



2025 Polling Place Accessibility Fact Sheet

DetroitDisabilityPower.org/pollaudits

KEY FINDINGS – ELECTION DAY

- 10%** of 415 Election Day polling locations met accessibility standards
Down from 13% in 2024 and 16% in 2022 – a declining trend over three years
- 36%** of polling locations had a fully accessible Voter Assist Terminal
Down sharply from 62% in 2024 – the most common barrier documented
- 93** single-barrier sites could be fixed with targeted remediation
If remedied, fully accessible polling places would more than triple – to 32%
- 32** of 45 jurisdictions had zero fully accessible polling locations
Voters' experience depends heavily on which city or township they live in

KEY FINDINGS – EARLY VOTING

- 28%** of 32 early voting sites met accessibility standards
Up from 17% in 2024
- 34%** of early voting sites had a fully accessible Voter Assist Terminal
Down sharply from 51% in 2024 – the most common barrier documented
- 12** single-barrier sites could be fixed with targeted remediation
If remedied, fully accessible polling places would more than triple – to 32%

ABOUT THE AUDITS

In 2025, Detroit Disability Power deployed **34 trained volunteers** to audit **447 polling places** across **45 jurisdictions** during the May, August, and November elections.

Each site was evaluated against four legally required accessibility measures: Parking and Pathways, Entrances, Voter Assist Terminal (VAT), and Wheelchair-height voting booth

A site was considered fully accessible only if it passed all four criteria. This audit covers a region of more than one million Michiganders, approximately 10% of the state's population.

WHY IT MATTERS

Nearly **1 in 3 Michigan voting-age adults**, 30.4%, has a disability. Voters with disabilities have a legally guaranteed right to cast their ballots privately and independently under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Help America Vote Act.

The real-world impact is significant:

- Disabled voters are 3x more likely than non-disabled voters to report difficulties voting
- If disabled voters turned out at the same rate as non-disabled voters, approximately 2 million more people would vote

POLLING PLACE ACCESSIBILITY BY MEASURE

ELECTION DAY (415 polling locations)

- Parking & Pathway: 49%
- Entrance: 52%
- Voter Assist Terminal: 36%
- Wheelchair-height Voting Booth: 76%
- Fully Accessible: 10%

EARLY VOTING (32 voting sites)

- Parking & Pathway: 81%
- Entrance: 84%
- Voter Assist Terminal: 34%
- Wheelchair-height Voting Booth: 94%
- Fully Accessible: 28%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the barriers observed can be addressed without new legislation or major funding:

Quick Fixes (No Budget Required)

- Plug in VAT headphones and controllers before polls open
- Clearly mark accessible parking spaces and path of travel with signage
- Ensure accessible entrances are unlocked before the first voter arrives
- Set up wheelchair-height voting booths proactively – not on request
- Rotate VATs and booths to protect voter privacy
- Designate an Election Day accessibility contact in every jurisdiction

Training & System Changes (Requires Funding)

- Standardize poll worker accessibility training statewide
- Require hands-on 'practice election' using the VAT as part of all training
- Coordinate with jurisdictional ADA coordinators before every election

Legislation & Infrastructure (Requires State Action)

- Pass a law requiring municipalities to report VAT usage to the Michigan Department of State
- Allocate dedicated state funding to support clerk offices in making polling places accessible
- Invest in structural improvements: curb cuts, door push buttons, ramps, and uneven surfaces

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Year	Election Day Polling Locations	Election Day Accessibility	Early Voting Sites	Early Voting Accessibility
2022	261	16%	-	-
2024	294	13% ↓	41	17%
2025	415	10% ↓	32	28% ↑

2025 Polling Place Accessibility Election Day Findings

Audits conducted May, August & November 2025

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POWER

415 polling locations • 45 jurisdictions • 7 counties • 34 trained observers • 3 elections

10%

Fully accessible locations

Down from 16% in 2022

36%

Fully functional VATs

Down from 62% in 2024

93

Locations failing only one measure

22% — fixable now

32

Jurisdictions with zero accessible locations

of 45 total assessed

If the 93 single-barrier locations were remediated, fully accessible polling locations would more than triple — from 10% to 32%. **These are fixable barriers, achievable without new legislation or construction budgets.**

