



Autism
Alliance of Canada

Alliance canadienne de
l'autisme

GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK

2025-26 Board Term



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INTRODUCTION

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.

Autism Alliance of Canada is directly accountable to its members through its Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is responsible for providing the strategic leadership and operational support necessary to establish and meet Autism Alliance of Canada's vision, mission, goals and objectives.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, Autism Alliance of Canada (then known as Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA)), a national coalition of autism related professionals and community partners, was formed. Following the release of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology report entitled, *Pay Now or Pay Later: Autism Families in Canada*, a number of leaders from Autism specific organizations from across Canada initiated an alliance to ensure that the momentum created by the release of the report continued.

Our members identified a single focus for their work: to work with the federal government and its departments to develop a National Autism Strategy. By reaching out to leaders in the autism sector from across Canada, the Alliance undertook the process of developing a collective voice for autism in Canada and a unified body with which our government could work. Through our organization, the autism community came together to provide a strong national voice to advance the collective messages of our sector. Committed to a shared leadership model of collaboration, we and our members have worked to promote the federal government's commitment to the development and implementation of a National Autism Strategy. Autism Alliance of Canada became incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in 2015.

In 2022, Autism Alliance of Canada (then CASDA) embarked on a brand refresh to reflect the evolution of the organization. As part of this process a new name was adopted to reflect a more holistic and strength-based approach to autism. At the April 6, 2022 Annual General Meeting, organization and community members voted unanimously to ratify the new name, Autism Alliance of Canada.

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

Due to the passing of S-203 in 2023, Canada has a National Autism Strategy and National Autism Framework, established in 2024. Autism Alliance of Canada is looking to the future with an ambitious [strategic plan](#) (2023-2028) that leverages our network to advance the human rights of Autistic people living in Canada.



Our Vision

A Canada where Autistic people exercise their full rights and realize their full potential.

Our Mission

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.
- Sharing leadership and meaningfully including persons with lived experience.
- Adding value to the neurodevelopmental and broader disability community.
- Ensuring equity in representation across all stakeholder groups.
- Encouraging diversity of thought and ongoing dialogue.



BOARD STRUCTURE AND ROLES

Composition

Autism Alliance of Canada has 3 different membership types.

- Organization (**voting**) - Organization Memberships shall be available to organizations incorporated as a charity and/or not for profit organization, pursuant to applicable Federal and/or Provincial laws.
- Community (**voting**) - individuals that have attained the age of eighteen (18) and are residents of Canada, or incorporated organizations that do not qualify as Organization Members, and non-incorporated organizations or groups with a designated spokesperson to represent the organization or group in voting.
- Associate (**non-voting**) - Associate membership is open to all individuals that elect to subscribe to the Corporations events and newsletters.

Autism Alliance of Canada is directly accountable to its members through its volunteer Board of Directors (no fewer than 3 and no more than 15 Directors).

All Directors are elected for two-year terms and are voting members of the Board. The volunteer Board is normally comprised of:

- A minimum of one third individuals employed by Organization Members
- A minimum of one third Community Members

The Board of Autism Alliance of Canada represents its diverse membership with a balance of skills that allows the Board to appropriately serve its members. Representation reflects the national, regional, linguistic and cultural diversity of Canada. Autism Alliance of Canada has limited capacity for paid employees so Directors are often asked to contribute their time and leverage the capacity of the organization or group they represent. Therefore, all Organization Member Directors must have the ability to enter into commitments on behalf of their organization.

The Board's Role

A **governance board** is responsible for developing objectives to enable an organization to achieve its mission and for making decisions that guide the organization towards achieving those objectives. An *operational board* is responsible for the organization's daily operations. Over the last several years Autism Alliance of Canada's Board has moved from an operations model to a **governance model**.

Autism Alliance of Canada Board of Directors provides governance to the corporation to ensure overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability through regular Board meetings as well as through meetings of the committees of the Board – Governance, Internal Affairs, External Affairs and Canadian Autism Leadership Summit Planning.

