

Voting in Long-Term Care Facilities: The Mobile Polling Project and Clearinghouse

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Project Components

1. The Vermont Mobile Polling Study -- a collaboration of

- **The ABA Commission on Law and Aging**
- **University of Pennsylvania Department of Medicine, Geriatrics Division (Dr. Jason Karlawish, MD)**
- **Vermont Secretary of State (Hon. Deborah Markowitz)**

2. A Survey and Clearinghouse

of Voter Outreach Activities and Resources Targeting Voters in Long-Term Care and those with Cognitive Impairments

**Funded by The Borchard Foundation and
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Introduction

- The problem: (1) Failure to ensure proper access to voting polls and (2) failure to protect against possible fraudulent manipulation of the vote of aging or disabled citizens. Both compromise the integrity of elections.
- Previous research: Karlawish et al. examined voting in Philadelphia area long term care (LTC) facilities and found that staff or political organizations exert substantial control over whether and how residents register to vote and whether they cast a ballot. (Karlawish et al. Identifying the barriers and challenges to voting by residents of long-term care facilities: A study of the 2003 Philadelphia mayor's race. J Aging and Soc Policy. 2008; 20(1): 65-80.)

Mobile Polling



Mobile Polling Study Design

Nursing homes over 40 beds (N=40) were matched according to size and cognitive status of residents

Random assignment to control site or intervention site

15 facilities voted as usual

9 facilities voted using mobile polling

Methodology: Election Official Training

- **Who may vote**
- **Assistance to voters and marking of the ballot**
- **Communicating with cognitively impaired individuals**
- **Dealing with challenging situations**

Methodology

- **Nursing homes asked to advertise mobile polling opportunity. Set an early voting date.**
- **Voting day. Teams of voting officials provide assistance to voters and marking of the ballot in common area or in room.**
- **One week after the 2008 general election, subjects were administered a 25 minute telephone survey to assess:**
 - Basic information about the nursing facility.
 - Experiences with voting at their facility.

Respondents

- **Nursing home activities directors: all sites**
- **Election officials: mobile polling sites**

