



**Autism**  
Alliance of Canada

Alliance canadienne de  
**l'autisme**

# **Canadian Autism Leadership Summit 2023**

## Impact Report

## Dear readers,

Autism Alliance of Canada is proud to present an impact report for the 9th Annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit (CALS2023), highlighting the remarkable success and significance of this event for our members and the autism community. Find out more about the diversity and reach of CALS2023, and feedback from attendees. This report informs the direction of our future Leadership Summits and ensures effective oversight and accountability for the Alliance.

CALS2023 was hosted from April 17th to 19th, 2023 at the Delta Hotels By Marriott Ottawa City Centre and via livestream. With over 250 attendees from across Canada and around the world, CALS2023 brought together the collective voices of Autistic self-advocates, service providers, policymakers, government representatives and international thought leaders in support of Canada's first ever National Autism Strategy.

We were pleased to welcome Minister Jean Yves Duclos, to address the meeting and were honoured to be recognized as a key partner in the further development of a National Autism Strategy.

With Canada on the verge of a National Autism Strategy (NAS), CALS2023 convened national and international experts to help inform autism policy at the national level and effective collaborative practices at the provincial/territorial level. CALS2023 also addressed the critical topics of housing and post-secondary education supports in the autism sector and the need for meaningful inclusion.

We are incredibly proud to report the following outcomes from CALS2023:

- Authentic engagement with Autistic participants, family members, researchers, politicians, service providers and policy makers from across the country;
- Presentation of the 2nd Annual Jim and Ginette Munson Award to Tom Jackman, Autistic advocate for acceptance of people on the autism spectrum;
- Provision of scholarships to 11 Autistic participants with lived experience who attended CALS2023 as part of our CALS2023 Financial Support Program;
- Presentation of opening remarks by the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health, which included his [announcement of funding for a research initiative by Autistics for Autistic Adults](#);

- Sharing of lessons from international leaders with direct experience and success in the development and implementation of National Autism Strategies and related policies, providing us with excellent examples and frameworks that can have relevance to our upcoming work on the NAS;
- A robust discussion with regional representatives across Canada on how collaboration can be bolstered in anticipation of a National Autism Strategy;
- A powerful presentation by leaders from Indigenous communities who shared perspectives on autism in their communities, including the current barriers that families face, and articulating of a call to action for partnering with Autism Alliance of Canada to develop and implement meaningful research related to their unique needs;
- Presentations and dialogue that shed light on topics of pre-employment, housing, as well as strategies for advancing the collective work of our priorities together;
- Celebration of the passing of Bill S-203, "Federal Framework on Autism Act," at a reception sponsored by The Honourable George J. Furey, K.C, Speaker of the Senate.

This event and its success are a direct result of the support of our members, meeting attendees and the 18 corporate supporters all of whom contributed to the outcomes of CALS2023 and the charting of our path for the coming year. View our full list of supporters and more on the official [CALS2023 website](#).

The recordings of CALS2023 can be [accessed here](#).

We look forward to seeing you again next year, for the 10th Annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit!

Sincerely,



Dr. Jonathan Lai  
Executive Director, Autism Alliance of Canada  
Chair of the Summit Organizing Team

# CALS2023 by the Numbers

**3**

Days

**18**

supporters

**130+**

orgs in attendance

**18**

sessions

**40+**

Presenters

**250+**

Attendees

# Visual Highlights from CALS2023



At the reception: “Celebrating Bill S-203: Moving the Dial for Autistic People in Canada and their Loved Ones.”

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From left, The Honourable Clément Gignac, The Honourable Jim Munson, The Honourable Leo Housakos, The Honourable Peter M. Boehm, The Honourable Mike Lake, Rebekah Kintzinger: Co-chair of Autism Alliance of Canada, Jonathan Lai; Executive Director of Autism Alliance of Canada.



