



Highlights of [GAO-10-6](#), a report to congressional requesters

# ELDERLY VOTERS

## Information on Promising Practices Could Strengthen the Integrity of the Voting Process in Long-term Care Facilities

### Why GAO Did This Study

Voting is fundamental to the U.S. democratic system and federal law provides broad protections for people with disabilities, including older voters. Many long-term care facility residents, who often have physical or cognitive impairments, vote by absentee or early ballot. Concerns have been raised about the extent to which states and localities are helping the increasing number of facility residents exercise their right to vote, especially those requiring voting assistance, who may be subject to undue influence or unauthorized completion of their ballot by facility staff or relatives. Given these concerns, GAO was asked to identify the actions taken to facilitate and protect voting for long-term care facility residents at (1) the state level and (2) the local level. To address these objectives, GAO interviewed federal officials, national organizations, and researchers; reviewed Election Assistance Commission (EAC) guidance on voting in long-term care facilities; surveyed state and local election officials; and visited seven localities in the weeks prior to the November 2008 federal election to observe the voting process in long-term care facilities.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the EAC collect and disseminate information on cost-effective promising practices for providing voting access while also ensuring voting integrity. EAC indicated agreement with our findings and recommendation. HHS and Justice did not provide formal comments.

[View GAO-10-6](#) or [key components](#).

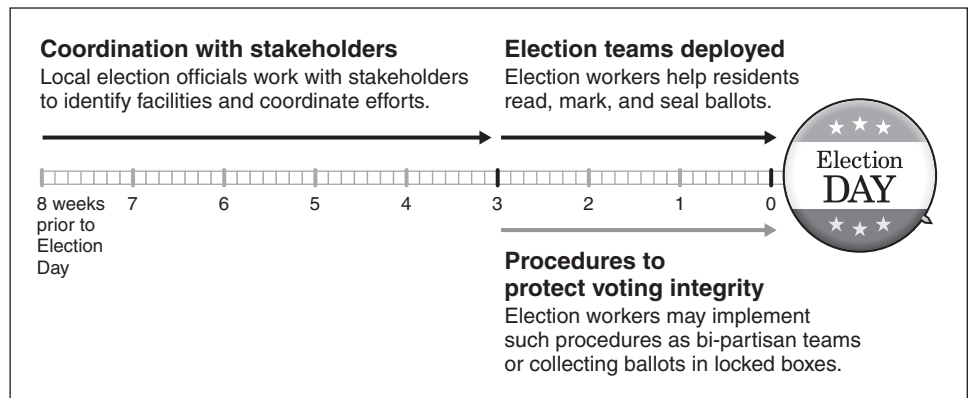
For more information, contact Barbara D. Bovbjerg at (202) 512-7215 or [bovbjergb@gao.gov](mailto:bovbjergb@gao.gov) or William O. Jenkins at (202) 512-8777 or [jenkinswo@gao.gov](mailto:jenkinswo@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

Most states have requirements or guidance to facilitate voting for long-term care facility residents, and some states also provide training and conduct oversight of localities' adherence to state requirements or guidance. States reported that they most commonly provided requirements or guidance for accommodations for absentee voting for residents of long-term care facilities, followed by accommodations for voter registration and voter identification procedures. Almost one-half of the states reported providing training to local election officials specifically on state requirements or guidance to facilitate voting for long-term care facility residents. Additionally, 17 states reported that they conducted one or more oversight activities to ensure that localities were adhering to state long-term care voting requirements or guidance. According to researchers, some of these state requirements or guidance for voting in long-term care facilities may help to protect against voter fraud and undue influence.

Localities also used a variety of actions to facilitate voting for long-term care facility residents, including some that may decrease the likelihood of fraud and undue influence. In our survey, 78 of the 92 localities reported taking actions to facilitate voting for long-term care facility residents. The most common actions included supporting facility staff in assisting residents with the absentee or early voting process, including providing staff with early and absentee voting information or guidance. Localities also reported providing services directly to residents. For example, close to one-half of localities we surveyed brought election officials to facilities to assist with the voting process. The seven localities we visited prior to the November 2008 federal election used a range of strategies to facilitate voting for long-term care facility residents, including coordination with facility staff and other stakeholders; the deployment of election teams to facilities; and implementation of procedures to protect and ensure voting integrity, such as requiring bipartisan voting assistance and signed affidavits to document voting assistance. Some local officials reported challenges to implementing these strategies, such as difficulty providing voting assistance to residents with cognitive impairments.

**Strategies Used by Selected Localities to Facilitate Voting in Long-term Care Facilities**



Source: GAO site visits.