

## **One in 66 Canadian children and youth are on the autism spectrum**

### **New data underscores the urgent need for services and a synchronized national strategy**

March 29, 2018 (Bothwell, ON) – Autism Canada welcomes the release of the Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) prevalence rates.

The report finds that 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth ages five to 17 are on the autism spectrum. The finding is based on analysis of 2015 data supplied by six provinces and one territory.

"1 in 66, the number released in the PHAC report, reflects what we're witnessing in the autism community – that the prevalence of autism is on the rise. Regardless if this increase is due to better diagnostics, increased awareness or increased incidence, there is an urgent need for a national autism strategy. This long-awaited Canadian data will be invaluable for planning and budgeting for services to support Canadians living with autism," says Laurie Mawlam, Executive Director at Autism Canada.

"For too long, Canadian organizations and policy-makers have been operating without a clear line of sight on the true magnitude of the situation. We've been relying on American data as our only source of quantitative information," adds Mawlam.

Wait lists for essential services across the country and in every province and territory in Canada highlight that autism families are not getting the supports they need to flourish.

"It has been 11 years since the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology released their report, Pay Now or Pay Later – Autism Families in Crisis. While the most recent federal budget announcement begins to address some of the action items recommended in that report, there is still much more work to be done," adds Mawlam.

Studies have shown that access to early interventions, based on the scientifically proven principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), speech and occupational therapies, and other evidence-based therapies provide positive results in cognitive development, language and communication, as well as social and emotional development. Ultimately, these positive results decrease the need for ongoing intensive supports into adulthood.

"The time is now for the federal government to work with provincial and territorial governments to create a national autism strategy," says Dermot Cleary, Board Chair of Autism Canada. "There are critical shortfalls for autistics, not only for early interventions, but for adults on the spectrum in the areas of education, employment, medical care and housing."

On April 2, 2018 – World Autism Awareness Day – Autism Canada will be releasing its report Aging and Autism: A Think Tank Round Table. The report presents a summary of findings from a recent conference of international academics, researchers and clinicians on autism in later life.



### **About Autism Canada**

Autism Canada is the only autism advocacy organization with a national perspective on the issues currently facing those with autism spectrum disorder, their families and other stakeholders. We work collaboratively to share expertise, build consensus and help inform public policy and research. In addition to encouraging the sharing of best practices across provincial and territorial boundaries, Autism Canada actively promotes national dialogue on the most effective strategies for building equitable access to funding and services.

To learn more, please visit [www.autismcanada.org](http://www.autismcanada.org).

### **About Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or autism, is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder causing most individuals to experience communication problems, difficulty with social interactions and a tendency to repeat specific patterns of behaviour. There is also a markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests. With an estimated 1 in 66 children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, it is the most commonly diagnosed neurodevelopmental condition.

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