Ginette Munson, Tom Jackman: Recipient of the 2nd Annual Jim and Ginette Munson Autism Leadership Award, The Honourable Jim Munson

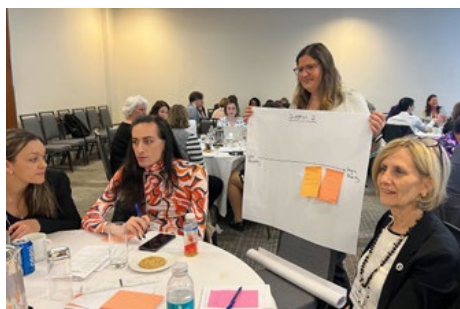


Team members of Autism Alliance of Canada Team at the reception: “Celebrating Bill S-203: Moving the Dial for Autistic People in Canada and their Loved Ones.”

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From left: Kelly Ntale, Simone Daniels, Deepa Singal, Danielle Pearlston, Mackenzie Salt, Jonathan Lai, Franziska Morin, Rakhee Chowdhury, Urwa Ghazi



The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos; Minister of Health, Benjamin Lachapelle; Autistic artist and author-illustrator



Attendees engaging in our Group Discussion session



Dr. Deepa Singal, Scientific Director of Autism Alliance of Canada, moderating the keynote discussion: “A Conversation with International Policy Experts, How do your Autism Policies Help Autistic People?”



CALS2023 attendees



Rebekah Kintzinger, Co-Chair of Autism Alliance of Canada's Board, addressing the attendees of the reception: “Celebrating Bill S-203: Moving the Dial for Autistic People in Canada and their Loved Ones.”

# Session Highlights

## Roundtable

### Building Collaboration in Autism Postsecondary Education Supports

This roundtable was joined by 8 panelists that are leaders in the area of postsecondary education supports. Together, they identified **gaps and challenges** within the current system of postsecondary education supports for Autistic students across Canada and to identify **collective next steps**.

Pictured from left: Jonathan Lai, Dr. Megan Ames, Dr. Heather Brown, Jess Lopez, Jenna Gauthier, Simone Daniels. Not pictured: Orly Fruchter, Andrew Eddy, Dr. Lee Burdette Williams, Dr. Patty Douglas.



## Facilitated Discussion

### Maintaining Momentum in Autism and Housing

This discussion presented an overview of recent initiatives and action in autism and housing in Canada. Presenters also shared information about a new project to create a Housing Knowledge Synthesis and Mobilization Hub using a lens of neurodiversity to advance a National Autism Housing Network in Canada.

Pictured from left: Tara Connolly, Tanya McLeod





# Session Highlights Cont'd

## Keynote Discussion

### A Conversation with International Policy Experts: How do your autism policies help Autistic people?

This panel, moderated by the Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard (Canadian Senator) welcomed international policy experts from the United States, Europe, and Malta. Panelists discussed how autism strategies in their countries have enhanced the lives of Autistic people and their loved ones, and shared their advice as Canada embarks on establishing its own National Autism Strategy. Key suggestions for Canada included ensuring ownership and accessibility, prioritizing implementation, embedding the strategy into legislation, fostering societal flexibility, building an inclusive advisory committee, and remaining realistic and open to compromise.

Pictured from left: The Honourable Wanda Bernard, Dr. Alistair de Gaetano, Dr. Susan Daniels, Harald Neerland



## Panel Discussion

### Using a Rights-Based Approach to Look at Autism Policies Around the World

Autism Alliance of Canada-Kids Brain Health Network Policy Development Fellows shared the stage with Lawyer, Sarah Ewart, and self-advocate, Yvonne Spicer, to provide insight into the alignment of national autism strategies with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Amplifying the perspectives and experiences of Autistic persons, panelists also highlighted promising practices from current strategies, and discussed experiences that other nations can learn from.

