

Call for evidence submission: Access to elections

United Response is a national charity with over 40 years' experience of providing skilled social care support to disabled people. We work under contract with local authorities across England and Wales and at any one time our 4000 staff are providing care and support to around 3000 vulnerable people in the community. Since the 2010 election, United Response has been successfully breaking down barriers to increase the number of voters among people with learning disabilities.

United Response welcomes this opportunity to input into the Government's call for evidence on access to elections for disabled people. Since setting up our [Every Vote Counts](#) project, we have found that many people we support really want to vote and take part in the electoral process.

1. Experience of disabled people in participating in elections

United Response's experience as an organisation is that registering to vote can be confusing for people with a learning disability. To help people with a learning disability understand the registration process we created the Every Vote Counts website which provides easy read information on the voting process, to make it easier to understand for people with a learning disability.

A lack of accessible information about voting presents a barrier to the 1.5 million adults in the UK who have a learning disability using their right to vote; many people with a learning disability find election material difficult to understand. Easy read information about voting, polling stations and party manifestoes, should be available to make it easier for people to make an informed decision and use their right to vote.

A lack of representation among political parties for people with learning disabilities can often be disenfranchising for them to take part in politics. Political parties should do more to encourage people with learning disabilities to participate in the democratic process, stand for election and become politically active.

2. Support provided to disabled people at elections

In 2007 United Response carried out a survey asking people about their voting experiences, results showed that only 1 in 8 respondents with a learning disability voted in the 2005 general election. As well as finding out how many people voted, support workers told us that they would like to provide better support for people to be part of the democratic process, but found there was not enough accessible information available on candidates and policies.

United Response provides accessible information to make voting easier to understand for people with a learning disability. Before an election or referendum we launch our Every Vote Counts campaign sharing information on social media and sending out newsletters to remind people of the resources available. This includes easy read booklets about politics, supporter's guides and a dedicated [website](#). Survey results from 2015 showed that 71% of respondents found our easy read booklets helpful with a further 33% visiting the dedicated website.

During the 2015 General Election, United Response used its Every Vote Counts campaign to lobby politicians and advocated on behalf of people we support. The campaign raised awareness of the fact that people with a learning disability are entitled to vote, irrespective of their mental capacity. It also alerted people to changes to voter registration, which meant people would have to register to vote as individuals rather than as households, resulting in 770,000 names being removed from the electoral register. This change would negatively impact disenfranchised groups, including people with a learning disability. After the campaign, a 2015 survey revealed that 31% of respondents had

voted for the first time. More needs to be done, to raise awareness and to provide people at polling stations with a better understanding of the needs of people with a learning disability.

Many people with a learning disability have views on political issues and would like to vote and become more engaged in the political process. Additional measures to help people at polling stations could include:

- More disability awareness training.
- Contacting people with a learning disabilities on a register ahead of an election to check that they are registered and that they have everything they need to exercise their right to vote.
- Providing an easy read guide to voting in the polling stations, as well as more easy read information ahead of elections.
- Making sure easy read manifestos for all political parties are released well in advance of polling day.

3. Level of support provided by electoral administrators to disabled people at elections

After United Response's, Every Vote Counts campaign in 2015 results showed that 43% of people with a learning disability surveyed voted in the general election – a 10% increase than the number of people who voted in 2010. This demonstrates that by providing more support and guidance for carers and support workers, awareness of people with learning disabilities' right to vote increased by supporting people throughout the electoral process.

We have previously worked with other disability charities and MPs, and carried out surveys to ensure our Every Vote Counts campaign was as effective as possible.

Contact:

Emma Sutton

Policy Officer

United Response

Email: emma.sutton@unitedresponse.org.uk

Tel: 020 8879 4980 / 07557177425