All Directors are voting members of the Board and, in all situations, are expected to hold the interests of Autism Alliance of Canada members above personal or **their** organization's interests.

The Chair(s) or their designate shall preside at all Board meetings.



INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

Directors and officers have a fiduciary responsibility to Autism Alliance of Canada. Every Director and officer is required to exercise their powers and discharge their duties by:

- Acting honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the corporation; and
- Exercising the care, diligence and skill that reasonably prudent person would exercise in comparable circumstances.

In addition, Directors are expected to:

- Attend all Board meetings;
- Act as a representative for the organization, serving as a representative of the organization;
- Participate on at least one Board committee; and
- Adequately prepare for Board and committee meetings. Adequate preparation is essential and should be factored into the overall time commitment expected from Board members.

To carry out these responsibilities, the Board usually meets in person and/or online bi-monthly with committee meetings occurring in alternating months, approximately five times per year.

OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION

As described in Article 17 of Autism Alliance of Canada's by-laws, the Board may designate the officers of the Corporation, appoint officers on an annual or more frequent basis, specify their duties and subject to the [Not-for-Profit Corporations Act](#), delegate to such officers the power to manage the affairs of the Corporation. **An officer may, but need not be a Director.** A Director may be appointed to any office of the Corporation. Two or more offices may be held by the same person and two people may simultaneously hold the same office. Officers are typically appointed at the first Board of Directors meeting after the Annual General Meeting.

Chair(s)

The Chair(s) presides over all meetings of the Board and the Annual General Meeting. The Chair(s) works cooperatively with Autism Alliance of Canada Executive Director and provides leadership to the Board. The Chair(s) are accountable to the Board of Directors and members. The Chair(s) are aware of and fulfills governance responsibilities and complies with applicable laws and bylaws to conduct Board business effectively and efficiently. The Chair(s) are also accountable for their performance.

Role

- Ensure the integrity and effectiveness of the Board's governance role and processes.
- Preside over all meetings of the Board.
- Act as a spokesperson for the organization, serving as a representative of the organization to both internal and external constituencies.
- Sit as an ex-officio member of all Board committees.



Responsibilities

- Ensure that the Board adopts an annual work plan that is consistent with the organization's strategic direction, mandate and vision.
- Ensure that the work of the Board committees is aligned with the Board's role and annual work plan and that the Board respects and understands the role of Board committees.
- Ensure Board succession by working with the Governance Committee to ensure there are processes in place to recruit, select, and train Directors with the skills, experience, background and personal qualities required for effective governance and operations.
- Oversee the Board's evaluation process and provide constructive feedback to individual committee chairs and Board members as required.
- Ensure that the Board governance structures and processes are reviewed, evaluated and revised from time to time.
- Fulfill other powers and duties from time to time, as prescribed by the Board to the office.

Vice Chair(s)

During an absence or inability to act as the Chair, the duties and powers of the Chair may be exercised by the Vice-Chair(s).

Responsibilities

- Act as a spokesperson for the organization, serving as a representative of the organization to both internal and external constituencies.
- Fulfill other powers and duties from time to time, as prescribed by the Board to the office.

Secretary

The Secretary ensures that accurate records of all Board Meetings and decisions are prepared and retained in the Autism Alliance of Canada Minutes Book. The Secretary ensures that notice is given to Directors and Members in advance of meetings. Additionally, the Secretary is responsible for ensuring government filings are completed in such a manner that the Corporation maintains its not-for-profit corporation status with Corporations Canada and its charitable status with the Canada Revenue Agency. The Secretary may delegate their duties to other officers or employees to the extent and in such a manner as the Secretary may determine.

Treasurer

The Treasurer Chairs the Internal Affairs Committee. The Treasurer oversees the financial affairs of the organization to ensure they are legal, constitutional and within accepted accounting practice. The Treasurer works with the Internal Affairs Committee to ensure proper records are kept and that effective financial procedures are in place. They monitor and report on the financial health of the organization and oversee the production of necessary financial reports/returns, accounts and audits.