Pictured from left: Jennifer Zwicker, Sarah Ewart, Yvonne Spicer, Christiane Roth, Dr. Preeti Kar, Alexandra Minuk



# Session Highlights Cont'd

## Presentation

### An Update on the National Autism Strategy

Mark Nafeekh (Director General, Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Branch, Public Health Agency of Canada) presented an update on the National Autism Strategy. **The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos** (Minister of Health) announced that the [Government of Canada is providing \\$215,000 to the Alliance to support the needs of Autistic adults aged 30 and over.](#)

Pictured: The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos announces Government of Canada funding for Autism Alliance of Canada



## Panel Presentation

### Centering Indigenous Perspectives: How can a Federal strategy help?

Panelists highlighted gaps in access to services in Indigenous communities, the need for better support for students, teachers and parents in the school system, the importance of grassroots perspectives in research and decision making, and the key role language plays in creating understanding and awareness of autism/neurodiversity in Indigenous communities. Panelists also provided actionable items for both the federal government and community members on how to better support neurodiversity in Indigenous communities, and shared a strong willingness to work with the federal government to lead initiatives to foster the inclusion of Indigenous communities.

Pictured from left: Sarah Sark, Jennifer Quaile, Kenny Robertson, Charles Brown, Bertha Sutherland, and Grant Bruno on the screen



# Session Highlights Cont'd

## Panel

### What do our Provinces and Territories need from a National Autism Strategy?

Canadian provincial and territorial governments and their community partners were invited to discuss what is needed at the regional level to improve services and support for Autistic people and their loved ones in the context of a National Autism Strategy. The panel highlighted the following key focuses for a federal autism strategy to improve social and political inclusion: (1) Consistent and timely diagnostic assessments to reduce wait times and ensure equitable access; (2) Revision of the funding model to provide support based on individual needs; (3) Active engagement of stakeholders; (4) Collaboration among provinces and territories to establish an integrated system of support; (5) Development of a comprehensive framework and national approach that brings together key players from all provinces and territories; and (6) Adequate funding for autism services and support, moving beyond tax credits and integrating various funding sources across multiple departments.

Pictured from left: Dr. Karen Bopp, Carolyn Kamper, Cynthia Carroll, Jennifer Covey, Margaret Spoelstra, and Lyndon Parakin

