

2022-2023

# Annual Report



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## A Message From Our Chief Executive Officer & Board President

This year has been nothing short of transformative for Autism Ontario, marked by dramatic change and remarkable growth. In 2022-2023, we collaborated with researchers to gain insights into the experiences of Ontario families and their children. The survey results were pivotal in our decision to partner with AccessOAP, enabling us to continue providing independent Service Navigation for the Ontario Autism Program — much like we have done in previous years for ministry-led programs. This collaboration has enabled us to reach more families than ever, marking a significant milestone in our 50-year history. This achievement is particularly noteworthy as we acknowledge the tireless efforts of those who, years ago, volunteered countless hours to establish what was then the Ontario Society for Autistic Children, now recognized as Autism Ontario.

In our ongoing commitment to directly support families of autistic individuals, we took substantial steps forward. We quadrupled our staff, carefully selecting individuals who mirror the cultural demographics across Ontario. Notably, our partnership with Indigenous Friendship Centres marked a high point in our deliberate expansion of connections to those with diverse lived experiences that hold significant importance for families.

Additionally, our advocacy for enhanced mental health support yielded fruitful results. We secured a partnership grant with Children's Mental Health Ontario and Dr. Jonathan Weiss, leading to the training of over 5,000 individuals across the province. This initiative underscores our dedication to improving mental health resources and services for the benefit of the broader community.

A few years ago, Autism Ontario's Board of Directors collaborated with province-wide volunteer leadership and staff to craft its "ends" statements. They aimed to address a crucial question: "What will distinguish the experience for individuals and families due to the existence of Autism Ontario?"



The answer remains this statement:

**Individuals and families in their communities are equitably and seamlessly supported across their lifecourse.**

Furthermore,

**Individuals, families, and communities have meaningful:**

- **Supports**
- **Information**
- **Connections**

**Information/knowledge is created, curated, and mobilized that is:**

- **Trustworthy**
- **Timely**
- **Relevant**

Autism Ontario is achieving these ambitious objectives through a diverse array of approaches, as elaborated in the following pages. We are deeply moved by the generosity and resolute efforts of numerous partners, staff, volunteers, and donors. They have played a pivotal role in establishing the resources that have collectively enabled us to make a meaningful impact on the lives of autistic individuals and their families across the varied communities of Ontario they proudly call home.



**Margaret Spoelstra**  
CEO, Autism Ontario



**Kim Moore**  
2022-2023 Board President

# Welcome to **Autism**MONTARIO

## Who We Are

A charitable organization founded in 1973. We have a history of over 49 years supporting, representing, and advocating for all autistic individuals across the province regardless of race, ethnicity, income, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.



We are guided by a Board of Directors with 12 diverse members - people on the autism spectrum, parents, caregivers, siblings of autistic people, and professionals.



We are Ontario's #1 source of information and referral on autism and one of the largest collective voices representing the autism community.

## What We Do

We provide information on autism, support autism research, and implement programs and services for the autism community to address the issues that affect Ontarians with autism, their families, and their caregivers.



7 regions supporting people on the autism spectrum and their families across the province.



## Our Vision

Best Life, Better World, Making Autism Matter!

## Our Mission

Creating a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism.

Advocacy into  
action

Services and  
Supports Across  
the Lifecourse

Organizational  
Health



### ENDS Level 1:

Because Autism Ontario exists: Individuals and families in their communities are equitably and seamlessly supported across the life course.

### ENDS Level 2.1:

Individuals, families and communities have meaningful supports, information and connections.

### ENDS Level 2.2:

Information/knowledge is created, curated and mobilized that is trustworthy, timely and relevant.

## Services We Offer

- Community events
- CommunityConnect Portal
- OAP Provider List
- Provincial newsletter
- Regional newsletters
- Adult programs
- Caregiver support groups
- French Language Services
- Regional supports
- Learning and positive advocacy resources
- Webinars and workshops
- Child and family supports
- March Break funding
- Summer support funding

## Our CARE Values

### COLLABORATION

We believe in the power of working side by side with individuals, families, and communities to make informed choices about autism.

C

### ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others responsible for achieving successful outcomes through high standards of integrity and fiscal responsibility.

A

### RESPECT

We value equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we listen to understand.

R

### EVIDENCE-INFORMED

We use and create knowledge to guide our decisions and work.

E





## Board of Directors

Autism Ontario is guided by an elected Board of Directors comprising parents, autistic adults, and respected professionals. They provide governance, expertise, and direction to the organization on a volunteer basis.

- Susan Boehnke, PhD
- David Moloney
- Dr. Sharon Smile
- Dr. Barry Bruce, Treasurer
- Kim Moore, Chair
- Audrey Susin
- Julia Frei
- Susan Morris, President
- Sophia Tsouluhas
- Hadley Koltun
- Tanya Rocca, Secretary
- Lisa Vezeau-Allen, Vice-Chair

## Land Acknowledgment

The Autism Ontario provincial office is located in Toronto, which is on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties, signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

We recognize, however, that our staff, volunteers, members, and the wider community are located all over the province on different Treaty lands. It is important to recognize that wherever we are in Ontario, we are located on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples dating back to time immemorial.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

## Language Statement

At Autism Ontario, we recognize that language is powerful. We understand that the language we use can educate, frame ideas and perspectives, and empower, but it can also harm and stigmatize [1].

The use of referential language, as it relates to autism, is a sensitive, important, and ongoing conversation.

Identity-first language reflects the belief that being autistic is important to a person's identity. Person-first language, including phrases such as "living with autism," reflects the idea that autism can be separated from a person. Results from a recent survey of over 7,000 autistic people suggest that approximately 90% of autistic people prefer identity-first language, with a smaller proportion preferring person-first language [5].

According to the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA), there is a growing body of scientific and community literature documenting the dislike — among autistic individuals — of person-first language and its potential for increasing stigma [6]. Disability scholars have also objected to the use of person-first language [7].

Although we acknowledge that there are varying beliefs within the autistic community about which language standards are 'correct,' based on the existing literature on language preferences in the autistic community, Autism Ontario recommends using identity-first language (i.e., autistic person).

The clinical model defines autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder as a lifelong

neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people and the world around them.

The Public Health Agency of Canada references the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) in classifying autism as a disorder [2]. However, many autistic people prefer the terms neurological "difference" or "condition," which remove the negative associations with the word "disorder" [3].

At Autism Ontario, our goal is to support and advocate alongside all autistic individuals across the province, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, religion, or gender identity. We aim to actively and deliberately listen to and include all autistic community members to guide our choices relating to language.

We understand that many individuals in the autistic community prefer certain types of referential language [4], such as identity-first language ("autistic person" or "autist") over person-first language (the terms "person with autism" or "person on the autism spectrum" are often used interchangeably).

**It is important to understand that each person may have a different preference for how they would like to be identified [8]. Autonomy and self-determination are the most important aspects to consider when talking about autism [9]. It is often best to ask an individual directly if they are comfortable telling you how they would prefer to be identified.**

To be inclusive, respectful, and representative of the many people within our diverse community [10], we will use identity-first and person-first referential language. We acknowledge that the use of language evolves rapidly and will continue to be an ongoing discussion within the autism community.





## Autism Ontario: A Year in Review

### Our Community

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Autism Ontario had **176 full-time staff** supporting the autism community.



There are **175 active volunteers** who help with various activities and initiatives across the province.

### Supporting Families

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The **Adult Services Team** connected with approximately **1,000 individuals** - the majority of those calls were with **autistic adults** or **caregivers**.



We had **42,094 Service Navigation** conversations.



**65%** of **webinar attendees** felt that they **learned something new**.

### Workshops, Webinars & Events

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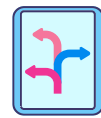
We hosted **960+ virtual, take-home, and in person events**, including **68 bilingual** and **67 French** events.



