



ELECTIONS ONTARIO OUTREACH PROGRAM 2007 FOR ELECTORS WITH DISABILITIES

June 2008



VOTING. EVERY DAY IT MATTERS.

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Introduction

Elections Ontario is the non-partisan agency of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which, under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer and in compliance with the *Election Act* and the *Election Finances Act*, administers provincial elections, by-elections and referenda.

Elections Ontario embraces the spirit of the *Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act, 2005* as part of our vision of setting the standard for electoral process excellence. This document acknowledges our collaboration with stakeholder organizations, reports on our accessibility measures in 2007 and recommends steps for improved response in future events.

In addition to the 39th Provincial General Election, Ontarians were asked in a referendum to decide which electoral system would better serve the province in the years to come. All our communications with stakeholder groups serving Ontarians with special needs emphasized the referendum and gave general process details. Specific information tools developed by our referendum team were made available to persons with disabilities in alternative formats.

Leading up to the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum, Elections Ontario examined the results achieved through measures implemented in the 2003 general election and reviewed the input from our consultations with stakeholder groups serving Ontarians with special needs as well as related provisions in the *Election Act* to respond to them, including adapting to new legislation introduced in that interim period.

In addition, we continued to research and share best practices with other jurisdictions and to monitor new tools being developed and applied elsewhere.

We focused on these building blocks to design a program that maintained our previous successes while helping to close gaps and to seize opportunities in order to further our vision within the mandate set out in the *Election Act*.

Summary of Contents

This document provides an overview of activities undertaken by Elections Ontario to respond to the needs of electors who have a disability, in anticipation of and during the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum held on October 10, 2007.

The 2007 Elections Ontario Outreach Program drew on the experience of the 2003 program in providing products and services to electors with disabilities. As previously stated, our aim was to enhance existing initiatives by closing gaps in the delivery of products and services to identified groups.

As background, Section A of this document is included to provide a summary of the legislated provisions for access under the *Election Act*.

Our Outreach Program is a core element of Elections Ontario's commitment to ensure a fair and accessible election process for all Ontarians. It is intended to identify and respond, within our legislated framework, to the electoral needs of Ontarians who have a disability. A review of our initiatives in the 2003 general election showed that we were headed in the right direction with our core products and services for electors with special needs. Consultations with stakeholder groups conducted after that election helped identify key issues and provided recommendations for enhancements to the program. This formed the basis for Elections Ontario's outreach plan for 2007. An overview of the measures implemented for the 2007 Election is covered in Section B of this document.

Under Section 55.1 of the *Election Act*, Ontario's 107 returning officers are required to prepare a report, for submission to the Chief Electoral Officer, on measures taken in their respective electoral districts to provide accessibility for electors with disabilities. Section C of this document provides a summary of these reports which the Chief Electoral Officer is required to make public under the *Election Act*.

Section D provides a brief overview of identified accessibility concerns to be addressed with stakeholder groups as we look ahead in our preliminary planning activities for the 2011 general election.

Section A - References within the *Election Act*

Provisions for Electors with Disabilities in the *Election Act*

The Chief Electoral Officer is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the address of the Legislative Assembly and, as an Officer of the Assembly, is responsible for administering provincial elections under the *Election Act* and the Election Finances Act.

Highlights

There are a number of provisions in the *Election Act* that reference the provision of services to electors with disabilities. In June 2007, before the 2007 Provincial General Election, the *Election Act* was amended to include the following provisions which also relate to the accommodation of electors with disabilities:

- Section 4.1 allows the Chief Electoral Officer greater ability to test alternative voting methods and equipment at by-elections. This will better allow for the testing of methods and equipment to improve accessibility in voting.
- Section 13(3.3) clarifies the application of the Human Rights Code and *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* in the selection of polling locations.
- Section 44(2) increases the number of advance poll days for regularly scheduled general elections.
- Section 67.1 formally requires the Chief Electoral Officer to survey electors after each general election to determine if they experienced any barriers in voting at the election and to include the results in the annual report that is to be made under section 114.3.

Assistance at Polling Places

Section 55 of the *Election Act*, entitled “Electors With Disabilities”, specifically provides for access and assistance to electors with disabilities as follows:

55 (1) On the application of any elector who is unable to read or who is disabled and thereby prevented from voting in accordance with the other provisions of this Act, the deputy returning officer may assist the elector to the voting screen or if the elector making the applica-

tion takes an oath as to his or her inability to vote without assistance, shall thereafter assist the elector at the voting screen by marking his or her ballot in the manner directed by the elector in the presence of the poll clerk and of no other person, and place the ballot in the ballot box.

(2) The deputy returning officer shall either deal with an elector mentioned in subsection (1) in the manner provided therein or, at the request of such elector who has taken the prescribed oath or affirmation and is accompanied by a friend, shall permit the friend to accompany the elector to the voting screen and there mark the elector's ballot for him or her.

(3) Any friend who is permitted to mark the ballot of an elector under subsection 2 shall first be required to take an oath or affirmation that he or she will keep secret the name of the candidate for whom the ballot was marked.

(4) No person shall be allowed to act as the friend of more than one elector mentioned in subsection (1) at any polling place, other than a polling place established under section 14.

(5) The deputy returning officer shall enter in the poll record opposite the elector's name the reason why the ballot was marked by the deputy returning officer or by a friend of the elector.

55.1 (1) Within three months after polling day in the election, every returning officer for an electoral district shall prepare a report on the measures that the officer has taken to provide accessibility for electors with disabilities in the district and shall submit the report to the Chief Electoral Officer.

(2) The Chief Electoral Officer shall make the report available to the public.

