



Autism
Alliance of Canada

Alliance canadienne de
l'autisme

Autism Alliance of Canada: 5 Year Strategic Plan

2023–2028

Table of Contents

Message from Board Co-Chairs	2
Our Story	3
Our Organization	4
Our Strategic Priorities: Overview	5
Strategic Priority 1: Develop a Shared Policy Agenda	6
Strategic Priority 2: Accelerate Systems and Policy Research	7
Strategic Priority 3: Facilitate Collective Impact	8
Strategic Priority 4: Advance Operational Excellence	9



Message from Board Co-Chairs



We are incredibly proud of the work we have accomplished together to advocate for a National Autism Strategy. The external and internal environments in which we operate have changed significantly over the last 4 years. During that time, we have made significant progress in achieving the goals of our previous strategic plan (2019-2022). Though the pillars of “Collective Voice,” “Federal Advocacy,” and “Operational Excellence” listed in this previous strategic plan remain true to the identity and intent of the Alliance, further refinement is necessary as our operations become more sophisticated.

Through the last 4 years, Autism Alliance of Canada has engaged in meaningful work within the disability sector in general, and the autism sector more specifically, at all levels of government as well as prioritizing efforts to connect with and collaborate alongside Indigenous partners. Our processes support robust collaboration, partnerships and member engagement to promote successful social and economic inclusion for Autistic people in Canada and their loved ones.

Our work together is generated by a shared leadership model, where all our members, as leaders in the autism and disability communities, help us achieve our collective vision: Autistic people and their families exercising their full rights and realizing their full potential.

Our new strategic direction is based on the priorities of our members and our strong track record and experience collaborating with our diverse partners. Importantly, they challenge us to continue to enhance our strengths, address our challenges and expand our network and ways of working that ensure the inclusion of Autistic people and our members across our activities and initiatives.

Together, we are making change happen; but there is more to do. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you as we press forward, bringing together the community voice, evidence, and policy to affect real-world change in areas that matter.

—Karen Bopp and Rebekah Kintzinger, Co-Chairs of the Board



Our Story

Autism Alliance of Canada is a not-for-profit coalition with a membership that includes Autistic people, caregivers, professionals, researchers, and representatives from organizations across Canada. We are a recognized national leader in advancing autism and disability policy.

Over time, we have evolved from an advocacy organization into a trusted partner to government and academia. We did this as a group of individuals and organizations who brought the community voice together with real world data and evidence.

We produce and use research and evidence as tools to find new solutions to challenges identified by our members. Our goal is to change the policies that shape Canadian society to build a more inclusive country. For us, inclusion means that Autistic people enjoy being part of community life as they choose to, no matter where they live.

We brief decision makers in government and legislators, and lead research and policy working groups. We support large research projects across Canada, and support Autistic scientists, neurodiverse trainees and engaged caregivers to lead and participate in research projects that inform policy and practice.

Our efforts have generated momentum, and delivered impact. At the heart of our work are Autistic people and their families.

Our Roots: Advocating for Canada's First National Autism Strategy

Over 14 years ago, Autism Alliance of Canada — formerly known as the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) — began calls for a National Autism Strategy after the release of the “Pay Now

or Pay Later: Autism Families in Crisis” report brought forward by the Senate in 2007. We achieved what was thought to be undoable: we brought together stakeholders across the country to advocate with one voice for the creation of Canada’s first National Autism Strategy.

Without the Alliance and its members, there would be no federal Framework for a National Autism Strategy.

Our Transformation: From Advocacy to Implementation, Research and Collective Impact

Today, Canada is on the brink of a National Autism Strategy. Autism Alliance of Canada is looking to the future and setting new strategic goals that leverage our network to advance the human rights of Autistic people living in Canada.

The diverse and wide reaching alliance we have formed is the ideal network to support a National Autism Strategy. Together with our members, we will continue to address issues that matter most to Autistic people in a way no one organization can do on its own.

We invite you to join us as we grow. This Strategic Plan charts our way forward.

Benjamin Lachapelle; Autistic artist and author-illustrator



Our Organization

Our Vision

Our vision is a Canada where Autistic people exercise their full rights and realize their full potential

Our Mission

Our mission is to inform policy and practice at a national level by bringing our members together, identifying priority issues, and developing meaningful ways to address them

Our Principles

- Respecting and learning from each other
 - Meaningfully including persons with lived experience and sharing leadership
 - Adding value to broader disability community
 - Ensuring equity in representation across all stakeholder groups
 - Encouraging different ideas and perspectives
-

Our Process

Convene

- Bring people with different expertise and experience together to learn from each other
- Find ways to take what we all learn and use it to make better policies

Catalyze

- Find creative ways for different sectors to work together and solve difficult problems facing Autistic people and their families
- Help the community grow stronger by exchanging ideas and developing skills

Collaborate

- Work together with our members to use solid evidence and data to inform policy
- Partner to create and spread practical solutions for Autistic people to be better supported
- Grow by teaming up with others, no matter their disability or identity

Our Strategic Priorities: Overview

Our strategic direction for 2023–2028 is based on the priorities of our members and our strong track record and experience collaborating with Autistic people and their families, researchers, service providers, government, community organizations and other non for profits.

We will enhance our strengths, address our challenges and expand our network and ways of working that includes more Autistic people, more family members and more of our members across our activities and initiatives.