**190** autistic adults **registered** for the **Personal Finance Module**.



We hosted **33 webinars** and **10 workshops**.



**42 parents/caregivers of autistic youth** participated in the **Journey to Adulthood Program**.

### Awards, Funding & Scholarships

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We awarded **21 scholarships to individuals in the autism community** entering the first year of a post-secondary program.



We reimbursed **25 autistic adults through the Building Brighter Futures fund** for expenses related to diverse vocational, educational, and leisure activities. **86 applications were received**.



We received **93 scholarship applications**.



We reimbursed **4,467 youth** for March Break funding supports and **500 families** for summer funding supports.



## Family Supports

### Supporting Children, Families and Caregivers

This year, Autism Ontario continued to expand on its success with various supports, services, online events, and program offerings at both the regional and provincial levels. Our staff and volunteers partnered with local businesses to provide families with innovative online supports and services, as well as unique Social Learning Opportunities (SLOs), for parents and caregivers of autistic children to focus on their learning needs, make connections, and support caregiver education and empowerment.

### OAP Provider List

This year, Autism Ontario approved hundreds of Clinical Supervisors of behavioural services, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Occupational Therapists as verified providers on the OAP Provider List. The OAP Provider List continues to act as a vital resource for families to search for, select, and confirm the qualifications of those providing services funded by the Ontario Autism Program. Our team has prioritized outreach and relationship building in the professional communities to engage providers of OAP services and contribute to the growth of the listing. We have developed a professional information session, offered twice a month, for providers interested in learning more about the qualification requirements and steps for joining the list. Autism Ontario hosted an information booth at the 2022 ONTABA Conference, where we shared resources and information on the OAP Provider List with hundreds of professionals from across Ontario.

In the fall of 2022, we implemented a new annual renewal policy that requires providers to complete a declaration of compliance each year and a full renewal every three years. Implementing the renewal policy will help us ensure that the OAP Provider List continues to be an accurate and effective tool for families accessing funds through the Ontario Autism Program. At the end of the year, the OAP Provider List included over 570 verified providers.



**570 verified providers**

### Community Connect

CommunityConnect continues to act as a helpful tool for those looking for resources related to housing, events, webinars, workshops, and past issues of our in-house magazine, Autism Matters. CommunityConnect also contains a listing of over 300 individuals and organizations who have expressed a willingness to work with the autism community. This resource provides a one-stop experience where one can find camp listings, regulated health professionals, and other service providers offering various autism services — and we have new services joining every day.



**300 individuals and organizations joined CommunityConnect**



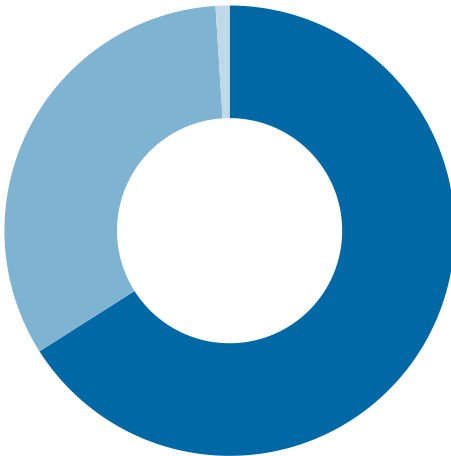
## Workshops & Webinars



We hosted 33 webinars with 3,382 total registrants

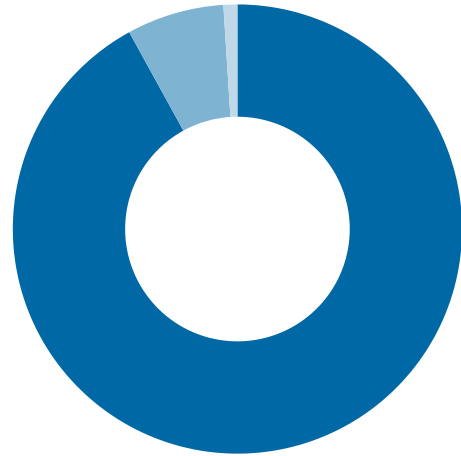
### Which best describes you?

■ Caregiver ■ Professional  
■ Autistic Adult (18+)



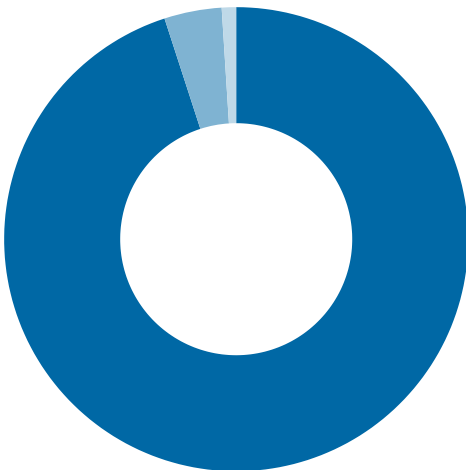
### I would recommend this presentation to others

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree



### The content of this presentation was useful

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree



### Webinar Feedback

“Great info. Exciting to hear about more research results from the individuals, [which] makes it more meaningful for both others with autism as well as professionals supporting them.”

“I really loved this webinar and feel I'm taking away info I can use for myself and my child. The webinar helped me understand myself better.”

“Thanks for the insight and support, and for the validation in our efforts to support our kids.”

This year, Autism Ontario welcomed a new team of subject matter experts, including a Social Worker, Occupational Therapist, Behavior Analyst, Speech-Language Pathologist, and Educational Specialist. This team developed evidence-informed, educational, and engaging webinars and workshops. Autism Ontario staff and consultants worked tirelessly to create content that supported our community and aligned with Autism Ontario's commitment to services and supports across the lifecourse.

## Webinars

There were many notable webinars offered this year, such as the three-part '[Exploring the Senses webinar series with Autism Ontario's Occupational Therapy Subject Matter Expert, Bethany Brewin](#), discussing how the sensory system works, various types of sensory styles, friendly adaptations, as well as strategies and sensory tools that parents can incorporate into their daily routine. Exploring the Senses saw over 450 registrants and received over 1,500 views on YouTube.



**450 registrants and 1,500+ views**

Dr. Evdokia Anagnostou discussed with families a new understanding of the many ways genes affect our brains, as well as how our brains affect our behaviour and thinking skills. This presentation had over 350 people registered and garnered over 300 views on YouTube. It provided important insights into understanding how our genes, brains, thoughts, and behaviour are all interconnected and influence how we think about interventions, as well as how such understandings affect stakeholder priorities. Autism Ontario also welcomed Tracie Lindblad, Autism Ontario's Speech and Language Pathology Subject Matter Expert, to present a two-part presentation overviewing the variety of [interventions and services available for young autistic children and autistic youth](#) to better assist parents and caregivers with selecting which treatment options fit their family best.

The intervention fact sheets created to accompany this series, as well as the recordings, have reached over 700 people.



**Reached 700 people with 350 registrants**

## Workshops

The multi-disciplinary team of subject matter experts looked to the community to identify what the interests and needs of both caregivers and professionals were to determine workshop topics. The workshops were focused, interactive learning sessions where attendees acquired new skills and knowledge on specific subjects.



**10 workshops**



**850 registrants**

Workshops that were presented this year included:

- Feel Better Box (Mental Health)
- Let's Talk Teen Mental Health
- The No Sleep Club (Behaviour and Occupational Therapy)
- Social Skills Series (Speech Language Pathology)
- How to Assess My Child's Social Skills
- Promoting Social Skills During The Summer

### Workshop Feedback

“Thank you. I appreciate your sharing. [The] strategies were the most helpful.”

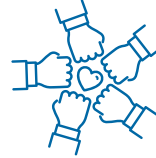
“What a great seminar. LOVE THIS. Thank you!”

## Regional Programs and Events

We are excited to report that we now have staff support in each region and continue increasing our volunteer base and community presence.

