagement.

Organizations and providers need to increase voting supports for people with disabilities, especially those groups we found were less likely to exercise voting rights. Everyone should have equal access to voting.

REFERENCES

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This brief was sponsored by CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Friedman, C. (2016). Exercising voting rights: People with Disabilities. Towson, MD: CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership.



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