Location of Polls

With regard to the location of polling places, the Act states that:

13 (3.1) In the selection of polling places under subsections (1) and (6), the following factors shall be considered:

1. *A location's convenience for electors.*
2. *A location's capacity.*
3. *The extent to which electors are likely to be familiar with a location.*
4. *Any significant geographic barriers that electors will encounter in reaching a location.*
5. *Any other factors that may be relevant to the proper conduct of the election.*

13 (3.2) *A polling place may be situated in any public building or on private property.*

13 (3.3.) *Nothing in subsection (3.1) affects the obligation to comply with the Human Rights Code and with accessibility standards established under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.*

Polls in hospitals and other institutions

14 (1) *Where an institution for the reception, treatment or vocational training of persons who have served or are serving in the Canadian Forces or who are disabled, a hospital, a psychiatric facility, a home for the aged, a nursing home or other institution of twenty beds or more, in which chronically ill or infirm persons reside or where a retirement home of fifty beds or more is situated in an electoral district, a polling place shall be provided in such institution or upon the premises.*

14 (2) *Electors resident at an institution referred to in subsection (1) and who are entered in the list of electors may vote at such polling place and the returning officer shall arrange for the deputy returning officer and the poll clerk to attend upon the electors at their bedsides or otherwise for the purpose of receiving their ballots.*

Accommodating electors by changing polling locations

With regard to transferring polling locations the Act states:

24 (1) *Up to and including the day immediately preceding polling day, an elector whose name appears on a polling list for the pending election and who has moved may apply in person to the returning officer or his or her assistant as set out in section 21 or have some other person apply on the elector's behalf to have the elector's name included in the polling list for the polling division where he*

or she now resides.

(1.1) Subsection (1) also applies, with necessary modifications, to an elector who could vote more conveniently in another polling division because his or her mobility is impaired by disability or by some other cause.

(2) Where an elector whose name appears on a polling list for the polling division where he or she resides,

(a) has appointed a proxy voter whose name appears on a different list in the same electoral district; or

(b) has been appointed,

(i) to cast a proxy vote at a polling place other than his or her own but in the same electoral district, or

(ii) to act as a deputy returning officer, poll clerk or scrutineer at a polling place other than his or her own but in the same electoral district,

an application may be made to the revising official for a certificate to vote at the other polling place.

(2.1) An application referred to in subsection (2) may be made by the elector or by another person acting on the elector's behalf.

Advance Polls

Advance polls are provided for under Section 44 (1) and 44(2) with the provision they will be open during a general election:

a) at an office of the returning officer, provided the ballots have been printed, on the 18th, 17th and 16th days before polling day; and

b) at an office of the returning officer and at designated other locations on the 15th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 11th, 10th, ninth, eighth, seventh and sixth days before polling day.

Also with regard to advance polls, Section 44 (5) requires the returning officer to "select locations that give access to wheelchairs."

Proxy Voting

As an alternative for electors who are unable to attend in person to vote at an advance poll or polling day location, the Act provides for appointments for proxy voters as follows:

An elector who has reason to believe that he or she will, for any reason, be unable to vote at the advance poll or on polling day may apply in writing to vote by proxy and appoint some other elector in the electoral district to vote for him or her at the election.

(2) No appointment of a proxy is valid unless it is made after the date of the issue of the writ of election and no such proxy remains in force after polling day.

(3) An elector may not act as proxy for more than two electors.

Moving of Ballot Boxes

The Act refers specifically to the moving of ballot boxes at a polling place to facilitate access to voting as follows:

46 (5) The ballot box may be moved by the poll officials to facilitate voting by an elderly or disabled elector but where the box is so moved it may be accompanied by any scrutineer present and a record of any such action and any objection taken by a scrutineer shall be made in the poll record opposite the name of the elector.

Interpreters

The Act speaks to the provision of interpreters both at the time of revision and at the polls as follows:

21 (8) Where the returning officer or his or her revision assistant does not understand the language spoken by an applicant or where the applicant is deaf, the applicant has the right to the assistance of an interpreter who, after taking the prescribed oath or affirmation, may translate any necessary declarations, documents or lawful questions put to the applicant and the answers, but in the event of inability to secure an interpreter, the application may for the time being, be refused.

56. Where neither the deputy returning officer nor the poll clerk understands the language spoken by an elector or where the elector is deaf, the elector has the right to the assistance of an interpreter who, after taking the prescribed oath or affirmation, may translate any necessary declarations, documents or lawful questions put to the elector and the answers, but in the event of inability to secure an interpreter, the elector shall, for the time being, be refused a ballot

Section B – Objectives and Implementation in 2007

Elections Ontario emerged from the 2003 general election with a strong Outreach Program. The results achieved in 2003 in serving electors with special needs indicated to us that our approach was sound and should be maintained as the foundation for the 2007 program.

At the same time, we resolved to continue looking for ways to improve our strategies by collaborating closely with stakeholder organizations and reviewing best practices with other election agencies.

Elections Ontario's worked with organizations serving people with disabilities to encourage them to provide in their publications and communications with their clients information on election accommodations available to them and continue to serve electors with special needs through established products and services. An additional objective was to ensure all eligible electors were able to register and vote in the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum.

In developing our materials, we carried out ongoing consultation with the Accessibility Directorate to further ensure that we at Elections Ontario are doing everything we can to support the spirit of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

Strategic Approach

To fulfill these objectives, we made the commitment to provide an enhanced program.

We emphasized an "information out" approach through working closely with established stakeholders and looking for effective communication channels to disseminate as widely as possible information to electors from these identified groups.

