

## Mail-In Voting

All states allow some style of absentee/mail-in voting (terms used interchangeably) which allows a citizen to vote before Election Day. The flexibility of what different states allow is wide-ranging. The differences mainly stem from who can vote remotely, what circumstances, and deadlines. In its *Voting Outside the Polling Place*<sup>i</sup> report, the National Council of State Legislators assembled mail-in voting state policies by the following categories.

<b><u>States with No-Excuse Absentee Voting</u></b>	<b><u>Excuses to Vote Absentee</u></b>
<b><u>States with Permanent Absentee Voting Lists</u></b>	<b><u>Removing Voters from Permanent Absentee Lists</u></b>
<b><u>Applying for an Absentee Ballot</u></b>	<b><u>States with Online Absentee Ballot Application Portals</u></b>
<b><u>When States Mail Out Absentee/Mail Ballots</u></b>	<b><u>How State Verify Absentee Ballot Applications</u></b>
<b><u>Ballot Drop Box Laws</u></b>	<b><u>Ballot Collection Laws</u></b>
<b><u>Receipt and Postmark Deadlines for Absentee/Mail Ballots</u></b>	<b><u>States with Postage-Paid Election Mail</u></b>
<b><u>State that Must Provide Secrecy Sleeves to Absentee/Mail Ballots</u></b>	<b><u>How States Verify Voted Absentee/Mail Ballots</u></b>
<b><u>States with Signature Cure Processes</u></b>	<b><u>When Absentee/Mail Ballot Processing and Counting Can Begin</u></b>
<b><u>How Election Results Are Reported</u></b>	<b><u>States with All-Mail Elections</u></b>

### Background

States laws on voting have changed dramatically in the past decade and a half for a few reasons. To start with, in 2013, the United States' Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, changed protections provided under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Before this ruling, states considered to have a history of voter suppression tactics were required to get approval from the federal government before creating any new voting practices or procedures. After the 2013 decision, the requirement for federal approval was dropped and many states moved to pass measures to make voting more restrictive.<sup>ii</sup>

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several state election boards changed their voting laws before the 2020 general election by implementing automatic voter registration, removing excuse requirements for absentee ballots, and expanding early voting windows. Another recent event that spurred a change in

state voting laws was the insistence by former President Donald Trump that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan, independent organization that analyzes election rules, the conspiracies surrounding the 2020 election were the catalysts for 14 bills passing in nine states that restricted voting access.

### **AAFP on Mail-in Voting**

In 2023, the Board of Directors directed AAFP to develop a policy statement and advocacy resources to support legislation that allows mail-in voting. The new policy statement, approved in 2024, is cited below.

*The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) supports the enactment of legal mail-in voting options for elections at the local, state, and federal levels. The AAFP also supports legislative efforts to increase legal access for voters to participate in elections. Increased participation by physicians and patients has the potential to increase engagement in important policy decisions around health care access, costs, quality, and outcomes.*

Mail-in voting has been used successfully and reliably in multiple states for local, state, and national elections. Yet as depicted above, several states have laws in place that limit mail-in voting. The AAFP encourages chapters to support legislation that reduces barriers to voting, including removing barriers related to location of voting sites, and hours of access, thus allowing people of all socioeconomic, geographic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds to have equitable access to voting.

Research shows there is a clear relationship between inclusive voting policies and better health outcomes: States with more inclusive voting policies and greater levels of civic participation are healthier; states with exclusionary voting laws and lower levels of civic participation are less healthy.<sup>iii</sup> In addition, there are several advantages for allowing the public to vote with an absentee ballot. Voting at home allows for an individual to review the ballots and take the time they need to study the issues. It can also help save voting jurisdictions money. A 2016 study of Colorado from The Pew Charitable Trusts found costs decreased an average of 40% in five election administration categories across 46 of Colorado's 64 counties (those with available cost data) after it implemented all-mail ballot elections<sup>iv</sup>.

Allowing mail-in voting across all states increases voter participation, allowing more individuals to express favor for their preferred elected officials who will oversee health care related policy decisions. In addition, by allowing absentee voting, more individuals can weigh in on preferences on ballot initiatives. Recent examples of health care ballot initiatives include the option to expand Medicaid and access to reproductive health.

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<sup>i</sup> [Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and Other Voting at Home Options](#). 2024. NCSL.

<sup>ii</sup> [Cost of Voting in the American States: 2022\\*](#). Election Law Journal.

<sup>iii</sup> [Advancing Health Equity Through Voter Participation](#). 2022. The Network for Public Health Law.

<sup>iv</sup> [Colorado Voting Reforms: Early Results](#). 2016. Pew.