

National Core Indicators®

Data Highlight

What Do NCI Data Tell Us About Voting Among People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities?



A total of 32% of respondents to NCI's 2018-2019 In-Person Survey said they had voted in a recent local, state, or federal election. Across states, the percentage ranged from 58% to 7%. A total of 5% of respondents said they had the opportunity but chose not to vote.

Why does it matter? Engagement in civic life through voting is a right that is available to all adults in the US. However, NCI data show that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are much less likely to vote than people in the general population. In 2018, about half of the country voted, and in 2016 the percentage was about 55%—significantly higher than the 32% of NCI respondents who reported having voted in a recent election. There are many barriers to voting faced by people with IDD that may account for the low numbers. These include a lack of training among poll workers regarding the support that people with IDD may need, lack of access to polling places (including lack of transportation), and lack of access to registration and voter education materials. (Ornstein & Kopic, 2016). Additionally, 36 states require or request voters to show a form of identification that people with IDD may not have. Further, in some states, guardians may be given the ability to determine whether a person can vote; considering that 54% of the 2018-19 NCI sample was reported to have a guardian, there may be significant numbers of people receiving services whose right to vote might be determined by someone other than themselves.

Questions to ask: During the person-centered planning process, are voting supports discussed and included in the plan. What voter education materials are available in your state and are they in user-friendly formats? Are there local organizations that can inform people about how and where to vote, and how to protect the privacy of their ballot choices? Are training materials available to poll workers that describe ways to accommodate people with IDD? How are families made aware of the importance of the participation of their family member with IDD in the civic life of their communities including voting? What role can community advocacy organizations play in raising awareness for families of people with IDD?

Want to know more?

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