In working to improve our program, we looked to our stakeholders' recommendations from the previous general election. As a result, an important component of the 2007 program was to emphasize improved sensitivity training for front-line employees.

To ensure we continued to meet our stakeholders' expectations, we seized new opportunities presented by legislative changes. We worked closely with partner organizations to review legislative amendments surrounding proof of identification and proof of residence as well as the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007 to ensure Elections Ontario's administration of these new requirements was consistent with our commitment to accessibility.

Highlights

Enhanced Program Components

The overall strength of our Outreach Program for electors with disabilities in 2007 was the result of collaboration with stakeholder organizations.

"Information out" focus

We focused our efforts on an "information out" approach that leveraged our relationships with established organizations and new channels to achieve effective dissemination of our information on voting, the electoral process, and available accommodations for electors with disabilities.

Improved approach to sensitivity training

We teamed up with established stakeholder organizations to develop specific information materials emphasizing sensitivity in serving individuals with different disabilities. We then delivered this information to all front-line personnel such as poll officials and public contact centre staff.

New Initiatives

In the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum, Elections Ontario implemented several new outreach initiatives. In some instances, this served to enhance our existing products and services while other measures were taken to meet new legislative requirements.

New Ballot Template

We introduced a new ballot template with raised numbers, Braille and cut-outs to assist voters who are blind or visually impaired in marking their ballots independently.

Ballot with larger type

The 2007 ballot showed candidates' names in larger type for electors with low vision.

Enhanced TTY service

Consultations with partner organizations serving Ontarians who are deaf or hard of hearing resulted in the introduction of a web-based TTY service with two lines.

Clear language information piece to download from Elections Ontario's web site

A clear language information piece with basic voting information was sent to the Ontario Association of Food Banks for inclusion in food boxes to be distributed through their outlets in the province. The document was also posted in the advertising section of our web site.

Consultation on new identification requirements

Amendments to Ontario's *Election Act* in 2007 required electors to present identification at different steps in the electoral process in order to prove their identity and place of residence. Elections Ontario worked with stakeholders to ensure identity and residence document requirements were fair and representative.

Post-event survey

Recent amendments to the *Election Act* now require Elections Ontario to conduct a post-event, province-wide survey to assess electors' and other participants' experiences in the election. Independent research firm Ipsos Reid's comprehensive survey included interviews with electors who have disabilities about their experience at the polls in the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum. Results will be shown throughout this document in sections dealing with feedback from electors.

Key Statistics

Below are some statistics which provide an overview of our accessibility outcomes:

- Elections Ontario's database of organizations serving Ontarians with disabilities contains 167 contacts. These organizations received mail-outs and e-mails with specific election information to share with the members they serve. Materials distributed to these groups included posters, letters, householder brochures as well as information in alternative formats (e.g. Braille, Audio cassettes, CDs).
- Members of our staff maintained ongoing relationships with over 66 key special needs organizations.
- 119 special needs organizations responded to our questionnaire regarding proof of identity and proof of residence challenges.
- Approximately 75,000 poll officials and 55 contact centre employees received sensitivity training designed to help them effectively assist electors with disabilities.
- Elections Ontario's dedicated Voter Assistance Access

Line handled 57 requests on polling day.

- Over 200 electors used the TTY service during the writ period.
- Returning officers' reports on accessibility confirmed that all 107 returning offices and all 535 advance poll locations in the province provided barrier-free/level access as mandated.
- Although polling-day locations are not required by law to be barrier-free, we endeavour to find accessible voting locations where possible. Returning officers reported that a full 99 per cent of polling-day locations in their electoral district were barrier-free.
- Approximately 80 per cent of all returning officers reported that persons with disabilities were appointed as poll officials in their electoral district.
- Of the 29,500 polls in the province, 1,244 were held in special care facilities.
- Print and web publications serving Ontarians with disabilities carried articles with election information for their audience. The combined reach of these outlets is estimated at over 100,000.

Responding to New Legislation

Proof of identity requirements

With changes to Ontario's *Election Act* requiring electors to show proof of identity and proof of residence in order to register and vote, Elections Ontario worked to ensure fair and representative requirements for acceptable identity and residence documents.

We developed a questionnaire asking our stakeholder partners to provide input on what types of challenges the communities they serve would encounter in presenting such documents.

As part of this initiative, we contacted 221 organizations representing Ontarians with diverse needs and we received 119 responses. This provided us with insight into the challenges electors with special needs might face in producing proof of identity and proof of residence in order to register and to vote. The Chief Electoral Officer incorporated this input in articulating what would constitute acceptable identification.

The resulting list of appropriate proof of identity was widely distributed, posted on the Elections Ontario web site, and

shared with poll officials as well as various organizations including groups serving Ontarians with disabilities.

Referendum on Electoral Reform

In 2007, under the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007, a referendum on electoral reform was held in Ontario at the same time as the general election.

Our mandate, in terms of referendum education, was to conduct a program to ensure electors across the province received clear and impartial information about the referendum process, the date of the referendum, the referendum question and the content of the choices in the referendum.

While we emphasized referendum information in all our communications with stakeholder groups serving persons with disabilities, specific referendum information tools were also created to inform Ontarians about this historic opportunity.

Our referendum brochure was available in alternative formats such as Braille, large print and audio, and the referendum ballot template featured raised numbers, Braille and cut-outs. In addition, all our referendum advertising materials were closed-captioned for television and were available on VoicePrint.