Our regions are actively running programming for autistic adults as well as parent and caregiver support groups. This year, the team focused on providing equitable events and programming across the province. We have been encouraged by the growth we have seen.

In addition to autistic adult and caregiver support, our Regional Program and Volunteer Coordinators and Regional Fund and Volunteer Coordinators have been working closely with our Service Navigation – Events and Outreach team to provide events and workshops for the whole family.



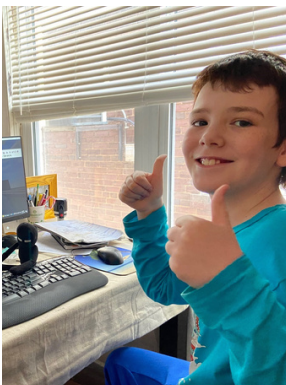
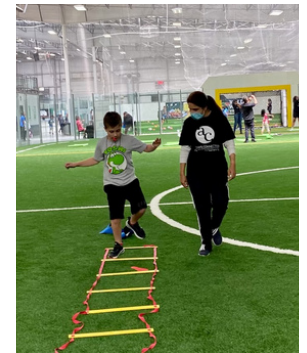
175 volunteers



960+ events



40,000 total attendees



## Feedback: Regional Programs and Events

CARES: “The CARES program provided a safe space to be ourselves and express our own thoughts and feelings without judgement. The coordinators went through the CARES book, going through different scenarios and tips/tricks for us to use if need be. These groups are essential, as some of us, especially the ones in remote locations, only have these support groups to work with. Plus the fact that it's virtual helps a lot.”

South Region Adult Social Club Escape Room: “Really enjoyed the escape room! [It] was really enjoyable coming together and solving puzzles together!”

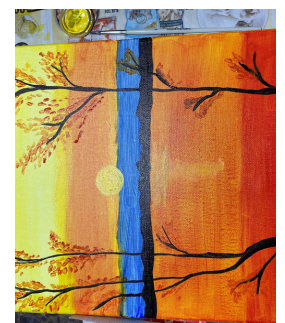
Fluid Art In-Person Program: “My daughter has a passion for art and this workshop was a perfect fit for her. Everyone was super friendly and helpful in such a bright and cheery atmosphere.”

New Diagnosis Adult Group: “I think this was an amazing experience. I learned a lot and feel more prepared for life now that I understand better what I'm living with. This was an important step for me in acknowledging my disability and accepting my diagnosis.”

Central West & South – Virtual Youth Cooking Program (ages 8-17): “The cooking class was amazing. My son and I had so much fun making so many different foods. We enjoyed [the class] and learned so much. The chef was very nice.”

Hamilton Adapted Gym Program: “It was wonderful to see my 4-year-old granddaughter's face light up as she ran around the gym checking everything out. She non-stop smiled from ear to ear. It was an hour of non-stop giggles and laughter.”

Ausome Moms (Parent Support Group): “It was great hearing from other moms about their experiences. The coordinator did a great job [with the] icebreaker topics and topics [of discussion]. It is my third session, and I am hoping to be able to open up more as I get more comfortable. I am really grateful for this.”

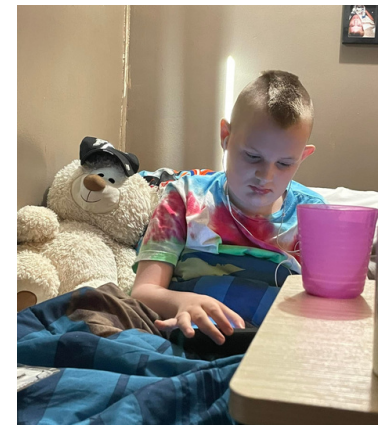


## Celebrate the Spectrum 2022

On Saturday, April 2, 2022, Autism Ontario initiated Celebrate the Spectrum in honour of World Autism Day. Celebrate the Spectrum is an opportunity to foster positive efforts in creating supportive and advocacy spaces for our diverse communities. It encourages learning about autism and underscores the collective responsibility to enhance the inclusivity of our communities for autistic individuals.

Celebrate the Spectrum was successful, with people on the spectrum, their families, and friends across the province enthusiastically celebrating the spectrum in backyards, classrooms, and offices. It was an opportunity to come together while learning about autism.

People taking part were encouraged to share photos of their unique spectrum celebrations. This involved activities such as crafting and donning vibrant tie-dye shirts, as well as designing personalized flags, which were then shared with family and friends.







## Service Navigation - Care Coordinators

### AccessOAP: The Future of Service Navigation

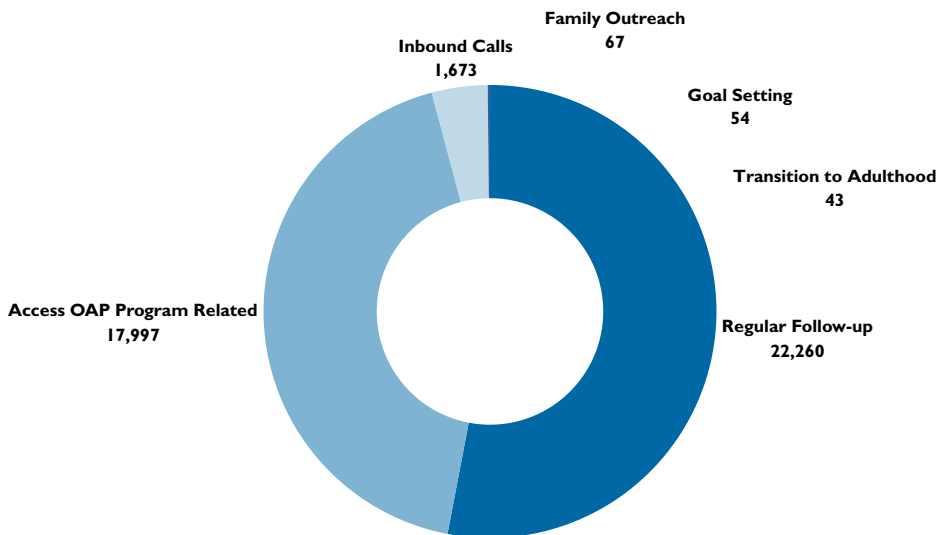
This year marked the first full year of our partnership with Accerta Services Inc., McMaster University (Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis ((CHEPA)) and the Offord Centre for Child Studies), and Serefin to deliver Care Coordination services to families through AccessOAP.

This collaboration, funded by the Government of Ontario, will support children, youth, and their families across the province to navigate the needs-based Ontario Autism Program (OAP) from intake to funding and access programs and services that meet their specific needs.

The team of 120 Care Coordinators has supported over 42,000 conversations with families through video calls, phone discussions, and messages in the AccessOAP family portal. Many families are reporting how supportive their Care Coordinators have been, and it is wonderful to know someone is available to discuss programs and services.

The expansion of our Care Coordination team has included French staff to support our Francophone families, in addition to Care Coordinators who speak a variety of other languages, including Mandarin, Arabic, Urdu, Cantonese, Hindi, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Malay, American Sign Language, and Punjabi. These Care Coordinators can offer support to families in their preferred languages, adding an additional layer of accessibility for these families.

### Service Navigation Conversations: 42.094



\*Note: These are voice and video conversations; does not include family portal messages.

## Adult Services

### **Strong Minds through Active Bodies: Promoting Autistic Mental Health through Physical Activity and Planning**

Autism Ontario was a recipient of the Autism Speaks Canada 2021 Community Grant, alongside its partners Variety Village / Variety – the Children’s Charity (Ontario), Apex Academy Online, and Partners for Planning

Strong Minds Through Active Bodies is a free online course designed for physical activity students, professionals, and supporters of autistic individuals. The course covers topics such as autism, neurodiversity, ableism, and autistic mental health. Participants gain access to crowd-sourced ideas to enhance accessibility to community programs and physical activities for autistic youth and adults.