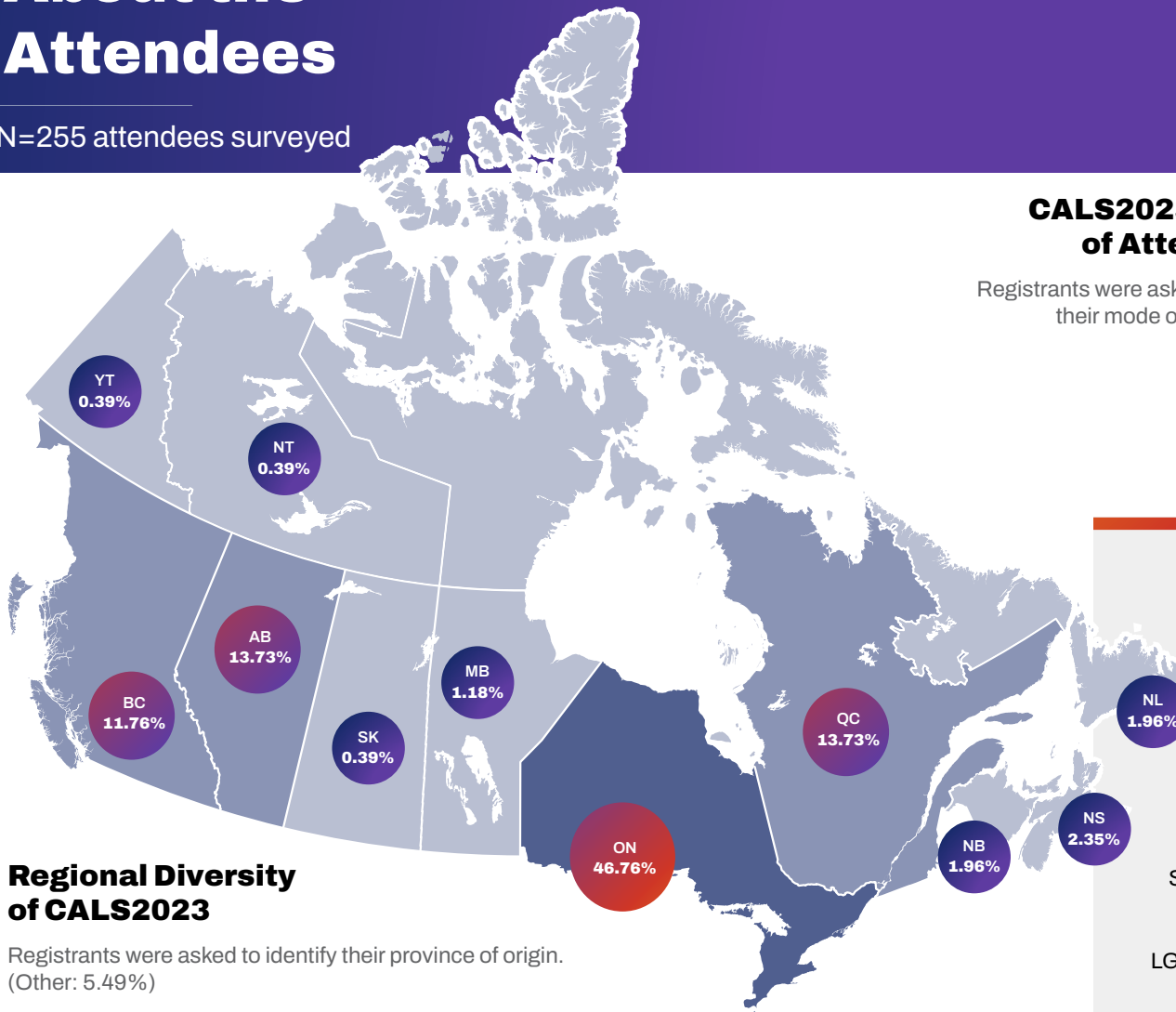


**For a comprehensive list of CALS2023 sessions and presenters,  
visit the [CALS2023 website](#).**



# About the Attendees

N=255 attendees surveyed



## Regional Diversity of CALS2023

Registrants were asked to identify their province of origin.  
(Other: 5.49%)

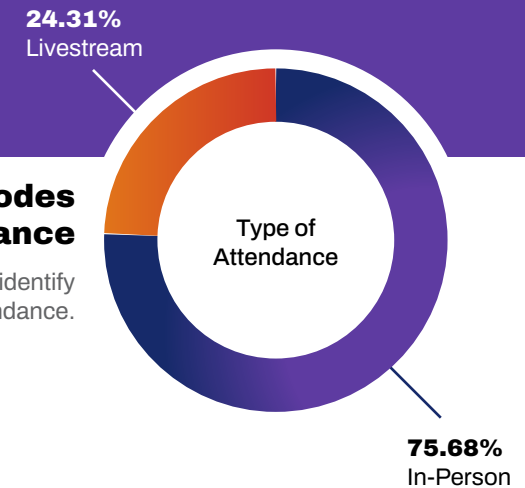
## International Diversity of CALS2023 Attendees

Registrants were asked to identify their country of origin.

Canada	96.08%
Other (Peru, Australia, Malta, India, United States, The Gambia, Norway)	3.92%