The Chief Electoral Officer hired 107 referendum resource officers, one for each electoral district, whose task was to make presentations on the referendum in communities across the province. Over 3000 presentations were given before audiences ranging from one to 550 in size. In fulfilling their duties, resource officers were expected to include key stakeholder groups representing Ontarians with special needs in their contacts.

Advance polls

In response to a change in legislation, our communication efforts emphasized the increased number of advance poll days – from six to 13 – providing precise dates, times and locations, and promoting this convenient opportunity for electors to choose the best time and location to vote. According to preliminary figures, 451,949 Ontarians voted at the advance polls in the 2007 election. This is a significant increase from the 356,396 electors who voted at advance polls in the previous general election. Although it is impossible to know how many electors with special needs voted at advance polls, the increased number of days and the availability of more locations offered increased opportunities.

Post-event survey

Elections Ontario is now required to conduct a survey after a general election to assess service to electors and help plan for future events.

Data gathered in this survey as well as from our other assessment tools, such as debriefing with stakeholders and returning officers' reports, are used in determining how well we served the needs of our stakeholders and will be helpful in assisting us to prepare for future events.

Elections Ontario's 2007 post-election survey was conducted by Ipsos Reid, an independent research firm, and it included questions specific to electors with special needs.

Survey results show that the experience of electors with special needs generally mirrors that of other electors when it comes to obtaining information at different stages in the electoral process and to being aware of an election. The vast majority of electors with disabilities also say they had no problems casting their ballots.

Detailed findings also show that Ontarians with disabilities were among the electors more likely to contact Elections Ontario for information or about a problem with the voting process or referendum, using either our web site or our toll-free numbers (21 per cent, compared to six per cent for electors in general). These results confirm the relevance of Elections Ontario's continued emphasis on effective responsiveness to electors with disabilities in all our front line roles.

However, there are still challenges: a key finding of the survey is that compared to other electors, voters with disabilities report, in general, higher than average problems at voting locations. Forty-four per cent of voters with special needs said they experienced problems at their voting locations and 15 per cent said they had problems casting their ballots, a stark contrast to eight per cent and one per cent respectively for electors in general.

According to the survey, the main areas of concern are physical accessibility in the voting location, signage outside the place identifying the location, the process of voting including the assistance received from poll workers, privacy and the ability to communicate with staff. For students with disabilities, there is a lack of information about available services, voting processes and how, when and where to vote.

These results point to a need for continued focus on improving assistance and services for these Ontarians at the polls. For students with disabilities, the findings show Elections Ontario

will need to focus on solutions to provide information with the same levels of effectiveness achieved for other electors with special needs.

Services for All Electors with Disabilities

In preparing for the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum, we recognized that the diverse needs of people with disabilities require both general services as well as specific solutions for identified groups. Therefore, we concentrated our efforts on initiatives applicable in responding to a broad range of disabilities and on proven products and services to meet specific needs.

As a rule, Elections Ontario works to have in place the information and the service levels required for all electors to exercise their franchise. For Ontarians with disabilities, we additionally provided the general measures described below. Our specific outreach efforts are discussed immediately after these general features of our program.

“Information-out” focus

With new fixed-date election provisions coming into effect for the 2007 Provincial General Election, Elections Ontario used this as an opportunity to gain effective, wider delivery of the program.

As noted previously, we built a database of over 167 contacts who received customized mail-outs or information through e-mail. It was an objective of this program to leverage our relationships with these groups and have them distribute this information to their members. Our information kits were distributed in partnership with established and new stakeholder groups to members. These kits focused on the electoral and referendum processes, available accommodations, products and services, the new identification rules and described how to find more information.

For this election, articles detailing electoral information also appeared in numerous publications including Abilities Magazine, Vibes Magazine, CNIB Insight newsletter, Arch Alert and the CMHA newsletter, as well as on web sites serving Ontarians with disabilities.

In addition, we secured links on stakeholders' web sites to the Elections Ontario site which carried all information about the election and our products and services.

To increase awareness of opportunities, Elections Ontario communicated alternative ways to vote (i.e., at advance

polls, through proxy voting) and emphasized alternative communication channels (e.g. TTY, accessible web site, VoicePrint) to all electors in our general communications and print advertising, information materials distributed through our web site or our partners', brochures sent to all households and customized materials distributed by stakeholder groups.

Sensitivity training

A key challenge identified after the 2003 general election was the difficulty in providing effective sensitivity training to the approximately 75,000 temporary poll officials who join Elections Ontario for a short period of time to deliver an election.

To address this concern, we developed and delivered training for front-line personnel including poll officials and contact centre employees to ensure effective responsiveness to electors with special needs.

Sensitivity training was delivered during the general training provided to returning officers in the spring of 2007. In turn, this information was provided to poll staff through their training to increase their effectiveness in providing assistance at the polls.

In addition, Elections Ontario's training video for poll officials incorporated information on ways to better serve voters with disabilities. Working with actors who have a disability and other actors, we used information gathered in our consultations with stakeholder organizations to demonstrate best practices in serving electors with disabilities at the polls.

All Elections Ontario poll official manuals also included instructions on how to assist electors with special needs. We emphasized that the deputy returning officer's role includes providing assistance to an elector with a disability at the poll if required.

Our poll kits, which are distributed to all deputy returning officers and contain information they and their colleagues

need to do their work on election day, included specific details on assisting voters who have disabilities.

Building on an initiative from the 2003 general election, we enhanced the Voter Assistance Access Line, an information hotline dedicated to supporting electors who encounter difficulties in voting on polling day, by providing sensitivity training to Elections Ontario's contact centre staff so they were also able assist electors with disabilities by phone or e-mail. With more people ready to respond to these electors, a communications officer was dedicated to focusing on specific calls requiring more time to resolve.