This project involved direct consultation with 11 autistic adults, 6 caregivers of autistic adults, and 10 professional subject matter experts to shape critical components of our training resource for students and professionals.

During both focus groups and filmed interviews, the people we consulted with shared openly their lived experiences and ideas to create safer physical and psychological environments for people to thrive in the programs fitness and recreation professionals deliver.

### **Scholarships and Awards**

Each year, Autism Ontario awards scholarships to outstanding students entering their first year of a post-secondary program across Ontario.

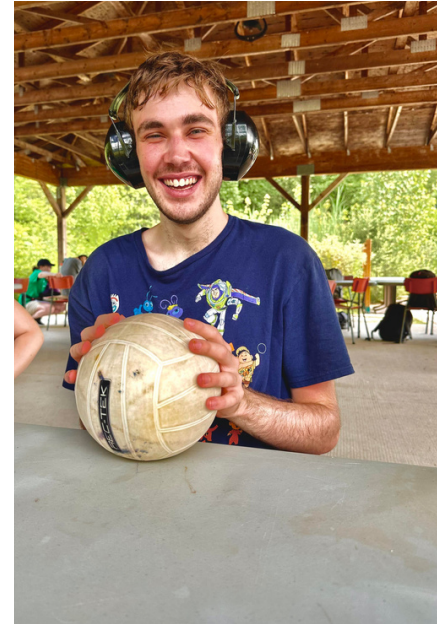
- In 2022, we awarded 15 Eleanor Ritchie Scholarships. The Eleanor Ritchie Scholarship is awarded to students on the autism spectrum. It is named after Eleanor Ritchie, a long-standing member of Autism Ontario, in recognition of her dedication and support for autistic individuals.
- We awarded 5 Jeanette Holden Scholarships to siblings of a person on the autism spectrum. The Jeanette Holden Scholarship was named after Dr. Jeanette Holden, a sibling of a person on the spectrum, in recognition of her dedication and contributions to autism research.
- We awarded 1 MacDonald Family Scholarship for a student with an autistic parent. Autism Ontario’s newest scholarship is named after Carole Ann MacDonald and her family. Ms. MacDonald was the first member of the Board of Directors of Autism Ontario who has an autism diagnosis.
- Autism Ontario's Building Brighter Futures Fund (BBFF) provides financial assistance directly to autistic adults in Ontario through a reimbursement of funds spent to access greater participation in their local communities. Autism Ontario was able to award 25 autistic adults this reimbursement, while 86 worthy applications were received.

## Journey to Adulthood

Autism Ontario launched the Journey to Adulthood virtual workshop series for caregivers of autistic youth navigating the journey from youth to adult.

These virtual, six-week workshops are offered by Autism Ontario Transition Resource Specialists and discuss topics including funding, consent capacity and legal issues, post-secondary options, building community connections, employment, and advocacy. This year, Autism Ontario offered 36 weeks of Journey to Adulthood programs and 2 Journey to Adulthood overview sessions for 42 families.

Consulting with and creating our Journey to Adulthood vignettes with caregivers and autistic adults with lived experience of this age transition is an important component of the workshops, and these individuals were part of the virtual workshops with new families.



### Program Feedback

"This is a wonderful workshop series, filled with loads of information. I highly recommend this class to families that are making that journey to adulthood with a young person with autism." (March 2023 workshop, 16-20y/o)

"The workshop surely opened up a world to think and plan for the future of our child." (November 2022 workshop, 12-15y/o)

## Online Courses and Workshops for Autistic Youth and Adults

Autism Ontario continued to reach new online participants in 2022/2023 with Autism Career Connection courses. Over 600 students enjoyed free access to these online courses designed for autistic youth and adults looking to learn fundamental employment, job searching, and interviewing skills. Professionals, hiring managers, and human resources professionals also enjoyed one of the Autism Career Connections courses designed to support the growth of psychologically healthy and accessible work environments for their staff, including autistic staff members.

As part of a partnership, two autistic adults accessed a paid internship at Odgers Berndtson.



**615 total students enjoyed free access to the online courses**



**2 autistic adults accessed a paid internship**



**10 autistic women and non-binary adults attend Living Life to the Full**

Autism Ontario and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario Division continue our work together to provide opportunities for autistic adults in Ontario to gain knowledge, skills, and resources in mental health by offering Living Life to the Full for Autistic Adults 18+. Living Life To The Full is an online, 12-hour, eight-week mental health promotion program offering free opportunities for Ontario adults on the spectrum to learn wellness and coping skills using the tenets of cognitive behavioural therapy. In February 2023, 10 autistic women and non-binary individuals attended this program from all over Ontario, expressing that self-care themes and mutual supports offered in the program were beneficial.

The RDSP Action Coalition is a group comprised of Autism Ontario, Community Living Ontario, Partners for Planning, PooranLaw, and Family Alliance Ontario.

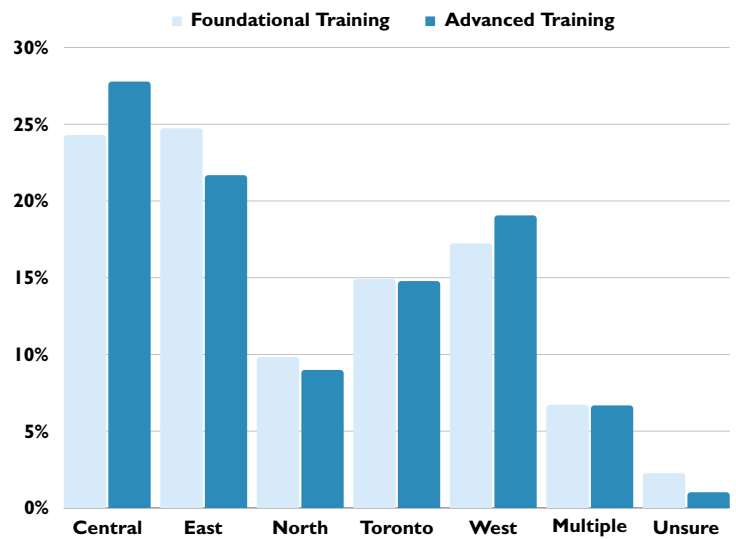
The mandate of our collective advocacy is to increase the uptake of the Registered Disability Savings Plan in Ontario and address barriers to opening and utilizing a Registered Disability Savings Plan. Due to our advocacy efforts, the provincial government announced their intention to extend the Qualifying Family Member provision until December 31, 2026, and to expand the provision to include adult siblings of a RDSP beneficiary. There is more work to do to address systemic barriers individuals and families experience in accessing this benefit, and so our group work continues.

## Ongoing Partnerships

### Building Integrated Capacity in Autism and Mental Health

CMHO, in partnership with Autism Ontario and Dr. Jonathan Weiss, developed a provincial training program to build capacity for autism and mental health providers in delivering integrated mental health services for autistic children and youth. These virtual foundational and advanced training sessions were designed to help enhance providers' expertise in treating and supporting autistic children and youth with mental health challenges and their families. To date, 13 Foundational (12 English and 1 Francophone) and 14 Advanced trainings (8 specialized advanced trainings for autism providers and 6 specialized advanced trainings for mental health providers) have been completed, totalling 4,950 providers trained!

Percentage of providers trained per region in Ontario



4950 providers trained

### Community Care Project: Resource Kits for Culturally Diverse Families of Autistic People

Autism Ontario partnered with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), SAAAC Autism Centre, Autism Calgary, Autism Yukon, Autism Society Alberta, Chiefs of Ontario, Arabic Community Centre of Toronto, Community Family Services Ontario, and SOCH Mental Health to deliver 3,300 Resource Kits to marginalized and racialized autistic individuals and their families across Ontario, Alberta, and Yukon. A grant from PHAC funded the kits.