DIRECTOR SUCCESSION PLANNING

Boards have a duty to address major business risks to which the corporation may be exposed, including the inevitable loss of Directors from the Board. Identifying appropriate candidates is accomplished through careful consideration and planning. Autism Alliance of Canada's Governance Committee develops, regularly reviews and revises Board succession plans and assesses and makes recommendations regarding nominees for election and re-election to the Board.

Succession Planning

The most critical step in Board succession planning is identifying the optimal Board composition and skills matrix. A skills inventory table is kept up to date to assist with these discussions.

The essential qualifications for Directors are as follows:

- Be a current Organization or Community Member in the Alliance with membership status in good standing
- Possess qualities that reflect the national, regional, linguistic and cultural diversity of Canada;
- Possesses leadership and communication skills;
- Has insight to help shape autism information directions, policies and programs; and
- Has the capacity to attend Board Meetings and engage in Board activities, as required.

Asset qualifications for Directors are considered as follows:

- Has a thorough understanding of and commitment towards Autism Alliance of Canada's vision and mission;
- Is well networked and able to reach out to and influence opinion leaders/decision makers; and
- Brings visibility to and enhances the profile of Autism Alliance of Canada.

Other qualifications may be sought in areas such as lived experience, research/economics, government relations, finance, health professions, population health and privacy, to ensure the required oversight can be provided.

Each year Directors should review their entry in the skills matrix to keep it up to date.



DIRECTOR ELECTION PROCESS

The Governance Committee assesses and makes recommendations regarding nominees for election and re-election by the Members of the Corporation. The process to assist with electing Directors is as follows:

- Nominations for an appointment on the Board of Directors shall be made by Autism Alliance of Canada members and delivered to the Board of Directors Chair(s).
- The Governance Committee may also recruit nominations based on gaps identified in the skills matrix.

Each year the nomination process will be communicated to members.

Assessment

Once individuals have been identified to fill a vacancy or vacancies on the Board, the Governance Committee meets to consider the candidates. When reviewing the composition and skills mix, Governance Committee members consider the following:

- Whether the Board lacks skills that may prove critical to understanding and managing current and future business operations;
- Whether more than one Director should possess skills that are critical to current or future business operations. Such resilience helps when sustaining the loss of Directors; and
- The importance of maintaining adequate depth of critical skills; however, candidates should also offer diversity of experience, skills and viewpoints.

Elections

Following its assessment of nominees, the Governance Committee makes a recommendation of a slate to the Board of Directors. The Board then recommends a slate for the members of the Alliance at the Annual General Meeting or at a special meeting of the members.

Terms of Office and Re-Election

The term for a Director is two (2) years, commencing upon the adjournment of the Annual General Meeting at which the Director was elected.

A Director is eligible for election or designation as a Director for three consecutive terms not to exceed, in the aggregate, six (6) years. This limitation can be abrogated (ignored) to permit a Director to serve in the office of Chair, Vice Chair or Past-Chair.

When a Director is eligible for re-election and has continued interest in serving as a Director, the Governance Committee reviews their qualifications within the context of the skills matrix and then makes recommendations at the Annual General Meeting to the Members of the Corporation regarding re-elections.



BOARD COMMITTEES

Standing Board committees are established to conduct specific activities that contribute to the fulfillment of the Board's or the organization's mandate and to allow the full Board to focus on more strategic matters. The Board committees benefit from the skills and expertise of Board members as well as community members appointed to committees.

Autism Alliance of Canada's Board has five standing committees:

- Governance Committee;
- Internal Affairs Committee;
- External Affairs Committee;
- Canadian Autism Leadership Summit (CALS) Planning Committee; and
- Jim and Ginette Munson Autism Leadership Award Committee.

Additional committees may be struck on an ad hoc or advisory basis, or from time to time, to ensure that Autism Alliance of Canada has the capacity to take on additional projects.

