

Autism Ontario's 2018 Provincial Election Toolkit: Getting Started on your Town Hall



1. Send an invitation

It is important that you invite all the candidates who are standing for election in your area. You might have to select a particular riding within your Chapter catchment. Are any of the candidates already appointed Ministers? That's a great way to help narrow down a riding to focus on. If you are not sure which ridings fall into your Chapter electoral area, please [click here](#). You also need to tell your volunteers, friends and family if you would like them to be involved. It's important that candidates see that autism affects others in the community.



Having a broad group of people with ASD, families, and professionals to contribute to the discussion will help your local candidates to better understand the complex issues that people with autism and their families often have to navigate. This will be a busy time for constituents, so they might not respond to your invitation right away.

Identify a moderator and let your invitees know who that person is so they're confident the event will be well run.

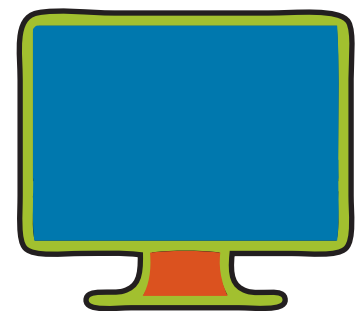


2. Set a time and place

Agree on a time and location. It's important that attendees feel comfortable, so pick a location that everyone is familiar with and won't be too busy or noisy so you can hear the discussion. If you do not have access to Chapter space, civic space is often a great choice to hold a discussion. Often libraries, police departments, city halls, schools or other community facilities grant access to their space to hold meetings and discussions. Ensure that the event location is fully accessible.

3. Prepare

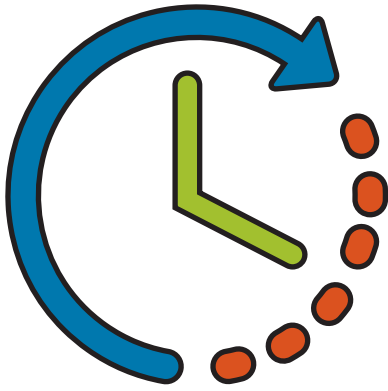
Do a tiny bit of preparation; we've pulled together some of the key documents and recent initiatives at the back of this document to help inform you and to share with your candidates. The Town Hall is about introducing your candidates to what it's like to live with autism in your community and how your MPP can help. To manage your time and ensure everyone has a chance to participate, it is important to decide in advance what your group wants to talk about. The discussion topics should help guide your group around what you want to focus on.



Plan your social media strategy to advertise the event and to encourage people to communicate before, during and after the event.

Connect with media with details.

Be sure there are beverages, even if it's just water, available.



Key ASD Discussion Topic: Service Registries/Waitlists

Currently in Ontario, children, youth and adults on the spectrum sit on lengthy service registries to access autism interventions and supports.

Did you know?

In some places in Ontario, it can take up to four years for children, teens and adults to receive a diagnosis of ASD.

As of 2017, there were more than 21,000 children under the age of 18 waiting to receive autism services.

Many adults on the spectrum are needlessly placed in jail, hospitals and psychiatric units due in part to the ten year wait for appropriate housing in some areas.

Special Services at Home (SSAH) funding is cut off at age 18, when loss of entitlement means families face the greatest challenges and financial demands. It is possible to age-out of SSAH before receiving any funds.

As of 2016, there were 15,000 + adults waiting for Passport Funding; this does not take into account the many people on the autism spectrum who are ineligible for DSO/Passport Funding because of their IQ.

Eligibility for Passport Funding does not necessarily mean access to Passport Funds right away.

Support provided in a timely and holistic manner with minimal or no wait time helps ensure maximum effectiveness and the reduction of family stress.



Questions to ask your local candidates:

What is your party prepared to do to address the waitlist for diagnosis and early intervention as well as ABA and mental health services for children and youth?

What is your party prepared to do to ensure that every adult with ASD won't have to wait for the funding supports they need?

Key ASD Discussion Topic: Autism in the Classroom

One of the most significant issues about ABA programming in Ontario is the challenge of access to excellence in ABA-based supports in Ontario's publicly funded schools. Coordination between ABA services and school programming must be resolved if parents are to have confidence that their children will be able to achieve their full potential.



Did you know?

Autism Ontario continues to hear that school issues remain one of the top concerns expressed by parents of students on the autism spectrum.

There are currently over 20,000 students diagnosed with ASD in the publically funded school system.

In 2017, an average of 9 students per elementary and 7 students per secondary school were waiting for professional assessment, IPRC, or placement.

In 2017 elementary schools reported an average of one EA for every 22 students.

Approximately 84% of students receiving special education programs and/or services are placed in regular classrooms for more than half of the instructional day.

Many school boards are discouraging parents from requesting an IPRC for their children. Autism Ontario supports parents to insist on an IPRC so they have full access to special education supports.

Although students receiving special education supports are required to have a transition plan in place before leaving high school, if the plan is completed, there are a significant lack of supports or programs to transition to in local communities.

Questions to ask your local candidates:

How would your party address the gap that remains between coordinating ABA services with schools and the community?

What is your party's plan to ensure students with ASD have access to qualified ABA professionals in their school?

What will you do to ensure that Educators have the necessary training to work with a range of students on the autism spectrum, regardless of where they teach in Ontario schools?

What will you do to support the successful transition of students with ASD from high school into and through adult life?





Key ASD Discussion Topic: Employment

Working, whether paid or unpaid, is good for our health and wellbeing. This is true for everyone, including people with ASD. Unfortunately, 20-somethings with autism are less likely to be employed than their peers with other disabilities.

