

National Council's Voter Registration Toolkit

Get-Out-the-Vote in 2020 for the Elections

Over the years, community mental health and addiction treatment centers have proven their strength and ability to shape political outcomes. From the Affordable Care Act and preserving Medicaid to the opioid crisis and addressing the workforce shortage, mental health and addiction issues have proven to be a consistent theme during the 2018 midterm elections and 2020 presidential debates. Throughout these processes, it has been evident that lawmakers value your experiences and trust your expertise; your clients trust and value the services you provide.

It is critical that your and your clients' needs and voices are heard, both in politics and at the ballot box – and this begins with registered voters.

In 2020, your organization can once again mobilize to become a powerful force in politics and help shape national policies on health care. The materials contained in this toolkit will help your organization create, launch and sustain a successful voter registration and voter education program for the 2020 General Election Cycle.

If you have questions or need additional assistance at any time during your voter registration efforts, please feel free to reach out directly to Michael Petruzzelli at MichaelP@TheNationalCouncil.org.

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An earlier version of this toolkit was translated into [Korean](#), [Chinese](#), [Spanish](#) and [Vietnamese](#).

COVID-19 Update

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we live and work. The needs of people with mental health and addictions are only growing and this ever-changing situation has brought stress and fear into many lives. One thing that has not changed is the important role that you play as a leader in your community. Here are some strategies for starting Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) efforts during COVID-19:

- **COVID-19 Voting Resources:** Know and share [your state's COVID-19 voting resources](#) with your clients. Each state has different guidelines for absentee or mail-in voting – share [your state's requirements](#) with your clients. Also, encourage your clients to know their voting rights – the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has a helpful [guide to addressing some common issues](#) people may have when attempting to cast their ballot.
- **Go Digital:** In addition to in-person posters and talking to clients who come into the clinic, consider emailing your clients GOTV resources and setting up a section on your website with GOTV resources. Social media is also a great digital tool that reaches a wide audience.
- **Start Early:** This year, start GOTV efforts earlier than you normally would. With recent state-level changes to the voting process and confusion around COVID-19, you may need more time to get messaging out to your clients and help them understand how to vote.
- **Emphasize Public Health:** In addition to letting your clients know about the changes to voting, emphasize some public health measures they can take while voting – voting by mail, early voting, going to vote in the early morning or afternoon, wearing a mask, wiping down equipment and washing their hands. Call their county election administrator a few weeks in advance to see if their location offers curbside voting, where individuals can vote from their cars.
- **Broad Messaging:** COVID-19 may cause additional disruptions or changes from previous voting cycles, so it is more important than ever to spread this messaging to your clients about safe ways to vote. The Fair Elections Center has a helpful [guide on running a registration drive](#) in your state that is regularly updated with changes regarding COVID-19.

Why Engaging Voters at Your Behavioral Health Clinic is Important

The right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy. In exercising their responsibilities concerning voter registration and education, community mental health and addiction treatment clinics hold the key to ensuring that all individuals can participate in this important democratic process. Voter engagement efforts can help behavioral health clinics meet their organization's mission and maximize effectiveness by educating and engaging the public. By fully and energetically working to engage staff, board and clients, behavioral health clinics can help ensure that the promise of our democracy is fully realized.

More than 80% of Americans polled in 2018 listed health care as a major priority they wanted candidates to focus on. The next election will decide the presidency and shape health policy for the next four years. Your organization has access to potential voters who are under-represented in the electoral process. Your position in the community provides you the power to be the catalyst for voter turnout and participation through legal, permissible, nonpartisan voter engagement activities in the 2020 elections – voter registration, voter education and Get-Out-the-Vote.

By increasing the number of registered and active voters in your community, you can increase the power of your organization and its clout in your community. Elected officials know where communities turn out to vote and a health care treatment facility engaging voters will be noticed by elected officials who will likely respond better to your advocacy efforts.

Note: All voter engagement activities at community mental health and addiction treatment organizations MUST be non-partisan. This [guide on nonprofits, voting and elections](#) provides more information on nonprofit voter participation.

Registering Voters in Your Organization

I. Know your state's voter registration rules and deadlines.

Each state has different processes and deadlines for conducting and distributing voter registration forms. Some states allow voter registration in-person, by mail and/or online while others have special rules and require training to register other people to vote. Be sure you know your state's voter registration laws and what deadlines you need to meet. To ensure your organization complies with your state's laws on distributing and collecting voter registration forms, check out the [Fair Elections Legal Network: Voter Registration Drive Guidelines](#). One thing to note is that, in some states, you may need to submit a statement of distribution if you request more than a certain number of registration forms. Please be sure to check your guidelines in as soon as possible to be in compliance with your state laws.