Committee Role and Responsibilities

The role of each Board committee is to oversee specific activities of the organization as well as activities of the Board (for example, governance practices and recruiting new Board members). Each Board committee has a set of responsibilities that ensures that the full Board can stay focused on matters of strategic importance. Board committee updates are provided to the full Board at each of its meetings, and committee recommendations are brought forward as required. The full Board then undertakes its own deliberation process prior to determining its approval of specific activities.

Committee Chairs and Members

The Governance Committee makes recommendations regarding committee membership as new Directors are recruited to the Board. The process entails carefully considering the skills/expertise required on each of the committees and matching these to the skills/experience of current Board members. The process also involves ensuring that representation on these committees is balanced among membership types, as well as ensuring a balance in workload among Board members. Once a Board member is identified as a prospective committee member, they are approached regarding their ability and willingness to become a member of a particular committee. For committee chairs, the process is the same, in addition to ensuring the members' willingness to undertake the extra work required by committee chairs. Committee Chairs are appointed by the membership of each committee.



General Committee Guidelines

- All committees report to the Board of Directors.
- Meeting Regularity:
 - The Governance, Internal Affairs and External Affairs Committees meet every other month, and a minimum of four times per year.
 - The CALS Committee typically meets weekly in the months leading up to the Canadian Autism Leadership Summit.
 - The Munson Autism Leadership Award committee typically meets a minimum of four times per year.
- Each Committee may appoint a Co-Chair as necessary.
- The Committee Chair(s) shall preside at all Committee meetings. In the absence of the Chair(s), other members of a Committee shall appoint one of their members to act as Chair for that particular meeting.
- Committee minutes or a summary report will be prepared and sent to the Board Chair(s) to be included in Board Meeting materials.
- Members may participate via video or tele-conference or in person.
- Meetings will be called at the request of the committee chair(s).
- Community members may be invited to attend as full members, or observers at the invitation of the Committee Chair(s)

Committee Membership

Members of each Committee are appointed by the Board of Directors under the recommendation of the Governance Committee. Each Committee shall consist of the following:

- One Board member who will act as Chair of the committee
- At least two other Board members
- The Autism Alliance of Canada Board Chair is an ex-officio member. (voting)
- The Executive Director is a standing ex-officio member. (non-voting)
- Community Members invited by the Committee Chair(s)

There may also be staff participating and/or in supporting roles in each committee.

Quorum

A majority of voting members will constitute a quorum.

Decision Making and Voting

Whenever possible, decisions will be made by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, the issue will be put to a vote. If requested, dissenting views will be recorded in the minutes. A vote must have a majority to be passed.

Staff and other resources to the Committee are non-voting members on all committees.

Board Committee Terms of References

Committee	Terms of Reference



Governance Committee	PDF Governance Committee - Terms of Reference.pdf
Internal Affairs Committee	PDF Internal Affairs Committee_Terms of Reference.pdf
External Affairs Committee	PDF External Affairs Committee_Terms of Reference.pdf Subcommittees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CALS Committee: PDF CALS 2025 Planning Committee_Terms of R... • CALS Accessibility Committee: PDF CALS 2025 Accessibility Committee_Terms... • Munson Autism Leadership Award Committee: PDF Jim and Ginette Munson Autism Leadership ...

BOARD POLICIES

An effective Board develops the policies, processes and procedures necessary to carry out its responsibilities. This sets the foundation for good corporate governance and sound risk management.

Each year, Board of Directors Members are required to renew their confidentiality agreement, commitment to Code of Conduct and a conflict of interest declaration.

Policy	Committee Responsible	Last Approved	Next Review
PDF Code of Conduct Policy.pdf	Governance		
PDF One Voice Policy.pdf	Governance		
PDF Conflict of Interest Policy.pdf	Governance	2021	2025
PDF Confidentiality Policy.pdf	Governance	2021	2025
PDF Remuneration Policy.pdf	Governance		
PDF Travel Policy.pdf	Internal Affairs		
PDF Approved_Directors Resolution Deleg...	Internal Affairs	December 2024	



CORPORATION BY-LAWS

Master Version - [Corporation By-Laws - Approved at AGM April 2025](#)

VERSIONS

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