A process was set up for front-line personnel to escalate these calls to this communications officer. A total of 57 voters used this service which was available until the close of polls on election day. In each case, callers received follow-up assistance within 30 minutes of contacting Elections Ontario.

Facilitating access to registration and voting opportunities

For the 2007 event, a key element of our program was to continue promoting alternative methods of accessing the electoral process. The various voting options available to an elector were a permanent feature in our radio, television and print advertising campaigns. These options were also publicized through our brochures and on our web site, and were an important part of our media release schedule.

As in previous elections, electors with restricted mobility had the option of transferring to another poll in the same electoral district for more convenient access. For electors unable to enter a voting location, we continued to have the ballot box brought to the door of the polling place.

Any Ontarian who is unable to vote in person can choose to have another qualified elector in the electoral district vote on his or her behalf. Recognizing that with just 30 days from the issuance of the writ to election day it is challenging for some electors to complete the proxy application process if they are required to mail in their signed proxy application. Returning officers, continued to accept a faxed copy of the application.

Outreach Initiatives

Elections Ontario complemented the general measures described above with specific information as well as proven products and services developed and disseminated in partnership with our stakeholders.

Electors who are blind/visually impaired/deaf-blind

To ensure that electors who are blind or visually impaired are better able to participate in the electoral process, Elections Ontario leveraged its partnerships with key stakeholder organizations serving this community to help inform members of the range of accessible information and services.

While several groups were contacted for discussion and input, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) continued to be the focal point of Elections Ontario's efforts to communicate with these electors because of the organization's broad reach and its willingness to partner with us.

Products and services provided by Elections Ontario:

- Information printed in Braille and large print – this information was also available on our web site in a downloadable format (Duxbury).
- Referendum question provided in Braille.
- Ballot template with raised numbers, Braille and cut-outs to assist voters in choosing their candidate and marking their ballot independently (New).
- Ballot with candidates' names in larger print for electors with low vision (New).
- Audio versions through VoicePrint, also available on request from Elections Ontario on CD or cassette.
- Assistance at the polling place from the deputy returning officer or from a friend.
- Large-print directional signage at the poll.
- Magnifiers available at the polls for electors with low vision.
- Support from pre-arranged provision of intervener services for electors who are deaf-blind.
- Specific information kits were disseminated.

Discussion

A successful initiative introduced for this election was the improvement of the ballot template. This measure came out of consultations with stakeholder organizations which recommended, where possible, the use of tools that allowed increased level of independence for electors with disabilities.

The new ballot template was designed in collaboration with Ontarians who are blind or are visually impaired through a focus group organized in collaboration with CNIB.

In 2007, we also continued to offer information through various channels for electors who are blind or have low vision.

Elections Ontario forwarded information kits with a summary of services and general election information to organisations serving people who are blind or visually impaired, including, for the first time in an event, colleges and universities. Articles on the electoral process and on the products and services provided to voters with disabilities appeared in the newsletter “CNIB Insight” which has a reach of approximately 10,000 in Ontario.

Information in alternative formats was also distributed to CNIB district offices across the province and magnifying sheets were included in all poll kits.

In addition, we purchased advertising time on VoicePrint, the 24-hour news and information audio service, which aired our householder brochure information during the election period.

Our service package in 2007 also included intervener services for electors who are deaf-blind. We advertised the service in brochures distributed to all households as well as in all our print advertising. We alerted organizations providing this service that they may be contacted by clients to arrange for assistance on polling day and we encouraged electors to book early with their service providers.

Feedback from stakeholders and electors

As part of our post-election review, we received feedback from CNIB specifically as well as from the results of the post-event survey. The opportunity for stakeholder input is very much appreciated, and the progress Elections Ontario has achieved has been noted.

In terms of information availability, our post-event survey results indicated that 94 per cent of electors who are blind or visually impaired were knowledgeable about the voting

process, a strong indication that our information focus was successful with these electors.

As for products and services, CNIB indicated that there have been improvements, including a successful new ballot template and larger print materials. Users reported mostly positive comments about the ballot, with a majority saying it worked well and they were pleased to be able to mark their ballot unaided. In addition, voters with low vision expressed general satisfaction with the larger print ballots.

Some of the challenges reported to our partners were difficulty fitting the ballot form into the Braille template and therefore having to receive assistance marking the ballot, as well as concerns that there was no way for users to independently confirm that they marked the ballot correctly without asking another person.

Twenty-nine per cent of the voters who are blind or visually impaired who responded to our survey said they had difficulties with the readability of the ballot and 18 per cent said they had difficulty casting the ballot.

According to CNIB, Braille users have also expressed a desire to see candidate lists in Braille. Elections Ontario offers this service during by-elections where the Notice to Voters is provided in Braille and includes the names of political affiliation of the candidates. However, our stakeholders understand that technical difficulties surrounding the production and delivery of Braille to meet the timelines required to get them to polling offices across the province cause this issue during a general election. Nevertheless, they urge Elections Ontario to continue to seek ways to resolve it.

While the necessity of tools in Braille is recognized, Elections Ontario is urged to take into account the fact that many people who are blind do not read Braille given that they lose their sight in their senior years.

In terms of service on polling day, among the voters who are blind who contacted Elections Ontario during the campaign period, 75 per cent were happy with the way the issue they raised was resolved, while 25 per cent said the issue was handled poorly.

Areas identified by our partners as requiring consideration for improvement include: clearer processes and instructions on election day; improved training for all staff in new requirements such as identification and proof of residence; and a focus on the needs of low vision voters in all Elections Ontario materials.

