



**Autism**  
Alliance of Canada

Alliance canadienne de  
**l'autisme**

# **From Vision to Impact: Shifting Systems through Partnerships, Policy and Research**

2024 Annual Report



# A message from the Executive Director and Chair of the Board

Dear Readers,

It is with immense pride and gratitude that we present Autism Alliance of Canada's 2024 Annual Report. Since our founding in 2007, we have grown from a small operational board to a member-driven network grounded in a shared purpose and deep community roots. This past year marked a significant milestone in our journey: we officially became a registered charitable organization, solidifying our long-term commitment and growing capacity to drive change at scale. At the heart of our work remains a deep commitment to bringing people together, fostering collaboration between Autistic individuals, families, researchers, service providers, policymakers, and allies to create meaningful and lasting change for Autistic people and their loved ones.

This year, our collective efforts reached a turning point. The release of Canada's first Autism Strategy represents a historic achievement and one shaped by years of advocacy, consultation, and relentless community leadership. But a strategy is only the beginning. The true challenge lies ahead: turning vision into action, frameworks into outcomes, and commitments into real, measurable impact for Autistic people and their families.

Guided by our 2023–2028 Strategic Plan, our work is grounded in four key pillars:

- Building a Shared Policy Agenda
- Strengthening Our Collective Voice
- Accelerating Research and Data
- Advancing Operational Excellence

These pillars guide every step we take: defining our priorities, informing our partnerships, and anchoring our accountability to the communities we serve.

This report reflects not only milestones met, but a growing movement powered by community wisdom, driven by shared values, and strengthened by collaboration. From over a decade of the Canadian Autism Leadership Summit to bold research initiatives and cross-sector policy work, we remain focused on one unifying goal: addressing the most pressing issues facing Autistic people and their families, from coast to coast to coast.

Thank you to every individual and organization that has walked alongside us this past year. Your commitment, trust, and advocacy continue to shape this movement—and together, we are just getting started.

With deep appreciation,

## Dr. Jonathan Lai

Executive Director  
Autism Alliance of Canada



## Shino Nakane

Chair  
Autism Alliance of Canada,  
Board of Directors  
Provincial Director, Autism  
Society Alberta



# About Autism Alliance of Canada

**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 Strategic Pillars



**Building a Shared  
Policy Agenda**



**Strengthening our  
Collective Voice**



**Accelerating  
Research and Data**



**Advance Operational  
Excellence**





**Our members  
are the driving  
force behind  
everything we  
do.**

**150+**  
Organization members  
**300+**  
Community members  
**1,000+**  
Associate members

## Our Members

Autism Alliance of Canada convenes a national coalition of Autistic people, caregivers, researchers, and organizations, working together to advance equity at a systems level through shared leadership and aligned action.

