

Voting Tips for People Living with Traumatic Brain Injury

October 2020

www.msktc.org/tbi/factsheets

TBI Factsheet

This fact sheet explains why it is important to vote. It includes tips for people with TBI on when, where, and how to vote.

People with traumatic brain injury (TBI) may experience challenges in voting due to a range of impairments in physical, hearing, vision, communication, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral function. Obstacles may include registering to vote, remembering to vote, accessing transportation, physically navigating the polling place, understanding ballot design, and utilizing technologies for voting. All that on top of deciding who to vote for! The information here is intended to help people with brain injury overcome such obstacles.

Why Vote?

- Voting gives you a voice in what happens in your city, county, state, and country.
- People with disabilities, including TBI, vote less often than people without disabilities. When this happens, people with disabilities have less of a voice.
- Your vote matters. If you do not vote, you are letting other people make decisions for you. Some of these decisions may affect your rights and access to health care, employment, and other services and opportunities.
- Voting is a privilege and a responsibility that is part of being a United States citizen.

What Are Your Rights?

- You have the right to vote.
- You have the right to ask for help with voting.
- You have the right to bring a friend or family member with you to help you vote.
- You have the right to have accommodations to help you vote.
- You have the right to ask a poll worker to explain how to use the voting machine.
- You have the right to ask for a voting machine you can reach.
- You have the right to ask for a seat while you are waiting to vote.
- You have the right to take your time while voting.
- You have the right to use curbside voting.
- You have the right to be treated with respect.
- You have the right to speak up for yourself.

The Traumatic Brain Injury Model System Program is sponsored by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

(See <http://www.msktc.org/tbi/model-system-centers> for more information.)

What Are Your Responsibilities?

- It is up to you to ask for help.
- It is up to you to be fully informed about the voting process and the candidates before voting.

How Do I Prepare to Vote?

- Make a plan. Where/how will you vote? How will you get there?
- Register to vote.
- Confirm your voter registration. Even if you have registered before, you should verify your registration status and make sure their address is up to date. Infrequent voters are more likely to be removed from voter rolls. When you go to vote, if you are told that you are not registered or not allowed to vote, you have the right to ask for a provisional ballot. In order for your provisional ballots to be counted, you must follow-up with the appropriate officials to provide proof of registration status.
- Set helpful reminders leading up to election day to remember to vote.
 - Write important dates on your calendar, set a reminder on your cell phone, and/or ask someone to remind you as the dates approach.
 - Important dates include the deadline to register to vote and to request and turn in an absentee ballot. They also include the dates for early voting and for Election Day. These dates may differ by state and precinct (voting region).
- Decide which elections matter to you.
- Become informed. (See suggestions on page 2)
- If you plan to vote absentee, request an absentee ballot to vote. Follow the directions that come with the ballot to complete it and turn it in. Consider having a family member or friend check that you completed it correctly and signed in the right places.
- If you plan to vote at the polls:
 - Make notes and take your notes with you when you vote.
 - Check on your state election board website to find out if you need to bring identification (ID) to vote.
 - Find out which polling place is your assigned location for voting.
 - Figure out how you will get to the polls. Plan for a ride if you need it.

Where Can I Register to Vote?

You can register to vote at a variety of places. Locations and processes vary by state.

Check before you go to make sure that the location is doing voter registration. Find out what documents to bring.

Location options for registration include:

- In person.
- Online.
 - Visit <https://www.usvotefoundation.org/>. This portal walks you through the process for each state. You can also check your county or state board of elections website.
- County board of elections office.
- Public libraries.
- Department of motor vehicles.
- State and county public assistance offices.
- Post offices.
- Town halls.

How Do I Become an Informed Voter?

- Decide what you care about.
- Know who is running. Know what issues are on the ballot.
 - Get a sample ballot.
 - You can get a sample ballot from your county board of elections office, early voting sites, libraries, or online.
- Learn about the issues. Learn about the candidates' positions on the issues and his or her leadership skills.
 - You can read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch debates on TV, and talk to other people.
 - Visit each candidate's website. These sites may list the candidate's views on different topics.
 - Read the Guide to Informed Voting.
(<https://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/VotingResources/InformedVoting.pdf>)

Where Do I Go to Vote?

Choose the way that is best for you. Options include:

- Vote from home using an absentee ballot or vote by mail. You must request an absentee ballot before the election. Follow the directions that come with the ballot to turn it in. Start the process early to allow enough time for you to receive and submit your ballot. Absentee ballots should be completed and placed back in the mail as soon as possible to be received by election day. Most states also have options for drop-off boxes or in-person early drop-off.
- A place that offers one-stop early voting. This often starts 2–4 weeks before Election Day.
- Your assigned polling place on Election Day.
- Curbside at the polling site or your local elections office. If you can't get out of your car or walk into the polling place, a poll worker can bring your ballot to your car. You will need to have a friend or family member go inside the polling place and tell a poll worker that you need curbside voting.

What if I Need a Ride to the Polls?

- You can take public transportation to the polling place.
- Ask a family member, friend, neighbor, or someone else you trust if you can go with them to the polling place. Contact the party headquarters (e.g., Democrat, Republican, or other) in your county for possible transportation services.

