



Bringing voting to long term care facilities: Assessing the benefits of mobile polling

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Background

- Failures to ensure proper access to voting and to protect against manipulation of the vote of disabled citizens compromise the integrity of elections.
- In 2008, Vermont enacted mobile polling. Mobile polling brings election officials into a long term care setting so they can assist residents to vote.

Objective

To assess the impact of mobile polling on voter turnout, voter rights, and voter fraud.

Methods

- 24 long term care facilities, matched according to size and residents' cognitive status, were randomized to conduct mobile polling or voting as usual (absentee or polling booth).
- Because some sites were unable or unwilling to conduct mobile polling, 15 facilities voted as usual, and 9 facilities conducted mobile polling, resulting in 9 matched pairs and 6 additional control sites.
- Surveys of activities directors and election officials assessed problems or challenges with each voting method and voting outcomes.

Results

- Facility staff and election officials reported that mobile polling made voting more convenient and accessible for residents, increased legitimacy, relieved staff discomfort in assisting cognitively impaired voters, reduced the threat of fraud and coercion, and decreased workload for residents and staff.
- By staff estimates, the overall proportion of residents who voted at matched sites was 30.1% \pm 16.9%.
- Although there were significant qualitative differences in the voting experience, there were no significant differences between matched control and intervention sites in proportion of residents who voted ($t = -1.7$, $p = .11$) or between-site variance in voting rates (variance ratio test $f = 0.33$, $p = .14$).
- These findings were consistent when all sites were included in analysis.

Advantages of Mobile Polling

- Beneficial for the residents' feelings of self worth
"I think it's very good for the residents' self-esteem; it makes them continue to feel like a worthy part of the community and in the political system."
- Less threat of fraud and coercion
"We felt there was less coercion, it would be the cleanest way of voting. No one would influence them, because we know the justices of the peace wouldn't do that and it also gave a real feeling of participating in democracy."
- Protects/ensures the residents' right to vote
"They need to vote, they need to make their vote count. Just because they are in a nursing home they shouldn't be cut off from doing things they want to do. We have pretty good people here, people are very vocal and get into discussion groups. They all felt good having to vote."
- Relieves discomfort of staff assisting the cognitively impaired
"We really cannot even read the ballot to them but you know in the past residents would say what do you think, who do you think I should vote for, so with these two officials there representing both parties it was, it took the load off us. It took the uncomfortableness out of it for us. As much as we want to help people do the right thing or what we think they would think is the right thing, this was not an area that we could get into. So it took a lot of pressure off us."
- Made voting more accessible and convenient
"Mobile Polling was convenient, it assured more people would vote with no influence and they really enjoyed it! Most people here would be too scared to just go out and go to the polling place in the confusion."
- Reduced workload for election officials
"It really helps us on the day of elections because...it helps us with not having so many people with you know those kinds of problems coming through the day of elections. I think it's a great idea and I think it's the wave of the future."

Summary

- Although mobile polling did not affect turnout, it does provide substantial benefits to maximize voter rights and minimize concerns of voter fraud and manipulation.
- Facilities where voting occurred as usual had difficulty judging capacity to vote; staff members worried about potential persuasion and fraud; and voting was time consuming for nursing home staff.