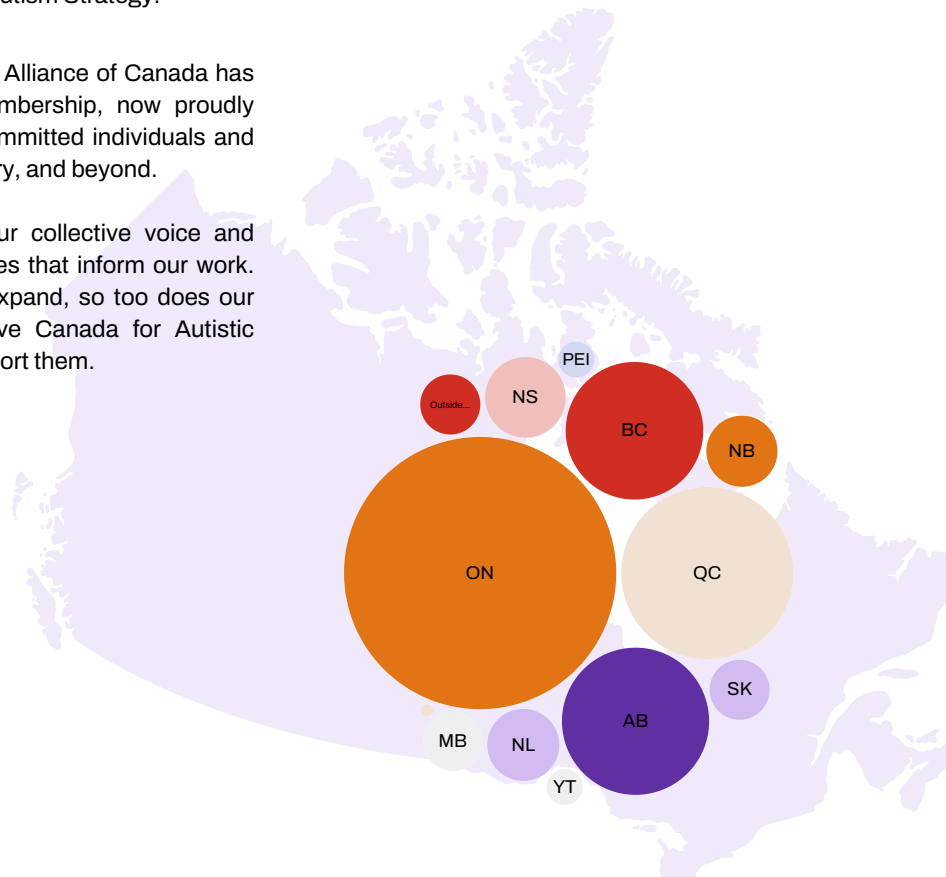
We take a collective impact approach, aligning our efforts around five key principles:

1. Developing a shared vision for change
2. Using common tools to measure progress
3. Supporting mutually reinforcing activities
4. Maintaining open and continuous communication
5. Providing backbone support through our coordination hub.

These principles strengthen our network and ensure Autistic people and their families remain at the heart of our work. By fostering collaboration across sectors, we align efforts, coordinate strategies, and amplify diverse perspectives. As a growing chorus of commitment, we represent our members' priorities and working with them to strengthen and advance Canada's Autism Strategy.

Since our founding in 2007, Autism Alliance of Canada has experienced steady growth in membership, now proudly representing over one thousand committed individuals and organizations from across the country, and beyond.

Each new member strengthens our collective voice and deepens the diversity of perspectives that inform our work. As our membership continues to expand, so too does our capacity to shape a more inclusive Canada for Autistic people and those who love and support them.





# Our Members



“

**“True progress in supporting the autism community comes not from competition, but from collaboration.”**

- Michelle Schmidt, Executive Director, Autism Community Training

**Real, lasting change can only be achieved through genuine collaboration—between the government, the system, and the Autistic community. Together, we have the power to dismantle barriers and create an inclusive, equitable system that not only supports but empowers.**

- Suzanne Perreault, Executive Director, Autism BC

## Building a Shared Policy Agenda

# Canada's Autism Strategy

**In 2024, the federal government released Canada's first-ever National Autism Strategy. This milestone is one of the most significant systems-level policy wins for Autistic people in Canada's history.**

We're helping make sure it leads to real change for Autistic people and their families - by bringing the lived experience, the right evidence and partnerships to the table. This is how systems change happens - through leadership that connects community voice with government action, and turns advocacy into impact.

Autism Alliance of Canada not only championed this vision; we helped build it from the ground up. From leading national consultations to shaping the Strategy's Blueprint and Roadmap, the Alliance is now supporting its implementation. Over the years, we worked directly with federal partners to ensure this strategy was rooted in lived experience, informed by evidence, and aligned with the needs of Autistic people and their families.