Did you know?

Of the adults with developmental disabilities, 58% of those rely on Ontario Disability Income Supports as their primary source of income.

After high school, there is little support for youth looking to access post-secondary education or employment opportunities.

Diversifying a workforce by employing people on the spectrum is an opportunity for businesses to invest in the creation of accessible environments and for managers to develop their own abilities to support and develop a workforce filled with potential.

Bill 148 ended the on-the-job training exemption currently being offered to many people with developmental disabilities and instead funds the provision of this training exclusively through colleges and universities. This creates a barrier for adults on the spectrum who are not attending post-secondary education and negatively impact autistic adults who are seeking or maintaining their employment.



Questions to ask your local candidates:

How would your party work to revisit the elements of Bill 148 which discriminate against people in the Developmental Services sector and their families?

How would your party encourage diversity in the workforce so that businesses can employ and support people on the autism spectrum?

Key ASD Discussion Topic: Housing

Our society has placed importance on people with ASD living in their communities, going to school or work with friends and peers, having relationships with their neighbours, and engaging in local community programs. Housing opportunities must consider the individual's existing community and offer the necessary supports to encourage inclusion and integration in the community as a whole. "Supportive housing" options must engage with and accommodate a broad range of challenges using creative and innovative thinking, families assuming an active role in the housing process, the ability to connect with other families in similar situations, and community partnerships.



Did you know?

There are over 14,000 identified individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) including ASD on wait lists for affordable housing in the province of Ontario.

There are few options that can help parents, caregivers and individuals with ASD navigate the current housing systems and provide guidance during times of housing crisis and/or loss.

Since the necessary closing of institutions, there has not been a corresponding investment into supporting people with Autism and DD in community settings. The need for housing remains critical, as does the need for qualified supportive options.

The good work of the Housing Task Force has been an important way for the province, families and adults to learn about what housing solutions look like locally for people with DD/ASD. The momentum cannot stop now.



Questions to ask your local candidates:

How would your party go about supporting adults with ASD to access and maintain housing best suited to their needs?

What kinds of inclusive housing initiatives would your party fund if elected?

What do you think a vibrant and caring community that supports people on the spectrum looks like?

For the past 4 years there have been special housing projects proposed by families and organizations through the efforts of the Housing Task Force. Will you support continued investment in the recommendations made by this Housing Task Force going forward?



Key ASD Discussion Topic: The Ontario Ombudsman's Report "Nowhere to Turn"

On August 24, 2016, the Ontario Ombudsman released Nowhere to Turn, the report on his office's investigation of more than 1,400 complaints from families of adults with developmental disabilities who were in crisis situations, including being abandoned, abused, unnecessarily hospitalized and jailed. The number of reports from caregivers has continued to grow.



Did you know?

In 2014, a non-partisan Select Committee of MPPs released its report of recommendations based on their investigations and having heard the stories of families and their efforts to get the supports needed for adults with developmental disabilities. The work accomplished by this committee was an important step in beginning to understand the magnitude of challenges faced by caregivers, service providers and people with DD/ASD.

Then in 2016, the Ontario Ombudsman released their scathing report on the state of Developmental Services in Ontario.

There has been limited action to address the recommendations in the report, many of which are fundamental human rights being denied to Ontario citizens with autism and developmental disabilities.

Questions to ask your local candidates:

We know the scope and specific nature of challenges faced by people with autism in their adult years. What will your party do with this information?

What actions will you take immediately and in the longer term in response to these clearly identified needs?





Key ASD Discussion Topic: Pre-Service Training for Health Professionals

According to the [Atlas on the Primary Care of Adults with Developmental Disabilities in Ontario](#), people on the autism spectrum can often have complex health care needs but can meet barriers when accessing services.

Did you know?

Many health care providers have little training or understanding of developmental disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Adults with developmental disabilities including autism are more likely to visit emergency departments and be hospitalized.

Nearly one in two adults with developmental disabilities are dispensed multiple medications at one time, with one in five receiving five or more medications concurrently.

People with ASD are often not easily recognized in day-to-day interactions. It is important for first responders to be aware that because of the core characteristics of ASD, many individuals “live in a constant state of anxiety”. Involvement with the criminal justice system may lead to additional anxiety, thereby creating further complications, misunderstandings and barriers for adults accessing criminal justice/legal supports.



Questions to ask your local candidates:

What is your party’s policy regarding pre-service training for physicians treating people with developmental disabilities including ASD?

What kinds of supports would you offer to families or people on the spectrum before they are in crisis?

Key ASD Discussion Topic: Mental Health Supports

People on the autism spectrum may also experience mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, attention deficit and other psychological disorders. Having a neurological disorder discounts individuals from accessing most mental health supports and funding available for Ontarians.



Did you know?

There is a need to train mental health professionals in the unique systemic and interpersonal challenges families and people with ASD experience.

Training mental health professionals about how to care for an individual with ASD may address some of the communication and behavioural barriers. Although the need to train professionals in this area is recognized, a plan to do so has yet to be put in place.

Right now, the need for ASD knowledgeable mental health professionals is higher than what is available, results in long wait periods, and generates crisis.

Our service support system is siloed and fragmented, and there is a need to increase timely service integration and access. Often our health system doesn't communicate with social services, addiction and mental health, family health teams, behaviour, housing, education etc.

The CASDA National Needs Assessment Survey identified that mental health treatment was one of the top priorities among families and individuals in Ontario and across Canada.



Questions to ask your local candidates:

How would your party address the important need for collaboration at a ministry level?

How would you ensure that mental health interventions continue to be current, widely disseminated and founded in best practice?