ELECTION DAY RESULTS:
The 4 Accessibility Measures

Parking & Pathway

49%

Accessible Parking & Clear Path

Marked spaces + path free of stairs, obstacles, and narrow passages

Entrance

52%

Accessible Entrance

Unlocked, clearly marked, operable doors for wheelchair users

Voter Assist Terminal

36%

Fully functional VAT

Set up with headphones + controller ready, placed for voter privacy

Voting Booth

76%

Wheelchair-Height Voting Booth

Set up and ready, placed for voter privacy

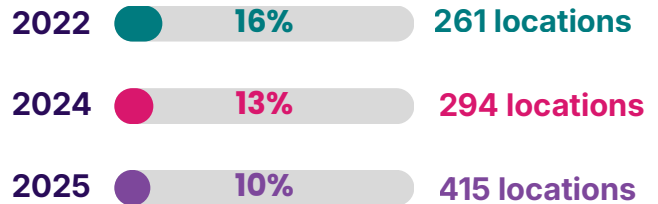
WHO IS AFFECTED

30.4% of Michigan voting-age adults have a disability — nearly 1 in 3

3× more likely for disabled voters to report voting difficulties

~2M more voters if disabled turnout equaled non-disabled turnout

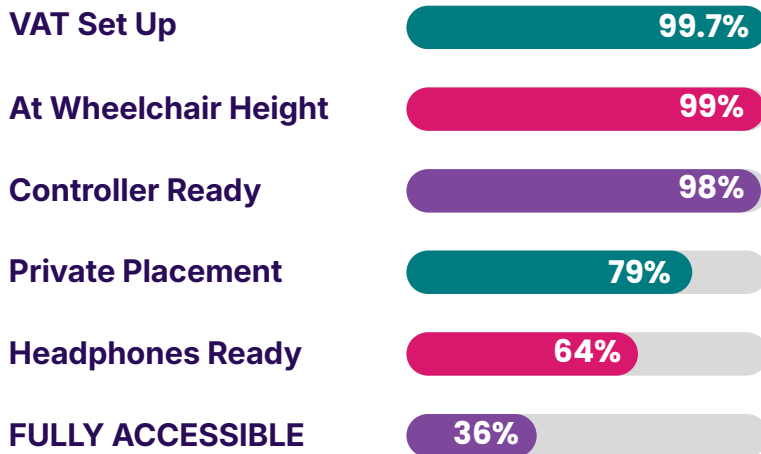
THREE-YEAR TREND



Coverage expanded each year — yet accessibility declined. The trend reflects systemic gaps in funding, training, and accountability, not individual failures.

THE VAT CRISIS

% of Polling Locations Where Each VAT Component Was Ready



115 locations had headphones present but not plugged in — a zero-cost fix

36 locations had no headphones available at the machine at all

1 Detroit location had no VAT at all — a direct violation of the Help America Vote Act

The VAT is already set up at almost every site. The headphone gap — a free, fixable problem — drags the full-access rate down to 36%.

26 percentage drop in fully accessible VATs from 2024 to 2025

**"The barriers are real. The fixes are known.
The moment to act is now."**

2025 Polling Place Accessibility Early Voting Findings

Audits conducted August & November 2025

DetroitDisabilityPower.org/pollaudits



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32 voting sites • 16 jurisdictions • 4 counties • 4 trained observers • 2 elections

28%
Fully accessible
voting sites
Up from 17% in 2024

34%
Fully functional
VATs
Down from 51% in 2024

12
Voting sites failing
only one measure
38% — fixable now

11
Jurisdictions with
zero accessible
voting sites
of 16 total assessed

If the 12 single-barrier voting sites were remediated, fully accessible voting sites would more than double — from 28% to 65%. **These are fixable barriers, achievable without new legislation or construction budgets.**

EARLY VOTING RESULTS:
The 4 Accessibility Measures

Parking & Pathway	Entrance	Voter Assist Terminal	Voting Booth
81% Accessible Parking & Clear Path <i>Marked spaces + path free of stairs, obstacles, and narrow passages</i>	84% Accessible Entrance <i>Unlocked, clearly marked, operable doors for wheelchair users</i>	34% Fully functional VAT <i>Set up with headphones + controller ready, placed for voter privacy</i>	94% Wheelchair-Height Voting Booth <i>Set up and ready, placed for voter privacy</i>