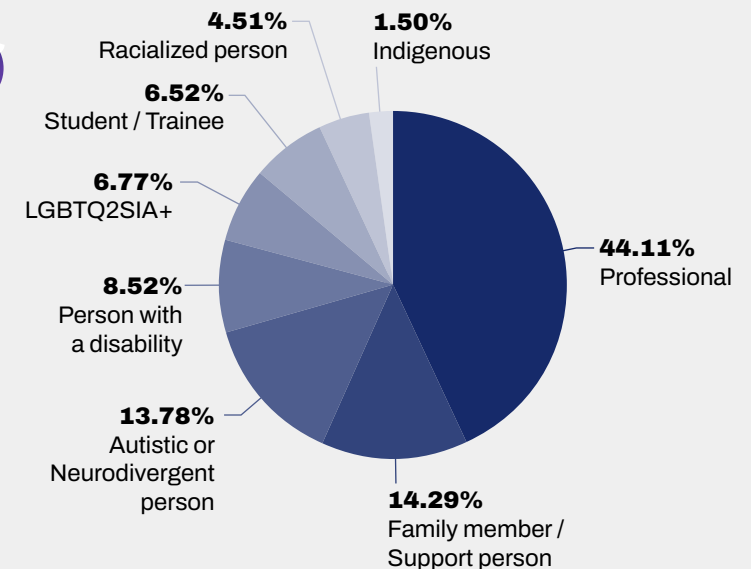
## CALS2023 Modes of Attendance

Registrants were asked to identify their mode of attendance.



## Presentation Diversity of Attendees

Registrants were asked to select identities (as many as they prefer) that they feel best represented by.

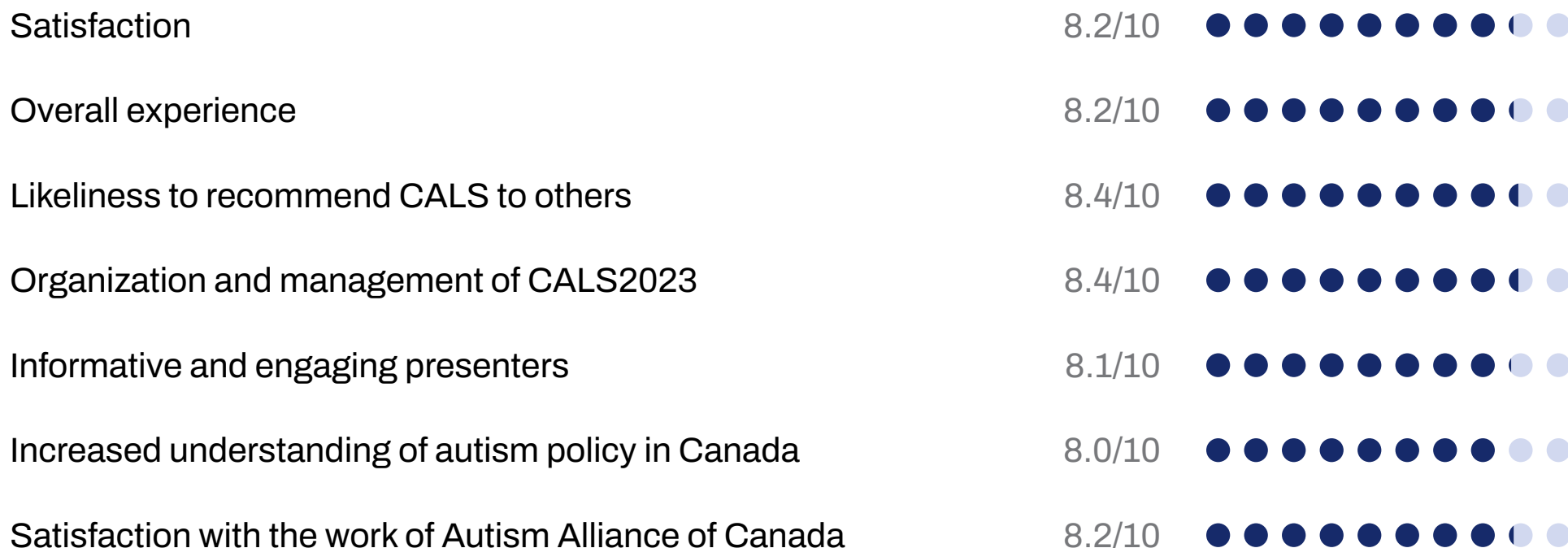


# What We Heard from Summit Attendees

## CALS2023 Feedback Survey

Autism Alliance of Canada is committed to incorporating learnings and feedback from our members and from our community. To this end, a survey was distributed to attendees throughout the Summit to capture their experiences and input. This feedback will guide Autism Alliance of Canada's collective work moving forward and inform the planning of the 10th Annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit.