### Our Impact at a Glance

- 20 years of sustained leadership and coalition building
- Blueprint and Roadmap authored by the Alliance shaped national direction
- Trusted advisor to federal agencies throughout development
- Selected by the Government of Canada to co-lead the National Autism Network
- Mobilized thousands to ensure lived experience guided design

### Our Role in 2024

- Trusted advisor to the Public Health Agency of Canada and federal policymakers
- Supported the launch of Canada's Autism Strategy and Framework
- Selected by the Government of Canada to start up the new National Autism Network in partnership with The Sinneave Family Foundation
- Elevated over 2,000 voices to ensure community accountability and impact

### Why This Matters

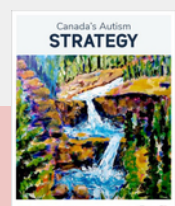
Canada's first National Autism Strategy is more than a policy milestone—it's a lever for social change. With more than 1 in 50 Canadians on the autism spectrum, this strategy has the potential to reduce long-standing inequities in healthcare, education, employment, housing, and human rights. It paves the way for coordinated investments, measurable outcomes, and better use of public resources. By helping inform this strategy, Autism Alliance of Canada is advancing:

- Health equity by promoting early access to care and culturally responsive services
- Economic participation by addressing barriers to employment and skills development
- Human rights and dignity by embedding lived experience into public policy

### National Autism Network

As a founding partner of the newly established National Autism Network, we are advancing the next phase of implementation by:

- Bringing together Strategic Priority Committees that will provide expert, cross-sectoral guidance to the Public Health Agency of Canada
- Embedding lived experience so that Autistic people and families directly inform national implementation
- Ensuring knowledge translation happens in a timely way throughout the Network





## Strengthening our Collective Voice

**We bring together people from across sectors—including autistic individuals, caregivers, researchers, clinicians, educators, and policy leaders—to collaborate on real-world solutions to the challenges facing Autistic people in Canada.**

In 2024, we strengthened our national convening power by fostering cross-sector partnerships, co-developing guidance for the implementation of Canada's Autism Strategy, and embedding lived expertise across all major initiatives. By connecting voices and expertise, we amplified collective action across Canada's autism ecosystem.





## Strengthening our Collective Voice

# Canadian Autism Leadership Summit



The 11th Annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit (CALS2025) convened a powerful cross-section of perspectives - Autistic self-advocates, researchers, policymakers, service providers, and families - to push forward the national conversation on autism policy, inclusion, and action. Held under the banner of collaboration and community, CALS2025 featured thought-provoking keynote addresses, breakout sessions, and panels aligned with the priorities of Canada's newly released Autism Strategy.

### Key Highlights of CALS2025

- Elder Vince Kicknosway opened CALS2025 with a grounding welcome, followed by Senators Marilou McPhedran, Wanda Thomas Bernard, Leo Housakos, and Jim Munson, along with Chief Accessibility Officer Stephanie Cadieux, who emphasized grassroots leadership, intersectionality, and the importance of lived experience in shaping policy.
- Breakout sessions and panels addressed all five priority areas of Canada's Autism Strategy, with focus on neuroinclusive housing, education reform, access to diagnosis, public awareness, and economic inclusion. Speakers called for community-led, data-driven approaches to close systemic gaps.
- Dr. Karen Bopp introduced the new National Autism Network, a new independent organization funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada
- The Jim and Ginette Munson Autism Leadership Award was presented to Kelly Bron Johnson for outstanding advocacy.
- CALS2025 prioritized inclusion through livestreaming, barrier-reduction supports, and financial assistance for participants with lived experience.
- Tanya McLeod of The Sinneave Family Foundation closed with a call to unite research, lived experience, and policy to drive measurable change.

[Read our CALS 2025 Impact Report for more information.](#)



**“There are few opportunities in Canada for those dedicated to autism to come together. CALS has become an important meeting place.”**

**CALS2025 Attendee**



## Strengthening our Collective Voice

### Canadian Journal of Autism Equity

Launched in 2021, the Canadian Journal of Autism Equity (CJAE) is an open-access digital publication, funded by the Sinneave Family Foundation and housed by McMaster University Library. It addresses critical equity challenges within the autism community and public policy by centring Autistic voices and lived experience often missing in traditional research. In 2024/25 CJAE published two volumes:

**Vol. 4 No. 1 (2024):** Autistics and Housing highlighting the importance of access to supports in achieving housing stability and quality of life. Through a combination of research and compelling stories, this edition seeks to inform social policy and better address the housing needs of Autistic Canadians.