Electors who are deaf/deafened/hard of hearing/deaf-blind

In preparing for the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum, Elections Ontario officials met with several groups representing people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Most groups provided Elections Ontario with general input and many directed us to the Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) as a key organization with expertise in this area.

Products and services provided by Elections Ontario:

- Enhanced, software-based, two-line TTY service and access by e-mail.
- Closed-captioning of our television advertising.
- Pencils/notepads in all poll kits to all deputy returning officers for communication with electors who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Support from a pre-arranged sign language interpreter with American Sign Language (ASL) at the polls using CHS interpreting services with the cost covered by Elections Ontario.
- Support from pre-arranged provision of intervener services for electors who are deaf-blind.
- Specific information kits disseminated.
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Discussion

One key tool we put in place for electors who are deaf and hard of hearing in 2007 was an enhanced TTY service.

Recommended by our partners, this new web-based software tool allows the use of computers rather than relying on one specific telephone as was the case previously. Therefore, multiple users in our contact centre were able to serve electors from their computers. In addition, we procured a two-line toll free number for faster service. This product was promoted in all our brochures and print advertising.

Another service we continued to offer to electors who are deaf or hard of hearing was the services of American Sign Language interpreters through our partnership with the CHS and its interpreter arm, Ontario Interpreter Services. Elections Ontario covers the cost of the service when used. This service was also promoted in all our print materials.

For its part, CHS promoted our services among its membership by forwarding all information to the regional offices and hosting a one-page information document on the organization's web

site with details on how to book interpreter services and a link to Elections Ontario's web site for more information on the 2007 Election.

While we are aware of only one request for the ASL service in the 2007 Provincial General Election, Elections Ontario is committed to continuing to offer the service in future events to maintain a solid level of accessibility, and we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that electors know this service is available.

Articles on the electoral process and on the products and services provided to voters with disabilities were published in the fall issue of Vibes, a members-only CHS magazine with an estimated reach of 10,000 readers in the province.

As with other stakeholder groups, all products and services available to these electors were outlined in an information kit. Other helpful information such as our web address, referendum information, new identification requirements at the polls and advance poll and proxy voting were also included. These kits were distributed through our partners to the members they serve, both in paper and by e-mail.

Feedback from stakeholders and electors

In the course of our post-election review, we met with CHS officials and we examined our post-event survey findings. CHS noted improvements in Elections Ontario's products and services and indicated we are on the right track.

In terms of information available for electors who are deaf, 69 per cent of those who answered our post-event survey told us that they were knowledgeable about the voting process. The remaining 31 per cent said they were not very or not at all knowledgeable about the process.

This finding underscores an issue raised by CHS officials who expressed concern that many people who are deaf and hard of hearing are not voting. Recognizing that this may be a reflection of an overall trend also noted in the general public and that many factors could be at play, our partners suggested that educating the members they serve about their right to vote and the importance of voting might go a long way in addressing this concern.

CHS would like to see Elections Ontario add an educational component to our outreach approach, outside of the election period.

In relation to products and services, technological improvements to our TTY line were well received. According to CHS, based

on anecdotal evidence as well as on the number of users noted previously, this service worked well and is headed in the right direction in terms of improved service to electors who are deaf or hard of hearing. CHS representatives pointed out that while users might be primarily persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, hearing people may also use the service to get information on behalf of electors who are deaf.

With regards to future trends, our partners tell us that increasingly, many people who are deaf or hard of hearing are using Blackberries to meet their communication needs. Their suggestion to Elections Ontario is to consider promoting an e-mail service at the same time as the TTY line during an event.

Elections Ontario was urged to continue looking for training opportunities for contact centre agents in order to enhance service and seize new technological opportunities to meet the evolving needs of diverse users.

In terms of service on election day, our post-event survey results show that among the electors who are deaf who contacted Elections Ontario, 60 per cent say the way their issue was handled was excellent or good while 20 per cent thought it was handled poorly. However, a key election issue identified by respondents who are deaf or hard of hearing is the difficulty in communicating with staff at the polls.

Elections Ontario is urged to maintain close relationships with stakeholders, meeting with them and consulting them regularly to share information.

Given that Ontarians who are deaf and hard of hearing are likely to be familiar with the various CHS regional offices, our partners suggest we add these locations to the list of voting locations in the relevant electoral districts. In our discussions, we reminded our partners that according to the *Election Act*, a polling day voting location is directly related to the voter's residence. In the context of current legislation, Elections Ontario should consider this suggestion in relation to advance polls and accommodation provisions related to transferring polling locations.

Electors with mental health challenges

In accordance with the requirements of the *Election Act*, returning officers were directed to complete registration, revision and polling activities at health institutions that are covered by Section 14 (1) of the Act. In addition, Elections Ontario worked with the Canadian Mental Health Association

(CMHA) to share and disseminate information to this community.

Products and services provided by Elections Ontario:

- A one-page "How To Vote" document with a condensed voting information and accommodations in plain language
- Polls in long-term care facilities
- Directional signage and clear-language posters at the poll
- Information packages provided to CMHA in electronic and hard copy formats. Packages were distributed to the 32 CMHA branches across Ontario to be shared with staff, family and clients.

Discussion

In the months leading up to the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum, Elections Ontario participated in a roundtable meeting of seven provincial mental health and addictions groups convened by CMHA. Key issues identified were related to the eligibility to vote. For example, our partners pointed out that people with serious mental illness are often disenfranchised due to lack of personal identification and/or being homeless.

Our partners shared a concern around availability of identification given that it is often removed from individuals in the mental health system at in-take. This potential barrier to voting was taken into consideration as the Chief Electoral Officer drew up our list of acceptable proof of identification and proof of residence.