### Here's what attendees had to say:



# What We Heard from Summit Attendees Cont'd

## Experience

Autism Alliance of Canada requested specific feedback and suggestions from CALS2023 attendees regarding the interactive activities, barriers experienced, accommodations requested, and overall features of CALS2023.

### Here's what attendees had to say:

#### Points for Enhancing Group Discussions

- ✓ Increasing time allotted for small group discussions.
- ✓ Reserving quiet spaces for attendees to use throughout the Summit as needed.
- ✓ Creating additional opportunities for attendees to contribute to topics that generate actions that they can bring back to their organizations.
- ✓ Having more focus on the specific actions that will be taken by policymakers in relevant sessions throughout the Summit.

#### Points for Enhancing Broader Representation and Engagement

- ✓ Including more self-advocates and persons with lived experience throughout all sessions.
- ✓ Adjusting the duration of each sessions, including shorter talks.
- ✓ Including a poster session highlighting Autism Alliance of Canada's ongoing work.
- ✓ Building additional opportunities for attendees to engage beyond table discussions.
- ✓ Including a discussion or presentation about learnings gathered from countries that have autism strategies in place, especially highlighting what has worked and what has not worked.

#### Points for Enhancing Accessibility

- ✓ Catering towards the specific and diverse needs of Autistic attendees.
- ✓ Providing live or closed captioning for all presentations.
- ✓ Encouraging more accessible and concisely-worded questions during discussion sessions.

# Learnings to incorporate in future Summits

**To ensure greater satisfaction, accessibility and inclusivity, Autism Alliance of Canada plans to incorporate the following learnings to the 10th Annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit (CALS2024):**

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- ✓ Prioritizing a larger location to ensure a more accessible experience for attendees.
- ✓ Including a poster session to highlight notable projects and research initiatives.
- ✓ Increasing involvement of Autistic persons and persons with lived experience throughout the Summit.
- ✓ Encouraging presenters to use plain and accessible language and to refrain from using metaphors as descriptors.
- ✓ Distributing session materials ahead of time for attendees to review as needed.
- ✓ Channeling to audio through the microphones and speakers in the room to create a more focused experience.
- ✓ Encouraging attendees to silence their devices to minimize distractions.
- ✓ Encouraging participants and presenters to identify themselves before speaking.

# Acknowledgements

**A big thank you** to our remarkable supporters who have played an instrumental role in making CALS2023 a resounding success: Azrieli Foundation, The Sinneave Family Foundation, Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN), Staples Canada, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), Kerry's Place Autism Services, le Réseau national d'expertise en trouble du spectre de l'autisme (RNETSA), Geneva Centre for Autism, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration in Autism (CIRCA), McMaster Autism Research Team (MacART), Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Autism Nova Scotia, auticon Canada, Autism Ontario, Sage Canada, McGill Summer Institute for School Psychology (McGill SISP), and Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice (YAIJ).

**In particular, we thank the following supporters for enhancing the accessibility of CALS2023 for our attendees and participants**

- Sinneave Family Foundation supported our ability to offer a livestream option, in order to expand access to the Summit for those who could not be there in person;
- RNETSA made it possible to offer simultaneous French translation;
- KBHN supported our ability to welcome participants with lived experience as our panelists and guests.





# Acknowledgements Cont'd

## Thank you to all those involved in the CALS2023 Organizing Team

- Munson Award Committee Members: Kim Ward, Margaret Whelan, Cyndi Gerlach, Elizabeth Plouffe, and Whitney Hodgins.
- CALS Planning Team: Margaret Whelan, Amy Lonsberry, Cyndi Gerlach, Carly Greenberg.



Venue of Senate Reception: "Celebrating Bill S-203: Moving the Dial for Autistic People in Canada and their Loved Ones."



Rakhee Chowdhury, Communications Manager of Autism Alliance of Canada, meeting The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, former Minister of Health.



Rebekah Kintzinger, Co-Chair of Autism Alliance of Canada's Board, conversing with CALS2023 attendee.

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