We are committed to equity, diversity and inclusion. We will integrate these principles into all our strategic priorities, actions, and goals. We will continually assess our progress to showcase our accountability to our funders and enhance our impact for the community we serve.

In the next five years we are committed to:

1 | Developing a shared
policy agenda

2 | Accelerating systems
and policy research

3 | Facilitating collective
impact

4 | Advancing operational
excellence

Develop a Shared Policy Agenda

What this means for the Alliance

We bring together Autistic people, caregivers, persons with lived experience, experts, and government to create an action policy to support Autistic people living in Canada.

Background

For the last several years, Autism Alliance of Canada has been making progress towards Canada's first-ever National Autism Strategy. We have been working to help Canadian decision-makers understand the challenges faced by Autistic people and their families. By bringing our members together, we have figured out what are the most important issues to autistic people and have identified shared priorities and policy ideas. Our work has shown that we are a trustworthy organization that brings the government, researchers, doctors, service providers and the disability community together to make better policies that support autistic people living in Canada.

Over the next 5 years, we will:

- ✓ Strengthen our relationship with the Public Health Agency of Canada and other parts of government to keep making the National Autism Strategy better
- ✓ Support Autistic people, support persons and families stay involved in public policy
- ✓ Use the annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit, webinars and other meetings to work on issues that matter most to our members.
- ✓ Make sure Canada learns from policies and practices of other countries that support autistic people and their families
- ✓ Work together with other disability organizations to ensure the rights of Autistic people are protected and follow the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



Impact: Our work will create a more inclusive Canada that includes the diverse perspectives of Autistic people and their loved ones.

Accelerate Systems and Policy Research

What this means for the Alliance

We do health systems and policy research on topics that matter most to Autistic people. We lead and support large research projects that include many different organizations and people from across Canada. We work together with Autistic people, their families, researchers, doctors, service providers, and government. We also help train new researchers, many of which are neurodiverse or have lived experience.

Background

In Canada, there is a big gap when it comes to researching what services and policies best support Autistic people. In the past, decisions about autism policies were often based on people's beliefs and opinions, rather than on evidence. In recent years, we've been working hard to change that. We are working with experts from different fields all over the country. Together, we're studying how our health, education and social systems can better support Autistic people and their families. Our goal is to take this information to leaders and governments who can help change the system.

We think it's important to have Autistic people and their families involved in our research. They should lead, advise and take part in the research and should be paid for their time and knowledge. We also want to train neurodiverse research trainees so that they can become leaders in autism research in the future.

Over the next 5 years, we will:

- ✓ Improve our ability to study and improve autism service and policies, and collect and share data about it
- ✓ Help Autistic people, their caregivers, and families get actively involved in research in a meaningful way
- ✓ Create a "knowledge mobilization plan" to share research findings with government, doctors, service providers and the public
- ✓ Work with other national training programs to help neurodiverse students get opportunities for learning and growth
- ✓ Conduct program evaluations for member community organizations
- ✓ Develop research priorities with Autistic people on topics that matter most to them



Impact: Our work will create new knowledge about the strengths and needs of Autistic people living in Canada. This information will help make important changes in our health, education and social systems, and ultimately improve the lives of Autistic people and their families. Our training programs will build a workforce of neurodivergent researchers who are prepared to lead.

Facilitate Collective Impact

What this means for the Alliance

We bring together people from different areas of expertise to work together to solve real-world problems facing Autistic people living in Canada.

Background

We work together with different groups of experts to improve ongoing research and policy and communication between these expert teams. We create opportunities for everyone to exchange ideas, share resources and celebrate achievements all across the country.

We are a platform where groups and people from different areas share what they know and help each other while working together on important projects and initiatives. When we do this, the ideas and solutions we come with work better than if just one group or government tried to do it alone. Together, we will find new and innovative ways to solve complex problems that affect Autistic people and their families and get the resources to address those issues.

Over the next 5 years, we will:

- ✓ Develop and support networks with common agendas advancing issues in: housing, education, employment, accessing services across the lifespan, and research
- ✓ Foster membership growth and retention. When members come together, we all have a louder voice in a nationwide leadership movement
- ✓ Identify innovations in priority areas that are ready for spreading and scaling



Impact: Our work will result in real progress on issues our members think are most important. We want to change how things are in society and the economy to make life better for Autistic people and their families.

Advance Operational Excellence

What this means for the Alliance

We are committed to growing our organization and empowering our team to do the work that fulfills our mission and strategic priorities.

Background

Over the past 4 years, Autism Alliance of Canada has grown quickly. We have shifted from an organization managed by an operational board to a team of skilled professionals working across Canada that is overseen by a board of directors. We have developed an efficient way of working that supports success in a virtual workspace. We are committed to improving how we work, to be more efficient and effective. We are dedicated to building a diverse team of employees, including neurodiverse people and all equity-deserving groups. We support our staff by ensuring they have the resources and skills to achieve our vision, mission and values.

Over the next 5 years, we will:

- ✓ Build infrastructure to sustain the activities and work of the Alliance
- ✓ Grow and support a diverse and inclusive workforce
- ✓ Modify our processes to reflect new learnings, knowledge and insight
- ✓ Improve professional development opportunities for our board members and staff



Impact: Our work will result in an efficient organization that helps make positive change in the lives of Autistic people and their loved ones. We will provide a supportive environment for diverse employees to make their best contributions.



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