

Voting: Supporting Safe, Accessible, and Inclusive Elections for Older Wisconsin Voters

Core Member Organizations

- Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW)
- Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter
- Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA)
- Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A)
- Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS)
- Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND)
- Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC)
- Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)
- Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA)
- Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network is a collaborative group of individuals and associations working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.

WAAN's Position: WAAN supports improvements to the voting process to ensure every eligible older adult (and adult with disabilities) who wants to vote, can vote, no matter where they live.

Wisconsin's spring 2020 elections exposed existing and new barriers older adults face in Wisconsin's electoral process. Our leaders must take the necessary steps to ensure safe, accessible voting is available to all eligible voters.

Recommendations

These recommendations for November 2020 and subsequent elections are based upon lessons learned this spring.

A. Voter registration - Increase access and provide training assistance

1. *Recommendations for completion before the General and Presidential Election - Nov. 3, 2020*

a) **Voter Registration Applications*** should be made available by the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) at public locations throughout each community - Aging and Disability Resource Centers, senior dining sites, senior centers, human/social service agencies, income maintenance offices, public housing, energy assistance offices, long-term care facilities, municipal offices, post offices and libraries. Complete online voter registration information should be available in Spanish and Hmong ([MyVote.wi.gov/](https://myvote.wi.gov/)).

b) **Outreach materials** promoting the availability of Voter Registration applications should be developed by the WEC and posted at the public locations noted above, as well as made available for posting at banks, in elevators (office buildings, clinics, stores, etc.), places of worship, gas stations, grocery stores, and other community locations. Voter outreach should include specific materials and formats targeted at reaching voters who face barriers to voting. (See page 2.)

c) **Electronic outreach materials** promoting voter registration and the availability of Voter Registration applications should be developed by the WEC and made available for use in or on websites, e-newsletters, social media platforms, and intranet systems. The WEC should contact the entities listed in A.1.a) and provide promotional language and links

to downloadable and e-versions of the voter registration application and absentee ballot request forms for posting on those entities' websites.

2. Recommendations for elections in 2021 and beyond

a) **Voter Education Ambassador Training** should be made readily available by the WEC. The training should provide consistent, up-to-date training to volunteers across the state willing to assist voters by accurately answering questions about voter ID, voter registration, absentee voting, and the election process.

b) **Voter Assistance** may be provided by Aging Units and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs). Aging Units' plans - which represent the intent of the county/tribe to assure that older people have the opportunity to realize their full potential and to participate in all areas of community life - may include helping older adults exercise their citizenship by providing information on and assistance with voter IDs, voter registration and absentee voting forms, and resources for election process questions. ADRCs provide - accurate, unbiased information on all aspects of life related to aging or living with a disability and information and assistance regarding a broad range of programs and services for older adults and people with disabilities - this may include information and assistance related to voting for older adults and adults with disabilities.

c) **Automatic voter registration** should be made available by the WEC and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation whenever eligible individuals obtain or renew a driver's license or apply for a state photo ID. Individuals could elect to opt out if desired.

People Impacted by Voting Barriers

Many segments of eligible voters are impacted, each with its own set of characteristics and needs, including people who...

- regularly vote at polling sites but now facing additional challenges due to new restrictions such as voter ID requirements and Coronavirus limitations
- have mobility issues – no longer drive, cannot walk for long distances, climb stairs, stand for long periods of time, or do not have access to ADA compliant voting polls
- have sensory impairments and do not have access to ADA compliant voting in-person or via the online absentee voting process
- live in residential care facility not providing needed support and assistance to access the absentee voting but with new restrictions that may bar them from returning to their homes if they leave to vote at the polls
- are voting absentee ballot – for the first time or the hundredth time – and are struggling to understand the new requirements and technologies needed to secure a ballot, complete and safely return it
- are not able to obtain a voter ID because they do not have proper documentation, because no birth record exists, they don't have transportation to the granting office or they are homeless and cannot provide a permanent address
- live alone and unable to provide a witness to their completed absentee ballot
- are people of color and disproportionately impacted due to poor health or low incomes
- live in rural areas where polling places are miles apart and have limited or no access due to transportation
- live in urban areas where polling places have been reduced. The remaining sites may require some type of transportation which is often non-existent or are in places where suitable parking is not available
- have developmental disabilities or mild cognitive impairments and have difficulty understanding the new procedures but no assistance is available
- have low English proficiency.

d) **Photo IDs for voter registration** should be made easier to access in underserved communities by creating an online process for voters to get an ID. Expand Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) days and hours of availability and/or provide mobile locations (municipal buildings, libraries, ADRCs) where photo IDs can be obtained.