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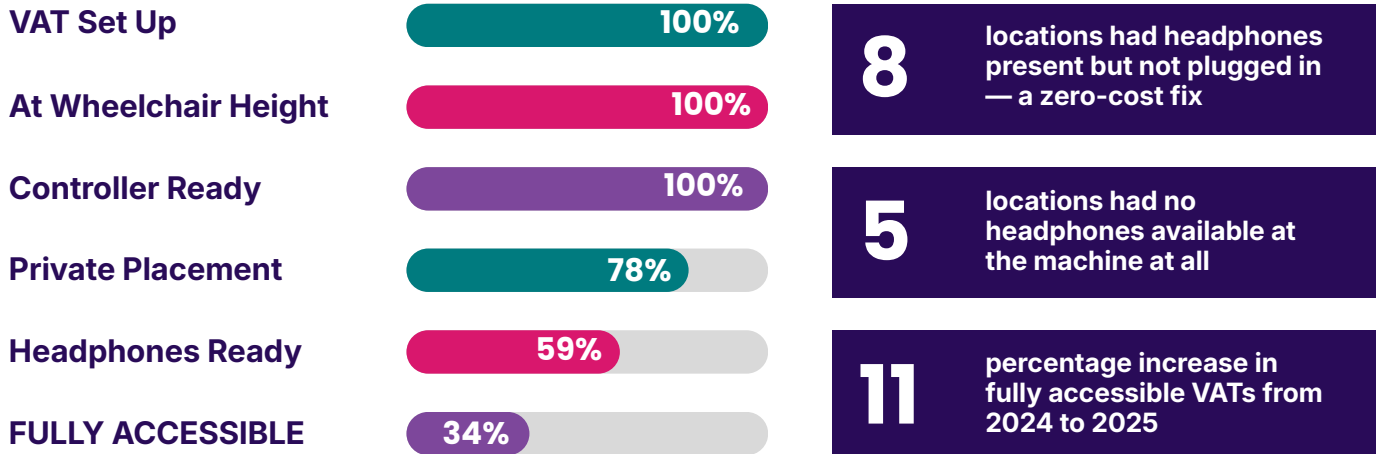
TWO-YEAR TREND

2024 **17%** **41 locations**
2025 **28%** **32 locations**

Early Voting is only required in state and federal elections. As a result, not all jurisdictions had early voting sites that could be audited in 2025's municipal elections. This accounts for the reduced number of sites.

THE VAT CRISIS

% of Polling Locations Where Each VAT Component Was Ready



Despite significant improvements in VAT accessibility, the majority of VATs still fail to fully comply with accessibility requirements. These issues are fully fixable, at no cost, through standardized training and systems that ensure VATs are fully set up and positioned to protect voter privacy.

**"The barriers are real. The fixes are known.
The moment to act is now."**



2025 Polling Place Accessibility Recommendations for Election Officials

DetroitDisabilityPower.org/pollaudits

The recommendations in this document are intended for Michigan election officials, who are responsible for the day-to-day administration of polling places, to help improve accessibility at the polling locations within their jurisdiction. The recommendations fall into two categories:

- **Quick fix** — No additional budget required. Achievable through training, coordination, or simple operational changes.
- **Requires funding** — Needs budget allocation at local, county, or state level.

Recommendation	What It Takes	Example from 2025 Audits
Coordination & Liaison		
Coordinate with your ADA coordinator to evaluate existing and potential polling place facilities.	Quick fix	<i>When accessibility is considered on a site-by-site basis, clerks and election workers are more able to address accessibility barriers before they arise and have a plan for providing accommodations to voters who may experience a known barrier.</i>
Designate a primary contact person for election-related accessibility topics.	Quick fix	<i>When observers at a Dearborn polling location reported a locked accessible entrance to the site Chairperson on Election Day, custodial staff were located who were able to unlock the door. Had custodial staff not been onsite at the time, it is possible the door would have remained locked for hours.</i>
Training		
Standardize poll worker training on voter accessibility issues.	Requires funding	<i>Observers in Sterling Heights noted that poll workers could explain a very clear process for ensuring VAT users had access to new, clean headphones, if desired. While headphones should be plugged in and available without a voter needing to request them, the clear process across polling places illustrates the impact of standardized, clear training. In jurisdictions without standardized training, poll workers often struggle to answer questions related to assisting VAT users.</i>