3,428 resource kits distributed



7 virtual and in-person workshops



8 culturally diverse partner organizations



10 bilingual information booklet guides



45 languages reached



21 jobs for autistic adults were created



## AIDE

Autism Ontario continues to partner with the Autism and/or Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network (AIDE Canada). AIDE Canada is a tool to connect members of the community to the information and resources they need. AIDE Canada has 6 hubs across Canada; Autism Ontario is the Ontario Hub. Through this partnership, we deliver credible, reliable, and evidence-informed resources in an unbiased and accessible way.

Resources developed included:

- [Preparing for a Healthcare Visit](#) (workbook)
- [Cultural Experience Video Essay Series](#)
- [Autism and Pregnancy: How to improve pregnancy care experiences for autistic women](#) (webinar)
- [Developing Independent Living Skills for Adults with Developmental Disabilities](#) (course)
- Toronto Sensory Friendly Holiday Events (article)
- Decreasing ableism in healthcare (focus groups)
- Peer advice video series: [Parenting Advice](#)
- Peer Advice video series: [Life and Social Skills Advice from Self Advocates](#)
- [Sexuality and the Spectrum: Lessons on Sex, Dating, and Love, Autism Style with Amy Gravino](#) (webinar)
- Microinterviews for the [National Autism Strategy](#) and [National Autism Conference](#)
- [AIDE Canada ID Inclusion Project](#)
- Facilitation of AIDE Canada's "[Impossible Conference](#)"



Autism Ontario staff attended the Impossible Conference in March 2023, hosted by AIDE Canada. At the conference, 5 "Impossible" topics were identified, and Hubs across the country had the opportunity to lead resource-building on one of the following topics.

1. Rural/Remote mental health
2. Supportive ID Systems
3. Communication Needs
4. Health System Navigation Supports
5. Self-Injurious Behaviour Working Group

Autism Ontario (i.e., Ontario Hub) will be working on a Rural and Remote Mental Health project.

## **Families in Flux (Published April 2022)**

The 2021 Ontario Caregiver Survey, conducted through a collaboration between the Laurier Autism Research Consortium (LARC) and Autism Ontario, sought to collect insights from primary caregivers of autistic children or youth (ages 17 or younger). This survey aimed to investigate their recent experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the areas of child education, autism services, supports, recreation, and caregiver well-being. The survey results underscore the persistent caregiver stressors that predated the COVID-19 pandemic, including lengthy waitlists, challenges in accessing and affording therapies, and time-related pressures in seeking care. These stressors were exacerbated by pandemic-related factors, such as isolation, service disruptions, and the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the Ontario Autism Program (OAP). Caregivers faced significant challenges in adapting to remote learning, resulting in disruptions for autistic students and compounded pressures on caregivers, impacting their mental health and well-being. While some families found unexpected advantages in remote learning, the availability of in-person education was a source of disappointment for others. For more details or to read the full report please use this link -

[wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-human-and-social-sciences/faculty\\_profiles/janet-mclaughlin/larc/assets/documents/families-in-flux-2022-larc.pdf](https://wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-human-and-social-sciences/faculty_profiles/janet-mclaughlin/larc/assets/documents/families-in-flux-2022-larc.pdf)

## French Language Services

### Extending Our Reach and Engagement with the Francophone Community

Autism Ontario is committed to providing French language services (FLS) of superior quality across the province. Recognizing that there are Francophones living with or touched by autism in every area of the province and driven by its commitment to serve the entire autism community in Ontario, Autism Ontario's French language services extend across the entire province. Autism Ontario engages with the Francophone autism community to better understand and advocate for its needs.

### Programs and Services

In 2022-2023, the Francophone community across the province had access to Autism Ontario's 8 full-time FLS staff who offered support through various French programming and services.

Highlights include:



#### Family Support Services - Parent Support Groups

- 4 Interim One-Time Funding presentations
- 1 Facilitated Support Group



#### Information Sessions

- 2 CARES Programs Offered (in Partnership with SAAAC)
- 9 How to Submit Your OAP Expenses



#### Events for Families

- 25 Recreational Events



#### Programs

- 18 Recorded/on-demand webinars
- 3 Workshops

#### Feedback

“Tout simplement un GROS merci, pout toutes ce que vous faites pour nos enfants francophone.”

- Parents d'un enfant sur le spectre



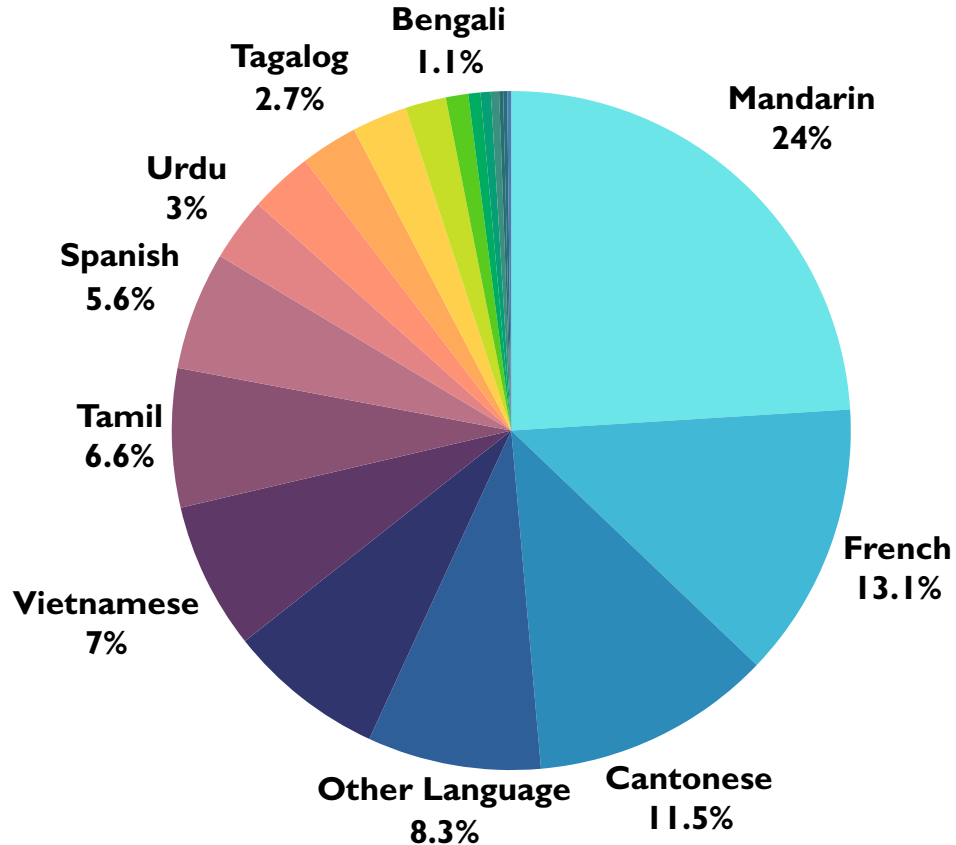


## Language Based Supports

Our language-based and culturally specific supports and opportunities continued to evolve as we offered access to information to many non-English speaking families.

From "What is Autism" sessions in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Arabic to mental health and "Facing the Stigma" workshops in Punjabi and Caregiver check-ins and chats with Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking communities, we are grateful to our partners at South Asian Autism Awareness Centre (SAAAC) who train our staff and support additional language translations so that we can continue to share these valuable supports and programs with more communities across the province.

This year, we also had the New Diagnosis series translated into Urdu, Farsi, and Cantonese, with more to come.



## Advocacy

Autism Ontario continued its commitment to advocating for the rights on autistic Ontarians by engaging different stakeholders. Some highlights from the year include:

In February, Autism Ontario's Chief Executive Officer, Margaret Spoelstra, appeared in front of the Minister of Finance, The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, where we outlined our concerns, including action on reducing wait times for those families waiting for core clinical services, support in transitions for autistic, children, and youth, and better housing solutions for autistic youth and adults.