**Vol. 5 No. 1 (2025):** Autism and Diagnosis focused on the theme of diagnosis. It features a diverse collection of research, narrative, poetry, and art that explore the diagnostic process and its outcomes, including access to services and accommodations. The edition aims to provide insights into the experiences, challenges, and implications surrounding diagnosis.



### Barriers to Healthcare for Minority-Language Children on the Autism Spectrum

Partnering with researchers from McGill University, Université de Hearst, and Dalhousie University, this project captures the lived experiences of people on the spectrum and their families who don't speak the language of the majority in their communities while getting autism services and supports.

*"Autism Alliance of Canada has been a key partner on this project's research team from its inception. This ongoing partnership ensures that the voices and the lived experiences of autistic individuals and their families guide our project and that its findings directly inform policy. Together, we aim to make healthcare more inclusive, culturally responsive, and equitable."*

- Myriam L. H. Beauchamp, MS ORT/SLP, PhD,  
Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa

### Lived Experience of Black Youth-Led Collective of Racialized and Neurodiverse Youth and Adults, with Employment in Canada

Launched in 2024 with funding from Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA) through the New Frontiers in Research Fund – Transformation, this project is a collaboration with the Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice. It explores the employment experiences of a Black youth-led collective of racialized and neurodiverse youth and adults in Canada. A testimonial video series will challenge myths about hiring Autistic and racialized youth, highlighting intersectional barriers. The series will be accompanied by an updated resource list to support inclusive hiring by employers and agencies.

### Expanding the Francophone Collective Voice

Autism Alliance of Canada is committed to deepening its engagement with French-speaking communities through the Francophones mobilisés: unissons les voix de l'autisme à travers le pays project. With funding from Employment and Social Development Canada, we are focused on empowering Francophone organizations and individuals to promote culturally inclusive approaches that reflect the unique needs of Francophone Autistic people and their families.

### Honest Conversations Podcast Series

Shortly after the release of Canada's Autism Strategy, Autism Alliance of Canada launched Honest Conversations, a limited podcast series. Hosted by Ally Garber, a longstanding member of the Alliance, mental health advocate, and public relations specialist, the series explores the priority areas of the Strategy through

- insightful discussions with experts and community leaders, offering fresh insights into the pressing issues facing the autism community.
- 1** Screening, Diagnosis and Services
  - 2** Economic Inclusion
  - 3** Data Collection, Public Health Surveillance and Research
  - 4** Public Awareness, Understanding and Acceptance
  - 5** Tools and Resources

Listen

Listen ad-free on  
amazon music





## Strengthening our Collective Voice Ready, Willing & Able

**Over the 11 years, Ready, Willing and Able (RWA), a joint initiative of Inclusion Canada and Autism Alliance of Canada, has transformed the landscape of inclusive employment across the country for people with intellectual disabilities or on the autism spectrum.**

By fostering inclusive hiring practices and connecting employers with job seekers who have historically been overlooked, RWA is redefining what equitable workforce participation looks like in Canada.

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Ready, Willing, and Able (RWA) program, we are filled with pride and gratitude for the incredible journey we have undertaken as a community. Over the past decade, RWA has (in partnership with 200+ supported employment agencies across the country), transformed the landscape of inclusive employment in Canada; helping to shift the paradigm from a charity-based model to one that recognizes the immense value of people with intellectual disabilities and those on the autism spectrum as contributors to our economy and society.

Since its inception, RWA has facilitated over 5,000 employment outcomes for individuals on the autism spectrum or an intellectual disability. These outcomes vary across every sector and industry and were achieved without the use of wage subsidies, ensuring that these roles were competitively paid and valued. Our work with more than 20,000 employers, including 20 National Employer Partners, across the country has demonstrated time and again that inclusive hiring is not just the right thing to do – it is the smart thing to do.

**SINCE  
2014**

**250**  
Partner  
agencies

**22,874**  
Prospected  
employers

**5,027**  
Total  
employment  
outcomes

**20**  
National  
employers



**READY WILLING & ABLE PRÊTS DISPONIBLES & CAPABLES**

Inclusive employment is about much more than just finding people a job. With our innovative projects in career advancement and the engagement of Indigenous and racialized communities, Ready, Willing & Able is working to ensure all Autistic people or those with an intellectual disability have the support to build lifelong career paths. Inclusion demands that everyone have the opportunity to contribute to and derive benefit from active and meaningful participation in the Canadian labour force. We must leave no one behind.