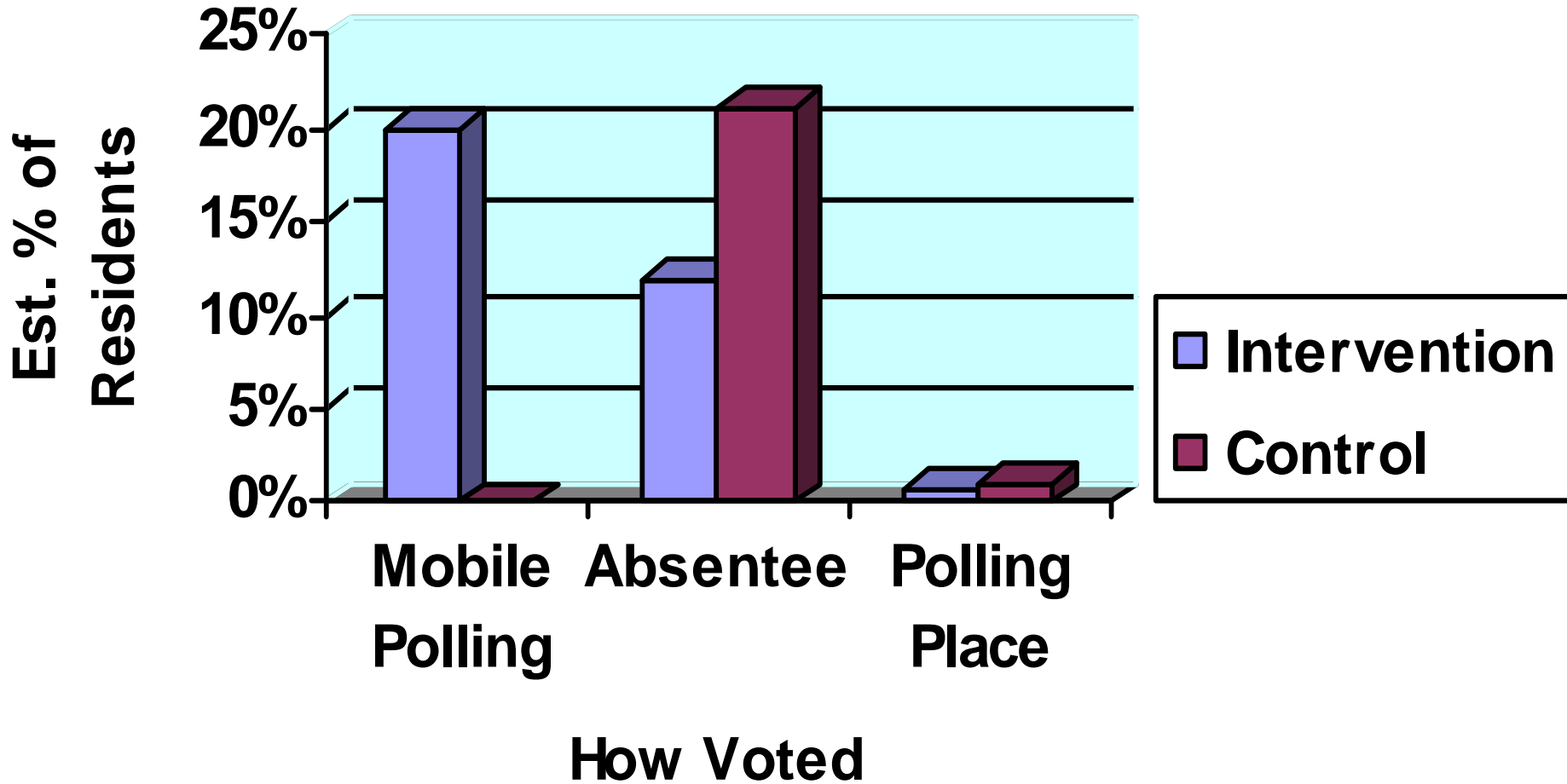
Survey Focus

- **Current resident access to voting**
- **Satisfaction with mobile polling**
- **Efforts needed to implement**
- **Impact on voting rates**

Findings



Findings



Increases Accessibility to Voting

- **Reduces voter anxiety**
- **Accessible**
- **Convenient**

“Mobile polling was convenient...Most people here would be too scared to...go to the polling place...”

Activities Director

Minimizes Fraud and Abuse

- **Eliminates arbitrary decisions about who may vote**
- **Lessens the opportunity for undue influence**

Popular with Residents

Fostered feelings of independence, pride and importance

“I think it’s very good for the residents’ self-esteem; it makes them continue to feel like a worthy part of the community and the political system.”

Activities Director

Valuable to Long-term Care Facility Staff

- **Streamlined the registration and voting process**
- **Increased the legitimacy of the process**
- **Relieved their discomfort about assisting residents with cognitive impairments**

Beneficial to Election Officials

- **Minimizes concerns of voter fraud and manipulation**
- **Reduces the workload**

“It really helps us on the day of the elections.”

Election official

Challenges with Implementation



Challenges/Issues with Voting

INTERVENTION SITES

- May increase workload
- Learning and organizing a new process
- Outsiders coming into the facility

CONTROL SITES

- Difficulty judging capacity to vote
- Time consuming process
- Potential for staff persuasion and fraud
- Figuring out what checklist a resident is on
- Unofficial – not part of civic process
- Paperwork

AS REPORTED BY LTC STAFF

Recommendations for Improvement

- **Display sample ballots prior to Election Day**
- **Larger print ballots**
- **Make guidelines on voting by cognitively impaired residents available**
- **Integrate mobile polling into the general education for clerks about running elections**

An Ideal State for Mobile Polling

- **Large population of residents of long-term care facilities**
- **Concerns with voter fraud**
- **Ballot portability**
- **Early voting procedures**

Resources recommended

- **Large private space**
- **Dedicated long-term care staff member**
- **Laptop computer with voter database**
- **Resident list**
- **Voting booth that accommodates persons with disabilities**

Survey & Clearinghouse

With the assistance of the National Association of State Election Directors, the project surveyed all State Election Directors to identify promising outreach activities at state or local level that targeted those in long-term care facilities and those with cognitive or other brain impairments.

Promising Practices Survey

- Distributed to 55 jurisdictions by e-mail through NASED three times -- 9/08, 2/09, and 3/09.
- 40 jurisdictions responded. The 15 that did not respond to the survey: AK, AZ, CO, CT, GA, Guam, IN, NJ, NY, OR, PR, VT, VA, WI.
- Only 10 jurisdictions reported practices we would define as “promising.” Collateral research turned up practices in another 10 jurisdictions.

Clearinghouse

www.abanet.org/aging/voting/home.html

- Expect survey results in chart form – Dec. 2009
- Currently posted:
 - ABA Policy & McGeorge symposium issue
 - Articles & News stories
 - Bazelon Center materials links
 - Congressional Hearing materials links
 - Election Assistance Commission materials links
 - Gov't Accountability Office materials links
 - NCCNHR materials links
 - State Resources

For More Information

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