We also intervened in an important human rights case on behalf of the autism community, when we successfully supported Niam Jain, a young autistic adult, and his family in their Ontario Human Rights Tribunal case against a Toronto sports club. Autism Ontario saw this as a clear case of discrimination not only against Niam and his family but the whole autism community. We also issued a media release in support of Niam and his family and interviewed him in the Autism Matters magazine.

During the 2022 Ontario provincial election, Autism Ontario also researched and published the main parties' platforms related to autism, providing useful information to voters. Autism Ontario's staff worked hard to keep the information updated in a constantly changing environment. During the campaign, Autism Ontario's Margaret Spoelstra was interviewed by the media about our findings.

On a national level, Autism Ontario partnered with the Autism Alliance of Canada, other allied provincial autism agencies, and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to develop a coordinated pan-Canadian approach to autism that would result in a National Autism Strategy. The goal of such a strategy, along with a better understanding of autism and the needs of autistic people, would provide autistic Canadians and their families access to consistent supports no matter where they live.

## Committee Membership

Autism Ontario Chief Executive Officer, Margaret Spoelstra, and Chief Education and Communications Officer, Jessica Bethel, are active members of the Seneca College Behavioural Sciences Program Advisory Committee (PAC), Mohawk College Autism and Behavioural Science Program Advisory Committee (PAC), and the Province of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Disorders Network Patient/Participant Advisory Committee (POND PAC). Autism Ontario places importance on these community connections as they impact research related to autism and neurodevelopmental disorders and the education of students in behaviour analysis programs in the province.

## Media Coverage

### Autism Ontario was involved in major media stories in 2022-23, including:

1

A Southwestern Ontario dog rescue, which made international news when they refused to give a dog to the Doan family. The dog rescue backed their refusal with vague, long-disproven claims about autism, then took it one step further by instituting a blanket ban on adoptions by autistic families. In a social media post, the rescue's owner quoted an unnamed teacher who claimed that 99% of her autistic students have outbursts and can be aggressive and violent. Autism Ontario used this opportunity to highlight the impact of these unfounded claims, educate the rescue about autism, and advocate on behalf of the Doan family.

[Read more about the story here](#)

2

The tasing of Abdullah Darwich, a young non-verbal autistic man who had wandered from his home by Peel Regional Police in Mississauga, in the fall of 2022. This event, which raised much concern in the autism community, also led directly to Autism Ontario's ongoing advocacy work with the Peel Autism Collaborative, an advisory group created by Peel Police to reduce the likelihood of autistics in the Peel Region experiencing future negative police interactions.

[Read more about the story here](#)

3

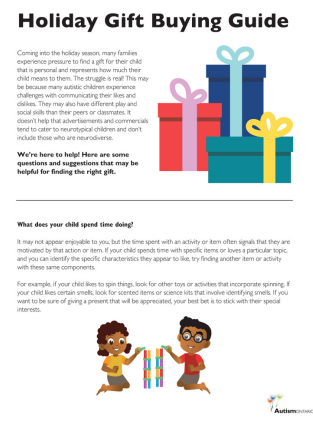
In the third story, Autism Ontario was also asked to comment on the death of Draven Graham, a young non-verbal autistic boy who had eloped from his home and was later found deceased. Autism Ontario created resources on eloping and supported the inception of a specialized alert system for these instances.

[Read more about the story here](#)

# Educational Resources

In addition to the 37 English webinars, 29 workshops, and 86 OAP related trainings we hosted this last year, a number of supporting resources were created. A few of the topics include:

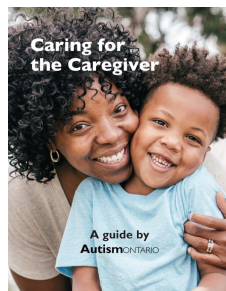
- [What is Stimming](#)
- [Sensory Toolkit](#)
- [Let's Talk Mental Health](#)
- [A gift giving guide](#)
- [Decreasing Ableism in Healthcare e-book](#)
- [Autism Intervention Fact Sheets](#)
- [Holiday Activity Book](#)



Most popular:

The new resources below contribute to the 1000+ daily visits to our website.

- [Understanding Creative Arts Therapies](#)
- [Children's Book Gift Guide 2023](#)
- [Back to School Mental Health Workbook](#)
- [New Diagnosis Resources & Videos](#)
- [Preparing for a Health Care Visit](#)
- [Caring for the Caregiver](#)
- [March Break activity booklet \(English and French\)](#)
- [Caregiver Burnout Resources](#)



## Digital Engagement (Communications)



### E-news

- English Provincial Newsletter - 41,737 members  
(Note: These numbers reflect newsletter recipients prior to list cleanup)
- French Provincial - 2,296 members\* This newsletter was created in late 2022
- Regional - 32,479 members

### Social Media



- Facebook English - 26,000 followers
- Facebook French - 287 followers  
(Note: This page was created in 2023)



- LinkedIn - 9,876 followers



- Twitter - 19,714 followers



- Instagram - 6,664 followers

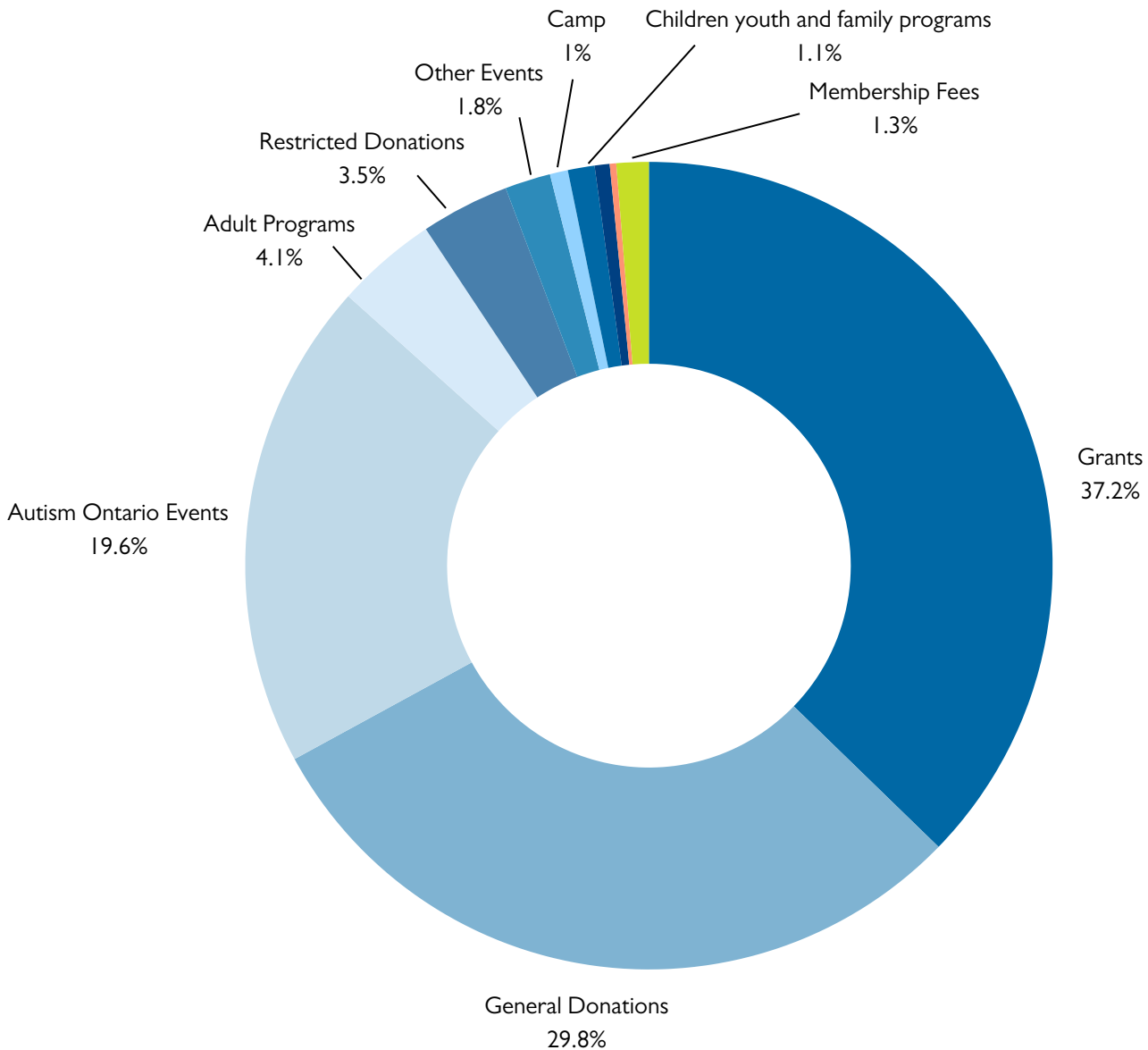
## Top Social Post: 10 Facts About Autism