- Dr. Jonathan Lai, Executive Director of Autism Alliance of Canada and  
Krista Carr, Executive Vice-President of Inclusion Canada



## Accelerating Research and Data

### Grounded in lived experience to drive national systems change through collaboration, evidence, and lived experience.

In 2024, we helped build a shared national policy agenda that reflects the real needs of autistic people across the country. Canada lacks data on the number of Autistic people, how their needs evolve over time, and where the most significant barriers to care, education, and inclusion exist. Without in-depth data, it's the most marginalized who fall through the cracks.

Autism Alliance of Canada has been steadily building the infrastructure for impactful, community-driven research that directly informs autism and disability policy. With early support from the Azrieli Foundation in 2021, we established foundational capacity that catalyzed over \$2 million in research and data initiatives, investments that continue to shape systems and policy research across Canada today. These partnerships with research institutions, funders, and community organizations deepen our capacity for evidence-informed policy development.

Building on this foundation, in April 2024, a \$10 million investment established the National Centre for Autism Collaboration (NCAC) to accelerate the impact of evidence-based solutions for Autistic people and their families across Canada. Led by a \$5 million leadership gift from the Joyce Family Foundation and matched by Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation, The Sinneave Family Foundation, McMaster University, and McMaster Children's Hospital, the NCAC reflects a shared commitment to building lasting infrastructure that bridges research, policy and practice.

Through the NCAC, the Alliance is co-leading research projects with leading scholars, tackling complex systems-level challenges such as national waitlists, data harmonization, and health equity. While the NCAC marks a significant achievement, it represents more than a one-time outcome: it is a key milestone in Autism Alliance of Canada's broader journey toward long-term sustainability and capacity-building. The NCAC will fuel the research and data engine of Autism Alliance of Canada, anchoring our research portfolio and providing infrastructure needed to move knowledge into action. It will also support the implementation of Canada's National Autism Strategy.

Bridging research and policy to support evidence-informed decision-making at every level

Driving accountability by co-developing transparent monitoring frameworks and implementation metrics

Scaling partnerships with government, civil society, and academic institutions to align efforts and maximize national impact.



If we want a Canada where Autistic people can live full, connected, and meaningful lives, we must start by knowing who we're serving—and act on that knowledge with fulsome policies, neuro affirming health care and education, and inclusive practices. That's why how we use autism data matters just as much as collecting it.

- Dr. Deepa Singal, Scientific Director of Autism Alliance of Canada



Discover how the NCAC is driving national change through collaboration, evidence and innovation.

## Accelerating Research and Data

### Research Pillars

#### Data & Science Hub

Empowers researchers by improving access to datasets—helping identify gaps and unlock solutions in clinical care, services, and public policy across Canada.

#### Knowledge & Evidence Synthesis Portal

Mobilizes high-impact projects that gather and translate evidence into best practices—guided by priorities identified by members of the Alliance.

#### Policy Collaborative

Creates space for members, researchers, and advocates, to unite, ensuring governments at every level are equipped with timely evidence and lived experience to inform policy.

#### Training Collaborative

Builds the next generation of leaders through fellowships, scholarships, and mentorships—opening pathways into autism research, clinical practice, and policy innovation.

### Training Collaborative

The Alliance's commitment to training the next generation of researchers and policy leaders is exemplified through the D2P Fellowship and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Health System Impact Fellowship. Together, these programs have supported over 10 trainees to date. These fellowships are intentionally structured to centre lived experience, translate findings into practice, and embed research expertise into real-world decision-making.