In our consultations, CMHA indicated the potential correlation between homelessness and mental health challenges. We took this information into account in designing initiatives for electors who are homeless.

Elections Ontario appointed liaison officers to help reach out to Ontarians who are homeless in areas where a high concentration of homeless individuals are identified. We also supplied guidelines and a template to shelter administrators to enable them to provide official letters for electors who are homeless to confirm their identity and residence. In addition we collaborated with service groups to assist the homeless in registration and voting at advance polls.

CMHA's election newsletter included articles summarizing the information provided by Elections Ontario. This newsletter was

sent to the organization's branches but also to subscribers and to organisations such as The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Addictions Ontario and the Federation of Community Mental Health and Addiction Programs. They in turn distributed that newsletter among their own member organizations and regional offices.

Of the 29,500 polls for the general election across the province, returning officers reported that 1,244 were held in special care facilities, a significant increase from the 2003 general election when 864 polls out of a total of 23,000 were held in special care facilities.

All voting locations were supplied with clear, directional signage and pictograph posters in polling stations. This measure is designed to assist people with a variety of special needs, including Ontarians who have mental health challenges, by visually showing with diagrams the steps a voter follows to cast a ballot.

Feedback from stakeholders and electors

In our post-election review, we heard from CMHA officials. They appreciated the opportunity to give input to Elections Ontario in serving electors with disabilities related to mental health problems and indicated that materials provided, particularly the clear language document on voting and the information materials, were useful.

According to the CMHA, members of the community found that the identification requirements were not tailored to the needs of electors with mental health problems and it would have been helpful to spell out clear alternative options for people without identification documents, for example.

As with all our partners, the CMHA recommendation is that Elections Ontario meet regularly with the community in order to receive input to solve problems early in the four-year cycle.

Electors with mobility challenges

Elections Ontario is required to select advance poll locations with access to wheelchairs. In the 2007 Provincial General Election and Referendum, this requirement was met for all advance polls. Returning officers were also required to choose electoral district offices that are accessible and this standard was met as well. In addition, our selection processes for polling day locations are designed to help meet accessibility standards where possible. More detailed results are provided in Section C of this document.

Products and services provided by Elections Ontario:

- Access to registration and voting opportunities is provided through:
- Polls held in long-term care facilities where possible.
- Option for electors with restricted mobility to transfer to another poll in the same electoral district for more convenient access.
- Wheelchair-accessibility for all returning offices and advance polls, and for 99 per cent of polling day locations.
- Option for an elector who is unable to vote in person to have another qualified elector in the electoral district vote on his or her behalf.
- Accommodations provided at the poll for people with a physical disability include:
- Assistance in voting available from the deputy returning officer or from a friend.
- Option to have the ballot box brought to the door of the polling place for electors who are not able to enter a polling place.

Discussion

Under the *Election Act*, returning officers are required to ensure all advance poll locations provide access to wheelchairs and as many election day poll locations as possible are wheelchair accessible. The Chief Electoral Officer also directed returning officers to select returning office locations that were wheelchair accessible. In addition, Elections Ontario identified on Notice of Registration cards (NRC) which locations were accessible.

Returning Officers reported that 100 per cent of all returning offices and advance poll locations had barrier-free access. In addition, the vast majority of polling day locations were wheelchair accessible (Section C).

Inside all polling places, voting screens were to be placed to accommodate voters who use wheelchairs, while in a long-term care facility, retirement home or other institution used as a polling place, the ballot box was to be moved from bed to bed as required.

Voters with restricted mobility were able to apply for a transfer if they could vote more conveniently at another polling location in their electoral district.

While we continue to make progress in ensuring accessibility, we face many challenges in ensuring all poll locations are fully wheelchair accessible. These issues are magnified by the high number of polls required for each event. For example, in the 2007 Provincial General Election, 29,500 polling places were required, an increase of 6,500 polling places since the 2003 general election.

Another problem we face is when sites are mistakenly represented as accessible by landlords to returning officers who later find out that this is not the case.

In many cases where buildings were found not to be fully accessible, returning officers report that they and other poll officials went the extra mile to ensure all electors could vote, either by placing ramps, having an information assistant at the main entrance to keep the door opened where there was no push button, moving the ballot box outside the polling location, and generally finding alternative ways to assist voters.

Polling day locations must meet several criteria such as convenience for electors, capacity, familiarity to voters and availability. In looking ahead, Elections Ontario will continue to refine tools and processes to help accurately identify accessible locations for election day.

Feedback from electors

Our elector feedback is derived from our post-event survey conducted by Ipsos Reid.

In terms of information availability, a majority of electors with a physical challenge (67 per cent) who participated in our post-event survey said they were very or somewhat knowledgeable about the voting process with the remaining 33 per cent saying they were not very or not at all knowledgeable about the process.

With regard to our service levels, a total of 10 calls were received on the Voter Assistance Access Line from electors experiencing accessibility challenges at the polls. In some cases, locations identified as accessible on the Notice of Registration card (NRC) turned out not to be fully accessible.

Our post-event survey results confirm a strong level of satisfaction with the assistance provided by Elections Ontario since all electors with physical disabilities who contacted Elections Ontario about an issue say they were happy with how the issue was handled or resolved.

Particular areas for improvement suggested by our post-event survey results are: voting location accessibility, outside signage identifying the voting location, room setup in the polling place and privacy of the polling booth.