**AutismONTARIO**  
**TEN FACTS ABOUT AUTISM**

<b>AUTISM IS NEURODEVELOPMENTAL</b> Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder affecting the way a person communicates and relates to people and the world around them.	<b>AUTISM HAS NO CULTURAL BOUNDARIES</b> Autism exists in all cultures, ethnicities, races, and gender identities.
<b>AUTISM IS A TYPE OF NEURODIVERSITY</b> Being autistic means that a person's brain may process information differently than non-autistic, or neurotypical, people.	<b>AUTISM MEANS SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE</b> A person on the spectrum might talk about autism one way, while an autistic person's family or a medical professional may refer to it another way.
<b>NEURODIVERSITY DOES NOT MEAN DISORDER</b> Many autistic people prefer the terms neurological "difference" or "condition", which remove the negative associations with the word "disorder."	<b>NOT EVERY AUTISTIC PERSON IS THE SAME</b> Autism exists on a spectrum, meaning each person on the autism spectrum experiences autism in a different way and the support they need varies.
<b>AUTISM DIAGNOSES ARE PREVALENT IN CHILDHOOD</b> 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth (ages 5-17) are diagnosed with autism.	<b>1-2% OF CANADIANS ARE AUTISTIC</b> Approximately 1-2% of the Canadian population is on the autism spectrum, which means there are approximately 135,000 autistic people in Ontario.
<b>USE PERSON-FIRST OR IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE</b> People talk about autism using person-first language (person with autism) or identity-first language (autistic person). When in doubt, just ask. The phrase, "on the autism spectrum" is usually a safe bet.	<b>EVERY AUTISTIC PERSON CAN THRIVE WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT</b> Many autistic people prefer the terms "high or low support needs" rather than "high or low functioning".

## Fundraising

2022-2023 was another year of change for the fundraising team at Autism Ontario. We welcomed new Fund Coordinators across the Regions to help increase our fundraising efforts to ensure and support the longevity of the programs offered in Ontario. We also gave our donors more choice in how their donation is allocated. The 2022-2023 Fundraising Revenue chart below demonstrates the fundraising initiatives and allocations that donors chose to direct their support.



‘Amazing’ is the word that comes to mind when we think of the wonderful donors during our 2022/2023 year. A special thank you to our incredible foundation, corporate, and individual supporters for their ongoing support of Autism Ontario. Their overwhelming generosity directly helps support our mission and vision.

We continue to be amazed by local autism champions who organize their own events to raise awareness and funds in their local communities.



We are grateful for every dollar raised. On behalf of the Autism Ontario Board of Directors, staff, and most importantly, the program participants impacted by your generosity, we extend our most sincere thanks and appreciation.

## Jane's Story

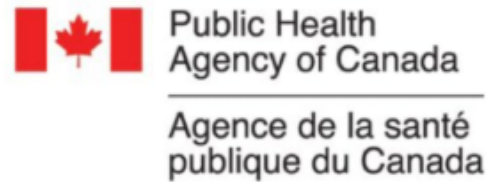
Our journey with Autism Ontario started when our family was facing challenges with my son Andrew's diagnosis in his late teens. There were no services for adults at that time in Niagara. Andrew and I went to a meeting with Autism Ontario Niagara Chapter, where plans were discussed regarding an adult social group. It was worth losing a day's pay to attend. Andrew had attended a group in Toronto, but Niagara is so much more convenient for us and less expensive. I started to donate to Autism Ontario as I realized the importance of the help we have received from Autism Ontario. The social group means a lot to Andrew and our family. I realize quality staff need to be paid to look after their own financial needs. Service groups and businesses give generously to Autism Ontario. I feel it is important for the families being served to donate to show they appreciate what they receive. I have read that the success of an organization is largely dependent on the commitment its members are willing to make. A group is taken more seriously if its members and clients are willing to donate to their cause and give of their time. There are times with my personal circumstances when I am not able to volunteer as much as I would like. Donating can help offset this to a certain extent. Our family has not been able to travel the last few years for a variety of reasons. Donating in lieu of travel provides the satisfaction of knowing the money is being used to better the lives of those on the spectrum.



### Corporations, Foundations, and Community Groups

\$50,000 +

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\$20,000 - \$49,999

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\$10,000 - \$19,999

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Aecon  
Anonymous Donors  
Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities  
CIBC Charitable Foundation  
Community Foundation for Kingston & Area  
Cotton Inc.  
Dundas Lions Foundation  
Equitable Bank  
GB Charities Aid Foundation  
Magna For Community  
Niagara Peninsula Foundation for Children  
Ontario General Insurance Hockey Tournament  
Ontario Trillium Foundation  
Royal Canadian Legion the Edward MacDonal Branch 499  
The Sherry & Sean Bourne Family Charitable Foundation  
Thunder Bay Police Charity Foundation  
Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund



\$5,000 - \$9,999

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Brant United Way  
Charities Aid Foundation of Canada  
CIBC  
Circle of Seven  
City of Welland  
Enterprise Holdings Foundation  
GFL Environmental Inc.  
Kiwans Club of Welland  
Local 444 C.A.W. Social Justice Fund  
P & L Odette Charitable Foundation  
Reuter Benefits  
Rival Office Solutions  
Rona Inc.  
Superbowl Lanes  
The Keg Spirit Foundation  
The Storage Box  
Theoret & Martel Insurance Brokers  
Unifor Local 2458  
United Way Greater Toronto  
Windsor Family Credit Union  
Wise Guys Charity Fund