DOWNLOAD: [State-by-State Registration Deadlines: Election Day 2020](#)

II. Designate a Voter Engagement Coordinator at your organization.

National Council members should appoint a staff person to oversee the organization's voter engagement activities. Responsibilities should include:

- Coordinating the organization's client outreach strategy.
- Training colleagues to ask clients if they would like to register to vote.
- Providing non-partisan voter education resources, such as [Vote 411](#) and [HeadCount](#).
- Ensuring the proper and appropriate forms (in all relevant languages) are available for clients.
- Forwarding completed forms to the appropriate government officials or offices.

III. Train staff on voter registration procedures.

All the forms in the world will not ensure success unless staff members are fully trained and engaged in the registration process. It is critical that staff members:

- Receive training from designated voter registration coordinators on how and when to use the forms.
- Receive training on how to assist clients with the voter registration application.
- Have a safe place to store registration forms and send them in as soon as possible.
- Understand that registering voters is a part of the organization's efforts to foster inclusion of their clients in society and the political arena.

Your organization should decide how best to engage clients in voter registration discussions. If you engage clients during a visit, be sure all appropriate staff is trained and equipped to handle any questions from clients. If you prefer a non-contact approach, include information and links on your organization's website, keep voter registration forms available at the front desk and advertise these services throughout your organization. **See below for sample Template Voter Registration Drive Flyers.**

DOWNLOAD: [State-by-State Registration Deadlines: Election Day 2020](#)

Offering voter registration information and forms to your clients provides several benefits:

- It ensures that staff have inquired about voter registration and offered assistance to each person, even if they have completed forms at home or in the waiting room.
- Offering voter registration at your organization will reach citizens who are accompanying clients but do not have appointments themselves. Many of these citizens may not have been offered voter registration on prior visits and can be offered an opportunity now.

IV. Set a goal for your organization.

Setting a goal for either a number of registrations or percent of clients registered can help encourage staff and clients to participate in your Get-Out-the-Vote initiative. You can consider putting up a thermometer or other poster to show how close you are to the goal, with the registration deadline clearly marked.

V. Post signs informing clients of the opportunity to register to vote.

The National Council has created template signs for your organization's use (see below). If you wish to create and use your own sign, we recommend using language like:

- "This community mental health/addiction treatment clinic registers voters – register today!"
- "Ask us to help you register to vote today."
- "May we register you to vote today?"
- "Do you know how to safely vote this year? Ask us how we can help."
- "Would you like to learn more about the candidates running this year? We have some resources that can help."

DOWNLOAD: [Template Voter Registration Drive Flyers](#)

VI. Track your progress and tell the National Council about your success!

The National Council knows how hard you work every day to provide care for those in your community. Taking time to register voters and help your community get involved in the political process is an important and meaningful activity. We want to recognize your hard work, so tell us about your successes by emailing Michael Petruzzelli at MichaelP@TheNationalCouncil.org.

Sample Script for Voter Registration in Your Organization

This sample script will help guide your conversation about voter registration with clients. Conversations around voter registration do not need to be difficult. You can simply ask your clients if they are registered to vote and help them understand the importance of voting in this and other elections. As you know, elections can have a direct impact on your organizations' ability to provide services and your clients' ability to receive them.

Introduction from Voter Coordinator: "Great. The next question I have is about updating your voter registration. Another important service we offer our clients is helping them register to vote or update their registration. Your vote really matters to your health care and organizations like ours. So, I can help you quickly register to vote or update your registration. Are you registered to vote at your current address?"

Possible Client Responses:

Client Response: “Yes. I’m already registered and my information is current.”

Voting Coordinator Response: “That’s great! Please remind your family and friends to register too.”

Client Response: “Yes, but I moved recently.”

Voting Coordinator Response: “I can update your registration right now. I can save you time by getting it done now and we can turn it in to the right election office for you.”

Client Response: “I don’t want to register” or “I don’t care about voting.”

Voting Coordinator Response: “I understand. There are a lot of challenges out there. We have a goal of registering 100% of our eligible clients here at _____. It’s important the voices in our communities are heard. Our ability to serve people like you can depend on the support of elected officials and it helps when they know our clients are registered to vote.”

Client Response: “I’m worried about COVID-19.”

Voting Coordinator Response: “I understand. There are many precautions you can take to vote safely this year, including early voting or mail-in voting [*Please check your [state’s laws](#) on this first*]. If you go to the polls, try going in the early morning when there are fewer people, wear a mask and maintain distance from others.”

Client Response: “I don’t have time.”