Section C - Returning Officers Accessibility Reporting

Summary of Reports

Ontario's Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints one returning officer (RO) for each electoral district. Under Section 55.1 (1) of the *Election Act*, Ontario's 107 returning officers are required to report on accessibility as follows:

Within three months after polling day in the election, every returning officer for an electoral district shall prepare a report on the measures that the officer has taken to provide accessibility for electors with disabilities in the district and shall submit the report to the Chief Electoral Officer.

Section 55.1 (2) further indicates that, "The Chief Electoral Officer shall make the report available to the public."

All returning officers completed their individual reports on the following areas prior to the January 10, 2008 deadline. The reports are broken down into the following sections:

- Facilities: returning office, satellite office(s), training site(s), advance polls, regular polls, special care facilities.
- Personnel: persons with disabilities employed in office / appointed as poll officials.
- Materials: voter information and assistance in returning office, at voting locations.
- Local outreach with groups representing persons with disabilities within electoral districts.
- Requests for access to American Sign Language Interpreters.

Facilities

- All 107 returning offices were reported as barrier-free; to ensure access:
 - * Nine returning offices built/rented ramps while 29 returning offices took additional measures.
- A total of 23 of 25 satellite offices were reported as barrier-free.
- A total of 105 ROs reported all training facilities were barrier-free, nine of whom indicated the need to take additional measures to ensure access. The remaining

two ROs indicated they were not able to have barrier-free access at training facilities.

- The 107 ROs reported all advance polls were barrier-free, with 20 of these indicating they needed to take additional measures to ensure access.
- With regard to regular polls:
 - * Returning officers reported that 99 per cent of voting locations in their electoral district were barrier-free.
 - * A total of 20 ROs reported building/renting ramps to ensure access
 - * 64 reported the need to move the ballot box to accommodate older electors or those with disabilities.
- With regard to lack of access for regular polls, reasons provided typically included:
 - * It was the only facility available in a small community.
 - * Landlord had advised it was accessible but ultimately it was not.
 - * Following earlier inspection, facility access changed.
- Of the nearly 29,500 polls, 1,244 were held in special care facilities, with 70 ROs reporting that ballot boxes were requested and carried to the bedside in those polling places.

Personnel

- 46 ROs reported employing persons with disabilities in their offices in 2007, compared to 29 ROs in 2003.
- 91 ROs reported employing persons with disabilities as poll officials, compared to 70 in 2003.

Materials

- All ROs reported they provided ballot templates, magnifying sheets, pictographs, the referendum question in Braille, instruction documents on how to

assist voters with disabilities, as well as wheelchair access signs to indicate accessibility at each site.

- 105 ROs reported they made the election brochure available in large print to electors, while 106 indicated they made the brochure available in Braille.

Local Outreach

- 27 ROs reported contact with groups representing persons with disabilities within their electoral districts (note that some electoral districts do not contain active representative organizations).
- Only one RO reported being contacted by someone requesting access to ASL interpreters, with the other 106 confirming they had not been contacted.

Section D – Heading Toward 2011

Overall, Elections Ontario's products and services met our stated objectives and were generally well received by our special needs stakeholder groups. This is, in part, attributable to our commitment to close collaboration with stakeholder groups and other jurisdictions in developing our approaches, products, services.

As we continue to assimilate the challenges encountered by electors with disabilities, we will strive to achieve consistent improvements while clearly communicating to our partners issues facing Elections Ontario in meeting diverse needs. Elections Ontario will also review the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* with a view to establishing how they apply to Elections Ontario.

Through our Outreach Program, our stakeholder partners have learned that:

- Elections Ontario is bound by the mandates and directives set forth in the *Election Act*.
- We must also ensure that, in adopting certain policies or practices to meet a specific need, we are not negatively impacting any other electors.
- Accessibility of polls is sometimes limited by the availability of suitable sites within electoral districts and polling areas in the short timeframe of the election period.
- A provincial election requires a vast, temporary workforce; this presents significant challenges in ensuring effective training.

In the next four years, we will continue to pursue excellence in elections by working toward the following objectives:

- Review legislation and assess resources to add an education component to the program.
- Examine the potential to pilot new initiatives in by-elections as a result of a new mandate for the Chief Electoral Officer.
- Engage in an ongoing dialogue with stakeholder groups serving Ontarians with disabilities to keep abreast of evolving standards and explain legislative framework. Hold regular meetings with stakeholders to share information about needs, best practices and solutions.

- Regularly update our database of contacts and collaborate with stakeholders to firm up an action plan for the 2011 event; report on progress in regular meetings.
- Monitor, share and continue to research best practices with other election administrations across the country and internationally with a view to closing identified gaps.
- Build a four-year outreach plan with clear benchmarks.
- Returning officers are directed to place polls, whenever possible, in voting locations that are accessible. However, accessibility of polls is sometimes limited by the availability of suitable sites. Elections Ontario will develop tools and processes (e.g. check lists, locations database) to support returning officers in finding and booking accessible voting locations to improve on current results.
- A provincial election requires a vast, temporary workforce – more than 75,000 workers were needed to staff the nearly 29,500 polls on election day in 2007. This continues to present considerable challenges in ensuring compliance with behaviour standards and legislated requirements, particularly when there are significant changes such as the new identification amendments to the *Election Act*. Elections Ontario will continue to look for ways to address limitations in the dissemination of training and information to poll workers for 2011.
- Our independent post-event survey indicates that students with disabilities are not receiving available voting information as successfully as other electors with special needs. We will seek to build partnerships to help us close this gap.
- Maintain current successful products and services, closing identified gaps where possible.
- Simplify some web site areas such the ID section for optimal understanding and list alternative options (e.g. someone with no identification).