## Individuals

\$100,000 +

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Panagiota Kyriazis

\$10,000 - \$99,999

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Estate of Doreen Wright

Scott Larter

\$1,000 - \$9,999

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Agnew, Carol

Anonymous

Azar, Emile

Barrette, Leo

Beaulieu, Daniel

Bennett, Sherry

Bertoria, Leesa

Boag, Denise

Bommarito, Giacomo

Bondy, Julie

Bondy, Joseph

Boudreau, Janis

Bowden, Linda

Buckingham, Martin

Burke, Stephen

Burton-Williams, Desmond

Chouinard, Carole

Chua, Grace

Cottenden, Kent

Cuduvalli Ravikanth, Siddharth

Cummings, Stephen

Francis, Donna

Gionet, Krista

Goulet, Angie

Hamilton, Sarah

Helmer, Scott and Angela

Hrabets, Larry

Hunsberger, Ruth-Anne

Jamieson, Gwen

Jill, Wilcox

Jones, Kelly

Kersey, Tanya

LaForet, Jobi

Lim, Adonis

Lucas, Stephen

Ndirangu, Anthony

Newton, David

Noel, David

Parker, Karrie

Pelaia, Sebastian

Phillips, Roy & Pauline

Poulos, Jenny

Pritchard, Drew

Salt, John

Seggie, Stan

Siscoe, Margaret

Smith, Andrew

Spoelstra, Margaret

Stephure, Matthew

Stumpf, Trudy

Terado, Alexander

Tuttle, Donald M

Wanschura, Tammy

Ware, James

Waugh, Cynthia

Wynne, Brenda

Yong, Elaine

Zacharopoulos, Don

## Financial Overview

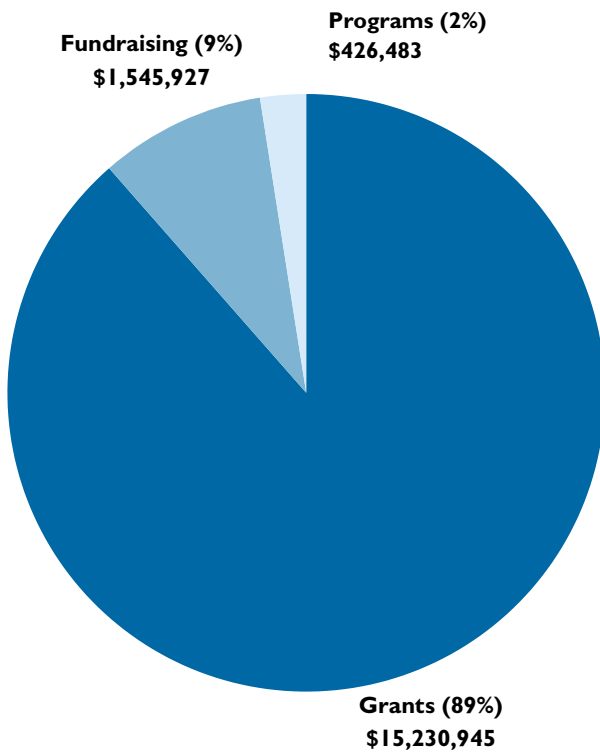
Autism Society Ontario Statement of Revenue and Expenses (from Audited Financial Statements 2023-2022)  
Year ended March 31, 2023 with comparative figures for 2022

	2023	2022
	Total	Total
<b>Grant/Foundation Revenue</b>	<b>\$15,230,945</b>	<b>\$8,227,065</b>
<b>Fundraising/Event Revenue</b>	<b>1,545,927</b>	<b>2,199,197</b>
<b>Program/Service Revenue</b>	<b>426,483</b>	<b>179,670</b>
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$17,203,355</b>	<b>\$10,605,932</b>
<b>Grant/Foundation Expense</b>	<b>\$14,215,509</b>	<b>\$9,350,845</b>
<b>Fundraising/Event Expense</b>	<b>258,599</b>	<b>198,162</b>
<b>Program/Service Expense</b>	<b>1,683,496</b>	<b>542,831</b>
<b>Administration Expense</b>	<b>361,502</b>	<b>291,399</b>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$16,519,106</b>	<b>\$10,383,237</b>
<b>Excess of revenue over expenses</b>	<b>\$ 684,249</b>	<b>\$ 222,695</b>

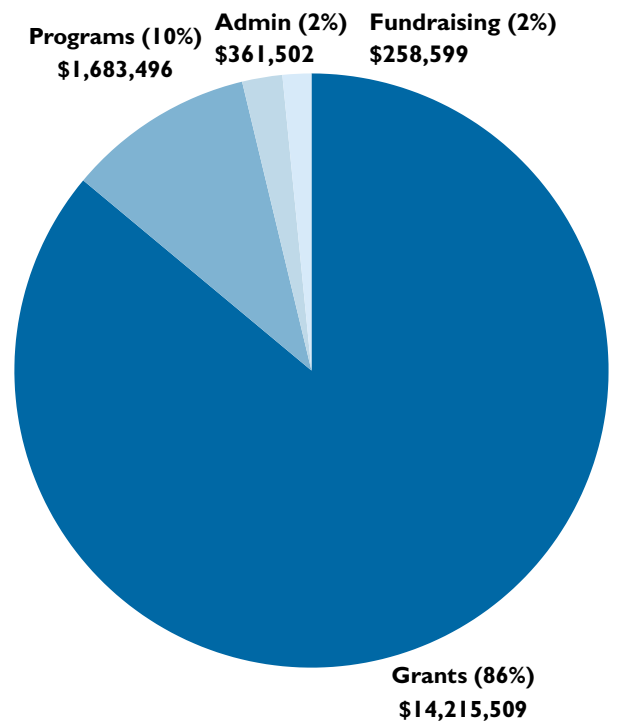


## Consolidated Financial Report

### Revenue



### Expenses



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- [4] <https://healthjournalism.org/blog/2019/07/identity-first-vs-person-first-language-is-an-important-distinction>
- [5] <https://healthjournalism.org/blog/2019/07/identity-first-vs-person-first-language-is-an-important-distinction>
- [6] <https://www.casda.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CASDA-Language-Guide.pdf>
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- [8] [https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1007/s10803-020-04425-3?author\\_access\\_token=IADwT183310FYeLy\\_7e-IPe4RwlQNchNByi7wbcMAY6biNKC5Pq68B0cjBHvRTEFCbAaM6NdTUp4ua\\_5j4bcDiLBvSuqOzT8u8RYRlcY2ets2z-unfeikLzAiLeg2yKwiIbku0rDj3W63bDmaXtbVdg%3D%3D](https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1007/s10803-020-04425-3?author_access_token=IADwT183310FYeLy_7e-IPe4RwlQNchNByi7wbcMAY6biNKC5Pq68B0cjBHvRTEFCbAaM6NdTUp4ua_5j4bcDiLBvSuqOzT8u8RYRlcY2ets2z-unfeikLzAiLeg2yKwiIbku0rDj3W63bDmaXtbVdg%3D%3D)
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"Welcome to the Autistic Community." Welcome to the Autistic Community!, [autismacceptance.com/read-the-book/](http://autismacceptance.com/read-the-book/).

Four Directions Autism (a parent-to-parent support group for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis parents who have autistic children): <http://fourdirectionsautism.ca/index.html>

## Share your story!

If you have been impacted by Autism Ontario, we want to hear from you!

Whether you are a donor, volunteer, or program participant, we want to know why you believe in Autism Ontario. [Share your story with us!](#) Personal stories inspire us and our community every day.

## Connect with us on social media



[@autismONT](#)



[@autismontarioprovincial](#)



[@autismeontarioprovincial](#)  
(French)



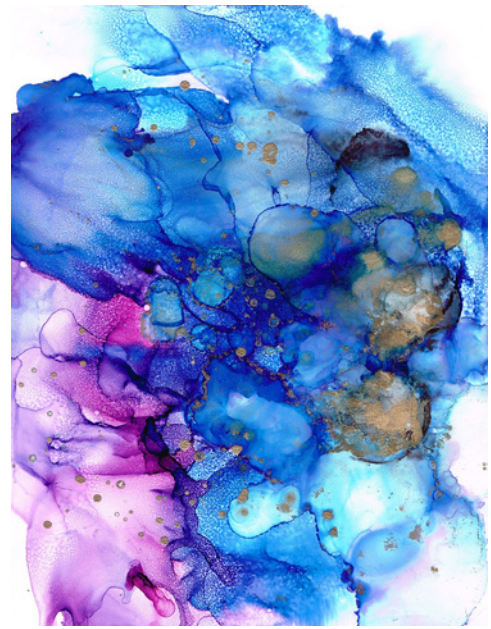
[@autismontario](#)



[linkedin.com/company/autism-ontario](https://www.linkedin.com/company/autism-ontario)



[youtube.com/user/autismontario](https://www.youtube.com/user/autismontario)



*Cool Water*  
Artist: Simona Charlesworth, Aurora



**Autism**ONTARIO