B. Absentee voting — Increase access and improve options

1. Recommendations for completion before the General and Presidential Election - Nov. 3, 2020

a) **Absentee ballot application**** should be made available by the WEC at public locations throughout each community - Aging and Disability Resource Centers, senior dining sites, senior centers, human/social service agencies, income maintenance offices, public housing, energy assistance offices, long-term care facilities, post offices and libraries. Complete online absentee ballot request information should be available in Spanish and Hmong at [MyVote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov).

b) **In-person early voting** options should be expanded to include designated early voting sites with established hours posted. They should be in easily accessible locations with accessible voting machines available. Include drive-thru or curbside early voting at specific sites on designated dates/times. [MyVote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov) should be enhanced to include municipal postings of locations, dates, and time availability for in-person early voting.

2. Recommendations for elections in 2021 and beyond

a) **Mail absentee ballot applications** to all registered voters before every election and to individuals currently living in residential care settings regardless if they have registered using their current address.

b) **Absentee voting assistance** – should be available for individuals completing the

application for witness signatures, transportation, etc. - see A.2.b).

c) **Secure absentee ballot drop-boxes** should be made available in every municipality, in easily accessible central locations, to ensure all voters have a safe option for ensuring ballots are returned before the deadline. At a minimum, a secure drop-box should be available up to and including election day at every polling site.

d) **USPS Intelligent Mail barcodes** should be integrated into the absentee ballot mailing process to allow for tracking ballot delivery and return.

e) **An exemption for the witness signature** should be made available for those who self-certify they are unable to obtain the witness signature after reasonable effort to do so, including a phone call to their local municipal clerk.

f) **Accessible absentee ballot options** should be developed to ensure voters with disabilities are able to complete their ballots without assistance.

C. In-person voting at the polls – Improve options and expand recruitment, training, and safety efforts

1. Recommendations for completion before the General and Presidential Election - Nov. 3, 2020

a) **In-person voting options** should be retained to ensure access for voters who have difficulty accessing or low-utilization of the absentee voting process. This includes Black Americans who may move more frequently and traditionally rely on in-person voting; homeless individuals who lack a fixed, regular night-time residence; voters with disabilities who may require in-person accommodations to vote privately, and voters who need to access same-day voter registration.

b) **Polling place consolidation** should be monitored by the WEC to ensure voters will not have difficulty accessing their polling sites or be subjected to unreasonably long lines at the polls, and to ensure Wis. Stat. § 5.35(2) is maintained. (The statute

requires municipalities to provide at least one voting booth for each 200 voters who voted in the last general election).

c) **Curbside voting**, as required by law, should be offered and publicized at every polling site. Curbside voting locations should be clearly identified and provide instructions for obtaining assistance.

d) **Alternate polling sites** should be near the closed site, ADA compliant, and accessible by transportation options similar to those available at the closed site.

e) **Trained staff and volunteers** should be available in adequate supply to work at the polls. This includes a reserve of non-high-risk individuals (during a public health emergency) to replace any of the standard cadre, as needed. Training of new volunteers should begin immediately and incorporate lessons learned from the April and May 2020 elections.

f) **Standardized PPE** should be available for poll workers and staff at every polling site. These supplies should be stockpiled and training on use should be provided.

2. Recommendations for elections in 2021 and beyond

a) **Action plans for conducting elections during a state declared emergency** should be developed by and for each municipality. They should include plans for addressing PPE needs; reserve poll workers; identifying alternate voting sites; securing other supplies/plans to keep poll workers and voters safe; and communication with staff, volunteers, and the public.



D. Voting in residential care facilities – Improve access and provide training:

1. Recommendations for completion before the General and Presidential Election - Nov. 3, 2020

a) **Alternative options to Special Voting Deputies (SVD)** should be developed when SVDs are not permitted access to residential care facilities to ensure all eligible voters have access to voting. Options should include mailing absentee ballots to *all* individuals currently living in residential care settings regardless if they have registered using their current address (use facility rosters to verify residency).

b) **Care facility staff** should be permitted to assist voters residing in the facility and should be provided the information, forms, and training to enable them to provide needed voter support and assistance to residents.

c) **Care facility care plan/chart** for each resident should indicate whether an individual wishes to vote in upcoming elections so assistance filing an absentee ballot request and ongoing voting support can be provided.

For more information about voting and older adults, please see WAAN's [Voting White Paper](#) or [Voting Issue Brief](#).

*(EL-131 – English, EL-131H – Hmong, and EL 131S - Spanish)

** (EL-121 – English, EL-121H – Hmong, and EL 121S - Spanish)

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network looks forward to working with policy makers to ensure future Wisconsin elections are safe, accessible, and inclusive for all older voters and voters with disabilities no matter where they live.