## 2025 Data-to-Policy Fellows



**Marwa  
Alkhalaf**



**Grace  
Bennett**



**Rachelle  
Humes**



**Jennifer  
Crookshank**



**Haley  
Clark**



**Saebom  
Park**



**Maya  
Albin**



**Nafiseh  
Kiamanesh**



National Centre for  
**Autism Collaboration**  
Centre national de  
Collaboration en autisme



**Holland Bloorview**  
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital



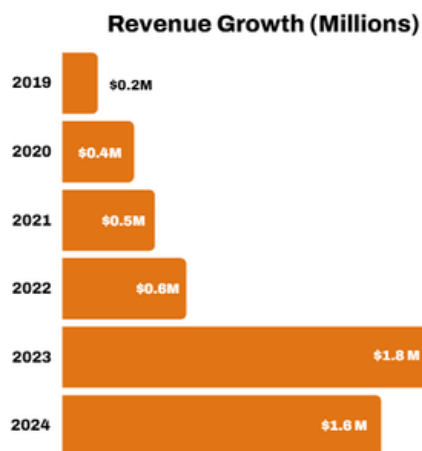


## Operational Excellence

**This year we strengthened our operations with a growing and neurodiverse staff team, building the capacity needed to support our expanding membership and national initiatives.**

By investing in efficient systems, strong governance, and professional training, we are preparing the next generation of leaders while ensuring that every resource entrusted to us is used wisely. Our operational growth has enabled us to advance government relations, influence policy, and drive systems change more effectively. Through this commitment to excellence, we are creating a trusted, sustainable foundation that allows every other pillar of our strategy to thrive.

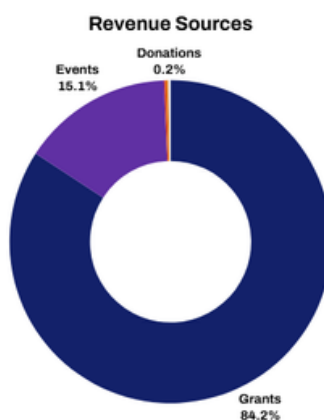
## Financial Summary



We remain committed to ensuring that every dollar we receive translates into meaningful outcomes for Autistic people and their loved ones across Canada.

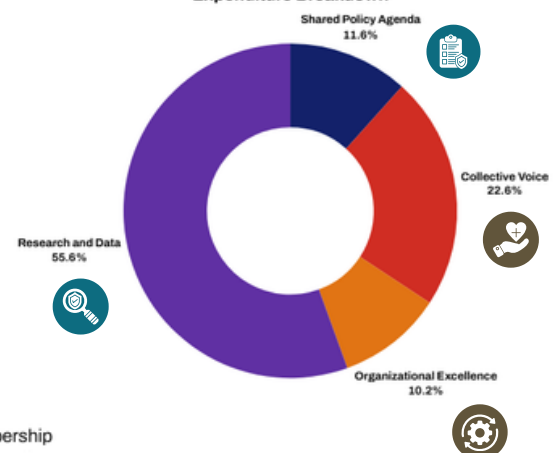
### 2024 Resource Allocation

To maximize our impact, our funding was strategically allocated:



Other revenue sources include: Membership fees, partnership support income & donations

### Expenditure Breakdown



# What's next?

Canada's Autism Strategy marks a pivotal milestone and the beginning of a new chapter. As we look to the future, Autism Alliance of Canada remains unwavering in our mission to transform the systems that impact Autistic people and their families. With trusted access to policymakers and a growing national network, we are amplifying community voices and advancing autism priorities in meaningful, measurable ways.

Through support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the newly established National Autism Network will serve as a vehicle engagement, collaboration, and coordinated action rooted in lived experience. Grounded in community priorities, the Network unites partners across the country to drive meaningful, systems-level change for Autistic people and their families.

But the work is far from done. Systemic barriers remain, and lasting change demands our collective commitment. We will focus on key areas of impact while fostering sustained engagement with parliamentarians, decision-makers, and federal officials. We look forward to continuing to shape policies that support, include, and empower Autistic people across Canada, and beyond.

We invite individuals, organizations, and allies to walk this path with us—by becoming members, partners, and champions for equity and inclusion.

The momentum is real. The vision is bold. And the future depends on what we do together—starting now.



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E-mail us  
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