Voting Coordinator Response: “I know you are really busy. Filling out this form only takes a couple of minutes and I can make sure it gets turned in for you. You can save time later by registering with me today.” (*If they insist they do not have time, offer the client a flyer with the online registration link and offer to help them register the next time they are back.*)

Client Response: “I can’t register to vote. I’m not eligible.”

Voting Coordinator Response: “May I ask why not? I’m trained and may be able to help you.” Not a citizen: “I understand. If you have people in your household who are eligible to vote, please make sure they’re registered!” Have a felony conviction: Refer to your state-specific Q&A document for your state’s rules. Not old enough: “Will you be 18 by Election Day? If yes, I can register you today.”

Client Response: “Why are you asking me that? I am just here for health care (or to get insurance).”

Voting Coordinator Response: “In addition to providing health care and helping our clients apply for health insurance, another service we think is important for our clients is helping you register to vote or update your registration. Your vote really can make a difference to your health care and your health center, so I’d be glad to help you register to vote or update your registration right now. It will only take a couple of minutes.”

2020 Election Questionnaire for Candidates

As candidates campaign in your district/state, there will be ample time to ask them about their views and stances on important topics related to mental health and addiction policy. Send these sample questions and ask candidates for public office this election season.

Note: 501(c)(3)s are nonprofit entities and are not allowed to endorse, financially support or publicly favor a candidate for office. If your organization wishes to use and send these or other questions to candidates, **election law requires** you to send the questions to **ALL candidates** running for office. Additionally, please provide candidates a reasonable time-period – three weeks, for example – to provide their responses and information.

1. Every American has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and millions have faced worsened mental health and increased substance use because of it. As an elected official, what steps would you take to increase access to behavioral health prevention and treatment services across the country? What action would you take to ensure additional efforts are made to advance telehealth, outpatient and community-based treatment options? Will you support efforts to further bolster our nation's addiction and mental health workforce to address the crisis?
2. The Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) is a federal law that prevents insurance providers that offer mental health or substance use disorder benefits from imposing less favorable benefit limitations on those benefits than on medical/surgical benefits. As an elected official, will you support efforts to ensure that all insurance plans are adhering to this law and offering sound, comprehensive benefit packages where mental health and addiction services are offered at parity as physical and surgical benefits?
3. Despite the growing efforts to curb the nation's opioid crisis, little has been done to address low reimbursement rates for providers and their impact on limiting access to care. Routinely low reimbursement rates make hiring professionals and running clinics a daily challenge for safety-net providers, restricting consumers' options and opportunities for treatment. As an elected official, will you support reimbursement rate increases for these providers serving on the frontlines of the nation's opioid and suicide epidemic?

This [guide on nonprofits, voting and elections](#) will provide more information on nonprofit voter participation and education guidelines.

Voter Education: Learning the Issues Before Casting Your Vote

Your clients may find it helpful to have some general information on the election process and **nonpartisan** information on the candidates they will be considering. You can direct them to websites such as:

- [What's on Your Ballot – Personalized Voting Information](http://vote411.org) (vote411.org)
- [Know Your Vote – Learn more about the Presidential Candidates](http://knowyourvote.io) (knowyourvote.io)
- [Learn more about the Politicians who Represent You](http://voterly.com) (voterly.com)

As a nonprofit organization, you can take a stance on ballot measures if you would like. Read page 12 of the [CaliforniaHealth+ Advocates Voter Engagement Toolkit](#) to learn more.

For printable stickers saying “Ask me about registering to vote,” as well as other communication/marketing materials, go to [Nonprofit Vote](#).

This page was last updated on June 25, 2020.

Register to Vote Here!

[ORGANIZATION] wants YOU to be heard in the 2020 elections.



Registering to vote is easy and [ORGANIZATION] is ready to help. To register to vote in November's elections, stop by the front desk today!

Registration Deadline: [enter deadline here]

Election Day: Tuesday, November 3, 2020.

Want to register online?

Visit: [Vote.org/\[State Name\]](https://Vote.org/[State Name])

Register to Vote Here!



Register to Vote Here!



Register to Vote Today!

[ORGANIZATION] wants YOU to be heard in the 2020 elections.



Registering to vote is easy and [ORGANIZATION] is ready to help. Here are three simple steps:

1. Stop by the front desk and ask for a registration form.
2. Complete the form and return it to any staff member.
3. Vote on **Tuesday, November 3, 2020!**

In-Person Registration Deadline: [enter
deadline here]

By Mail or Online Registration Deadline:
[enter deadline here]

Learn more at [www.vote.org/\[State Name\]](http://www.vote.org/[State Name])