

Assistance to voters

Local government elections



**Northern Territory
Electoral Commission**

EVERY vote counts!

The [Local Government \(Electoral\) Regulations 2021](#) recognises that, in certain cases, voters require assistance from another person to cast their vote and it is specific about how that assistance is to be provided.

What person is able to be assisted to vote?

Any person may be assisted to vote provided they would otherwise be unable to cast a vote without such assistance.

How can voters be assisted?

Those assisting voters may do so in any of the following ways:

- by acting as an interpreter
- for a declaration vote – by completing, or assisting the person to complete, the declaration
- for a postal vote – by placing the ballot paper in the envelope bearing the postal vote certificate, sealing the envelope and sending or delivering the envelope to the returning officer
- by explaining the ballot paper and the requirements of the Electoral Regulations relating to its marking
- by marking, or assisting the person to mark, the ballot paper at the person's direction
- By folding the ballot paper and placing it in a ballot box or declaration envelope, or giving it to an authorised officer, as required by the Electoral Regulations.

Who may assist voters?

At a voting centre, any person nominated by the voter may provide that voter with assistance. This can also be an authorised officer (electoral official) but only on the request from the voter.

What assistance can be provided?

Where assistance is being provided in a voting centre, the nominated assistant may enter a voting compartment alone with the voter to mark the ballot paper; however, if an authorised officer is acting as the assistant, then they must also be accompanied by a scrutineer (or, if no scrutineer is present, by another authorised officer).

Assistance to persons unable to enter a voting centre

A voter may vote outside the voting centre if the voting centre manager is satisfied that they cannot enter the voting centre because of a physical or other disability, illness, advanced pregnancy or another condition.

In these cases, the voting centre manager (authorised officer) will inform scrutineers at the voting centre and allow one scrutineer for each candidate to be present.

The ballot paper will be issued to the voter outside the voting centre and the voter will mark the ballot paper in the presence of the authorised officer and any scrutineers. The voter must be allowed to mark the ballot paper in private to preserve the secrecy of the ballot.

The voter must fold the ballot paper to conceal the names of the candidates and give the ballot paper to the authorised officer who will:

For ordinary voting:

- Place the folded ballot paper in the ballot box inside the voting centre in the presence of any scrutineers who were present when the person voted, or
- Place the folded ballot paper in an envelope bearing the name of the person's enrolled local government area or ward and the name of the voting centre, seal the envelope and place it in the ballot box in the voting centre.

For declaration voting:

- In the presence of the person, without unfolding the ballot paper, place the ballot paper in the declaration envelope and seal the envelope, and
- Place the envelope in the ballot box in the voting centre.

How should interpreter assistance be provided?

Generally speaking, the role of the interpreter is to use their language skills to support the voter in ensuring effective voter participation. In practice, they are usually called upon to help in identifying the voter on the electoral roll, ascertaining the voting preferences of the voter and ensuring the marking of the ballot paper results in a formal vote.

All interpreters employed will undertake training that will enable a controlled message of their role and responsibilities whilst providing assistance. In particular, they need to ensure they restrict themselves strictly to enhancing understanding of the system and the voting wishes of the voter when helping with the casting of a vote. They should not, either by word or deed, do anything that might influence (or be seen to influence) the voter in forming or casting their preferences.

How is the integrity and secrecy of the ballot protected where assistance is provided?

Before assuming duty, every authorised officer and scrutineer completes an undertaking that states that they will not attempt to influence the vote of any person or disclose knowledge officially acquired concerning the vote of a person. This message has been reinforced in the training module provided to local assistants employed in remote communities.

Significant penalties apply for breaches of the secrecy of the ballot and the application of undue influence under Part 5 of the Electoral Regulations.