

Political Inclusion for people with cognitive disability: A new frontier and approach

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Aims/Objectives: What was the purpose what you did? Why is your topic important? What did you want to change? What difference did you want to make?

Two inclusive political inclusion events explored current knowledge and barriers around choice-making, civic engagement, and voting. International leaders working with people with cognitive disability provided new ideas. We used these to build active networks and make sense of what needs to change to increase political inclusion.

Methods/Process: Who was involved? What did you do? (100 words)

Inclusion Melbourne and the University of Melbourne ran two inclusive half day roundtables in 2021, and then, subsequently in 2023, an inclusive National Summit on political participation. We partnered with nine partner organisations including advocacy, supported decision-making, family carer disability service provider and another university group and in the national summit explored best practices and barriers drawing on their leadership. International leaders also presented their work and subsequent discussions explored how to work together to make change in the future, that would increase political participation and voting by people with cognitive disability.

Results: What did you find? What changed? What difference did you make? What did you learn?

Political inclusion involves changes to legislation and exclusion linked to capacity, as well as significant changes around ensuring people are registered to vote. Central to change was that from the earliest of ages people with cognitive disability need to be: supported in choice-making; meaningfully engaged in local communities to understand why local and national issues are important; to be encouraged and to value civic participation and engagement to change things; and, at voting time to wish to want to vote. Family carer and service systems support and resources need to be in place so they can cast a vote in elections whilst electoral commissions should make voting as accessible as possible. To deliver these outcomes requires strong non-discriminatory networks, technology to support choice, innovative training, the engagement of politicians with this voting group, support resources all delivered in plain

language. The leadership of people with cognitive disability and the collaboration of advocacy and other groups to drive change over time is also vital.

Conclusion: How could other people use what you found out? What would you recommend other people do based on what you did and what you found out?

Advocacy, University and Third Sector collaborators who network people with cognitive disability, develop resources and training as well as provide increased education and mentoring need to build a distributed system of support encompassing family carers and service supports that is evidence-based. These should be used in the demonstrating that political engagement and voting can increase over time. Associated and ongoing action research should feature to explore outcomes relating to choice-making, civic engagement, support to vote, as well as voting itself. Changing whole systems and their assumptions takes time but can be accomplished through these mechanisms.

Alignment with the Conference Theme: How does your proposal address the conference theme of ‘New Frontiers’? How does your proposal showcase something new we can do to make the world a better place for people with disability? (50 words)

Voting represents perhaps the most evident sign of citizenship. Yet many people with cognitive disability are excluded from, or simply do not vote. They are not supported across the life course to become choice-makers, participants in civic life, nor trained in politics and supported to vote. This diminishes democracy