Recommendation	What It Takes	Example from 2025 Audits
Training		
<p>Incorporate a "practice election" into poll worker training.</p>	<p>Quick fix</p>	<p>At one Detroit precinct, an individual voter has experienced issues related to their use of the VAT in every recent election. The issues have included the voter being unsure if their ballot was counted when they left their polling location (and being unable to verify that it was) to a multi-hour voting experience where they and their service animal were mistreated. In each case, the election workers' lack of familiarity with processes and equipment has played a major role in the issues.</p>
Exterior Accessibility		
<p>Clearly mark the accessible path of travel throughout each polling place.</p>	<p>Quick fix</p>	<p>At multiple sites, the accessible entrance was around the side or rear of the building with no signage from the parking area. Observers who knew where to look still had difficulty locating it.</p>
<p>Ensure that accessible entrances are unlocked, especially if the accessible entrance is a separate entrance.</p>	<p>Quick fix</p>	<p>At one polling location, the accessible entrance was locked from the outside but could be opened from inside, meaning a voter using a wheelchair had no way to enter without assistance, despite a compliant entrance existing on paper.</p>
Interior Accessibility		
<p>Provide an accessible wheelchair-height voting booth for marking a paper ballot and a moveable chair.</p>	<p>Requires funding</p>	<p>At multiple sites, poll workers set up the accessible voting booth upon the request of observers. This places the burden on the voter to disclose a disability and wait while equipment is retrieved, the opposite of the independent voting experience the law requires.</p>
<p>Ensure that VATs and accessible voting booths are placed to protect voters' privacy.</p>	<p>Quick fix</p>	<p>At multiple precincts, the VAT screen was directly visible from the check-in table where poll workers were seated. Rotating the machine 45 degrees would have resolved this at no cost.</p>

Additional information on these recommendations are available in the full 2025 Polling Place Accessibility Report available at DetroitDisabilityPower.org/PollAudits.



2025 Polling Place Accessibility Recommendations for Other Government Officials

DetroitDisabilityPower.org/pollaudits

The recommendations in this document are intended for Michigan government officials (at the state, county and municipal level) whose decisions about funding, legislation and infrastructure shape what election officials are able to accomplish. The recommendations fall into two categories:

- **Requires funding** — Needs budget allocation at local, county, or state level.
- **Requires legislation** — Needs new or amended state law to implement.

Recommendation	What it Takes	Example from 2025 Audits
Allocate sufficient funds to support county and city clerks as they seek to make their polling places accessible.	Requires funding	<i>Many clerks operate on departmental budgets with no capital improvement line items. Accessibility fixes (even minor ones like repairing a broken door button) go unaddressed not because clerks are indifferent, but because there is no funding mechanism to act on them.</i>
Allocate funding specifically for identifying accessibility issues at all polling places	Requires funding	<i>Polling place audits, like those conducted by Detroit Disability Power, are essential for identifying both the location specific and systemic issues that disabled voters experience. By identifying issues, clerks will be better able to find solutions or request support in ensuring their polling places are accessible. This would also give decision-makers a clearer and more comprehensive picture of where problems exist and where progress is being made.</i>
Pass a law requiring municipalities to report VAT usage to the Michigan Department of State.	Requires legislation	<i>Michigan currently has no way to know whether accessible voting equipment is being used across its 1,500+ jurisdictions. Without usage data, it is impossible to know whether VATs are being set up but not offered, or whether voters are declining them due to setup issues.</i>
Focus on structural improvements to polling places — sidewalks, narrow doorways, door push buttons, curb cuts.	Requires funding	<i>33 polling locations had curb cuts in poor condition or missing entirely, barriers present 365 days a year. Municipalities with ADA transition plans that include polling place infrastructure can often access federal Title II compliance funding; many clerks are not aware these pathways exist.</i>