



General election voting guide



This guide gives anyone living with severe mental illness the information they need to cast their vote during a general election.

People living with severe mental illness and their loved ones often face a number of challenges when it comes to voting and do not get the information and support they need to carry out their democratic right to vote.

At Rethink Mental Illness, we want to make sure that everyone who wants to vote at the next general election is able to do so. This guide will support you through the process.

This guide contains clickable links with further information. If viewing a printed version, you can access further information at www.gov.uk/vote-uk-election.

NOTE:

The biggest change since the last general election regarding voting is that you must now show photo ID when voting in person at a general election.

[Accepted forms of ID](#)

If you do not have an accepted form of photo ID, you can apply for a free voter ID document, known as a [Voter Authority Certificate](#).

Eligibility

To register,
read the [full guidelines](#).

You must be registered to vote before you can vote in UK elections or referendums.

Who can register to vote?

You can **register to vote if you are aged 16 or over** (or 14 or over in Scotland and Wales).

To vote in a UK General Election you must:

- be [registered to vote](#)
- be 18 or over on the day of the election ('polling day')
- be a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen
- be resident at an address in the UK or Gibraltar, or living abroad and registered as an overseas voter
- not be legally excluded from voting.

There are **three ways of voting during a general election**:

1. in person at a polling station
2. by post
3. by proxy. This means applying to have someone else for vote you.

Can I vote if I'm in hospital because of my mental illness or detained under the Mental Health Act?

Most people can – this includes people receiving community treatment (including those under a Community Treatment Order), voluntary inpatients, and people who are detained under the civil sections of the Mental Health Act.

It also includes those with a condition that may impair their mental capacity. These individuals should also be given support to vote by their mental health trust.

Some people can't – such as people detained under forensic sections of the Mental Health Act. This includes people who have been convicted of a criminal offence and are detained in hospital.

Visit our [website](#) to view all our factsheets on the Mental Health Act (scroll down to 'Mental Health Laws').

Can I vote if I'm in prison?

You **can still vote** while in prison if you are:

- Unconvicted (also called '*on remand*')
- Convicted but not yet sentenced
- A civil prisoner – someone who is in prison for not paying fines or not doing what the court has told them to do (this is called *contempt of court*).

Sentenced prisoners are disqualified from voting, other than those described above.

You can still vote in a general election if you are a prisoner in inpatient care who has been remanded in hospital under the Mental Health Act on Sections 35, 36 or 48.

Registering to vote



How do I register?

You can [register online](#).

You may need the following if you have them:

- Your [National Insurance number](#)
- Your passport if you are a British citizen living abroad, and want to vote in England, Scotland or Wales.

There is a different process [to register anonymously](#), for example if you're concerned about your safety.

I don't have internet access - how do I register?

Contact your [local Electoral Registration Office](#) and ask them to post a form to you. You'll then need to return the completed form to your local Electoral Registration Office.

I am a carer - can I register to vote on behalf of someone else?

Yes, as long as you have their permission to do so and have their details to hand. This is called a proxy vote. You must apply for a proxy vote by 5pm, 6 working days before election day in England, Scotland or Wales.

Find out more about [voting by proxy](#).

My mental illness means that I am in hospital for long periods of time and therefore I don't have a permanent or fixed address - should I still register?

You can still register to vote if you don't have a permanent or fixed address.

This could be because you are:

- 1** a homeless person
- 2** a patient in a mental health hospital or
- 3** a person remanded in custody.

To register to vote, you need to fill in a form called a '*Declaration of local connection*'. You can get this from your [electoral registration office](#). Or you can download and print a [registration form](#).



If you are without a permanent address you should register from an address where you would be living if it were not for your current circumstances, or an address where you are staying temporarily or have lived at in the past.

If you do not have a fixed address, you can give the address of somewhere where you spend a lot of time, like a friend or family member's home.

For more on [registering to vote](#) if do not have a fixed or permanent address.

What happens once I have registered?

- You will receive your polling card by post with information about where you should go to cast your vote in person.
- If (for some reason) you do not receive a polling card, make sure you phone the [Electoral Registration Office](#) in your local council so they can inform you where your local polling booth is located.

What happens to my data?

When you register to vote, your name is added to the electoral register and means that your name is only used for elections, preventing and detecting crime and checking applications for loans and credit.

However, the 'open register' is available to anyone who wants to buy a copy and is frequently used for marketing purposes. You can opt-out of the open version when you register.

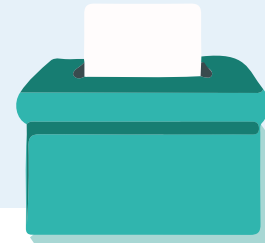
If you are registering to vote [anonymously](#), (for example if you are concerned about your safety) your details will not appear on either version of the register.

I'm unsure which political party to vote for - should I still to vote?

Yes, once you are registered you will have time to make up your mind about who to vote for before polling day.

You can find out who your candidates are and what they stand for by looking them up on the [BBC website](#) using your postcode.

Election day



How do I vote in person?

- **Under new rules, you must show photo ID when voting in person at a general election.** [Accepted forms of ID.](#)
- **If you do not have an accepted form of photo ID,** you can apply for a free voter ID document, known as a [Voter Authority Certificate](#).
- Go to your polling station (between 7am and 10pm) on voting day.
- Speak to staff inside the polling stations so they can check that you are on the electoral register. You will then be given your ballot paper listing the parties and candidates to vote for.
- If you have a visual impairment, you can ask for a special voting device that allows you to vote on your own in secret.
- Read the ballot paper carefully, it will tell you how to cast your vote.
- When you exit the polling station you might be asked for your polling number but you do not have to give this information, but it does help the parties understand who voted on the day.

Can I get assistance at the polling station to help me feel less anxious while I'm there?

If you need any advice, just ask the staff at the polling station – they will be happy to help you.

We recommend taking someone you trust with you to the polling station. You can also ask someone else to help you (for example, a support worker, as long as they are either a relative or an eligible elector and have not already helped more than one other person vote).

How do I find out where to vote?

The address of your polling station will be printed on your polling card.

To find your local polling station visit www.electoralcommission.org.uk and enter your post code.

Can I vote online?

No, you can register to vote online but when it comes to casting your vote you need to either vote in person on the day, vote via post or vote via proxy.

My mental illness means that going to a polling station makes me feel anxious. Is there another way to cast my vote?

Yes, when you register to vote there is a section on the form which allows you to choose to vote by post or proxy.



By post: you have to [apply in advance](#) to vote via post. You will be sent a ballot paper in the post about a week before election day, which you need to return in the post as quickly as possible to make sure it's counted. For more information on [postal voting](#).



By proxy: voting by proxy allows you to select someone else to vote for you. This could be a friend or family member. You must apply for a [proxy vote](#).

What should I do if I cannot walk to the polling station?

- If you are a supporter of a political party, you could ask someone from that party to drive you to your polling station.
- If you have a carer, friend or key worker, you could ask them to arrange for you to be driven to your polling station.
- [Contact your local authority](#) to find out what help is available.

I had a bad experience last time I voted, what can I do to make sure it does not happen again?

You can [contact local authority](#) ahead of polling day to find a solution in advance.

Useful links



Registering to vote: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote



Voting in the UK: www.gov.uk/voting-in-the-uk



Find and contact your local authority: www.gov.uk/find-local-council

You can reach the Rethink Mental Illness Campaigns Team by emailing campaigns@rethink.org