



# EAC FACT SHEET:

## How the U.S. Election Assistance Commission empowers Voters with disabilities and the election officials who serve them

More than 35 million Americans with disabilities, [roughly one-sixth of the total electorate](#), are eligible to vote in the United States. This accounts for a broad range of disabilities, including mobility, communicative, physical, and cognitive impairments. This ever-growing population of voters also faces educational, cultural and political barriers that can make participating in elections even more difficult. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has a strong commitment to working with both election officials and voters with disabilities to ensure that the election process, polling places and voting services are accessible.

### Why the EAC?

In 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to reform the voting process throughout the U.S. Through HAVA, the EAC was created to assist states in improving voting systems and voter access for all Americans. HAVA also established a clear mandate to ensure that Americans with disabilities be given the same opportunity to vote freely and independently as other voters. The bill contained landmark provisions requiring the secure, private, and independent casting of ballots for voters with disabilities and entrusted the EAC with leadership in this area.

### How does the EAC ensure access for voters with disabilities?

**PROMOTING AWARENESS:** Since it was created, the EAC has worked closely with election officials to promote HAVA's access requirements and to foster a climate of understanding in providing assistance for voters with disabilities. In support of this effort, the EAC also engages voters with disabilities, who provide vital information that informs election system and administration improvements. For example, leading up to the 2016 election, the EAC held a widely attended field hearing in Boston, Mass., where voters with disabilities provided testimony to help the EAC improve the election process. During its #BeReady16 campaign, the EAC also distributed more than 10,000 federal voting rights cards in Braille, large print, and plain language. The EAC recognizes the importance of these efforts and that much work remains to be done to reach the full promise of HAVA.

**ELECTION SYSTEM CERTIFICATION:** The EAC's Testing and Certification program, the most successful and most implemented voting machine testing and certification program in the nation, works directly with expert stakeholders to ensure voters with disabilities have access to election systems that meet stringent national standards. The guidelines significantly increase overall requirements for voting systems and expand access, including opportunities to vote privately and independently, for individuals with disabilities. The next iteration of the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines (VVSG) contains expanded requirements covering security, reliability, quality, usability, accessibility, and testing. In order to listen to the voice of concerned citizens, EAC recently established a [VVSG public working](#) group focused on human factors and accessibility. This group will help in providing universal design for all future voting systems.

**RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT:** Through the Accessible Voting Technology Initiative (AVTI), a recently completed \$8 million EAC [grant program](#) to assist both election officials and voters with disabilities, the EAC and its grantees produced approximately 45 R&D technological and administrative solutions designed to ensure all citizens can vote privately and independently.

### What other laws impact voting rights for people with disabilities?

In addition to HAVA, the following is a list of landmark laws passed to protect voting rights for people with disabilities:

**Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):** This major civil rights law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in the private and government sectors. ADA enacted a comprehensive set of national goals to ensure that individuals with disabilities enjoy equality of opportunity, full community participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. HAVA expanded these objectives into our nation's voting rights.

**Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 (VAEHA):** This law requires physical access to polling places used in federal elections. The law also requires states to make registration and voting aids accessible.

**Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA):** Section 208 of the VRA provides assistance for voters with disabilities. Any voter needing assistance is able to have an individual of their choice accompany them into the polls.