What if I Need Help Voting?

- You can ask a poll worker for help. **Poll workers can't ask you if you need help, but you can ask them for help.** You can ask the poll worker to help you read the ballot and use the voting machine.
- You can ask someone to go with you and ask the poll worker for help on your behalf.
- You can ask someone to go with you to the polling place and into the voting booth to help you.

How Can Families, Friends, and Care Partners Help Me Vote?

- Talk about current events, political issues, and candidates with others.
- Think about obstacles that may keep you from voting. Think about how you can get help to overcome them.
 - These obstacles may include a lack of desire to vote, fatigue, and a desire to avoid crowds. Other examples include problems with memory, not being able to drive, and having a tough time moving around or communicating.
 - Plan each step of how you will vote, from getting your ballot to turning it in. If there are parts of the process that you don't know how they will work, research these issues and make a plan.
- Tell others that you want to register to vote, your preferred method of voting, and ask for their help if you need any.
- Ask for help with
 - registering to vote,
 - remembering deadlines (such as, dates for registering to vote and getting an absentee ballot),
 - gathering information,
 - learning about the candidates,
 - getting a sample ballot,
 - making sure you have the right ID to vote,
 - requesting or turning in an absentee ballot,
 - getting a ride to the polls,
 - getting into the polling place,
 - reading the ballot.
 - Someone else can read the ballot and ask you to pick one of the choices. They can't pick for you.

What About Voting and the Coronavirus Pandemic?

- If you vote at the polling place, bring a mask, hand sanitizer, and remember to social distance.

Where Can I Get More Information?

- National Disability Rights Network
 - <https://www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/>
- American Association of People with Disabilities Voter Resource Center:
 - <https://www.aapd.com/advocacy/voting/voter-resource-center/>
- U.S. Vote Foundation online portal for registration, absentee ballots, election dates, and other information:
 - <https://www.usvotefoundation.org/>
- Election Protection coalition:
 - Toll-free at 866-687-8683 or online at www.866ourvote.org
- USA gov:
 - How to Register to Vote: www.usa.gov/register-to-vote
 - Voting and Elections: www.usa.gov/voting
- Guide to Informed Voting:
 - <https://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/VotingResources/InformedVoting.pdf>
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission:
 - Resources for Voters with Disabilities: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/resources-for-voters-with-disabilities/>
 - Voter's Guide to Federal Elections: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/voters-guide-to-federal-elections/>

References

1. A Consideration of Voting Accessibility for Injured OIF/OEF Service Members: Needs Assessment. July 2012. Prepared for: Election Assistance Commission 1201 New York Avenue, N.W. Suite 300 Washington, D.C. 20005. Prepared by: Human Systems Integration Division Electronic Systems Laboratory Georgia Tech Research Institute Georgia Institute of Technology Atlanta, Georgia 30332.
2. Link, J. N., Kropf, M., Hirsch, M. A., Hammond, F. M., Karlawish, J., Schur, L., Kruse, D., & Davis, C. Voting competency and political knowledge: Comparing traumatic brain injury survivors and average college students. *Election Law Journal*. 2012;11(1), 52-69. DOI: 10.1089/elj.2011.0121.
3. Hirsch, M. A., Kropf, M., Hammond, F. M., Karlawish, J., Schur, L., & Ball, A. Voting characteristics of individuals with traumatic brain injury. *World Medical & Health Policy*. March 20 2019;11(1):24-42.
4. Schur, L., Shields, T., Kruse, D., & Schriener, K. (2002). Enabling democracy: Disability and voter turnout. *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(1), 167–190.
5. Schur, L., & Kruse, D. (2000). What affects voter turnout? Lessons from citizens with disabilities. *Social Science Quarterly*, 81(2), 571–587.
6. Schur, L., Adya, M., & Ameri, M. (2015). Accessible democracy: Reducing voting obstacles for people with disabilities. *Election Law Journal*, 14(1), 60–65.

Authorship

Voting Tips for People Living With Traumatic Brain Injury was developed by Flora M. Hammond, MD, FACRM; Mark A. Hirsch, PhD, FACRM; Christine S. Davis, PhD; Julia Nelson Snow, MA; Martha Kropf, PhD; and Jason Karlawish, MD, in collaboration with the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center.

Source: The content in this factsheet is based on research and/or professional consensus. This content has been reviewed and approved by experts from the Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems (TBIMS), funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), as well as experts from the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers (PRCs), with funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice of a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment. The contents of this factsheet were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DP0082). Partial support was provided under a grant by the National Institutes of Health (grants HD055202-01 and HD055202-02S1 to Carolinas Rehabilitation/ Carolinas Medical Center to understand the experience associated with voting from the perspective of individuals living with TBI.) and the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) (TBI Model Systems at Indiana University School of Medicine Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation grant #90DRTB0002). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this factsheet do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

This version of the factsheet has not been tested with individuals with TBI and their caregivers.

Copyright © 2020 Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC). May be reproduced and distributed freely with appropriate attribution. Prior permission must be obtained for inclusion in fee-based materials.

