

## **First-of-its-kind nationwide program launched to help those with autism to communicate effectively in an emergency**

### **Autism Canada and MedicAlert Foundation Canada team up to launch MedicAlert Autism Program**

April 10, 2018 (Toronto, ON) – Autism Canada and MedicAlert Foundation Canada have partnered to create the MedicAlert Autism Program, designed specifically to support Canadians on the autism spectrum.

Autism isn't always recognizable to those who don't know the signs, and this can make those on the spectrum particularly vulnerable in an emergency situation, especially when communication is hindered or not possible. The MedicAlert Autism Program is the only nationwide program designed to be a voice for autistics who find themselves unable to communicate effectively in these situations.

The program is unique in that the MedicAlert subscriber profile includes information about the person's routines, anxiety triggers and de-escalation techniques – all can be accessible to emergency responders within seconds – so emergency responders can make better decisions to help the person at time of need.

"We are very pleased to be partnering with Autism Canada so that the autism community can be better served," says Robert Ridge, President & CEO of MedicAlert Foundation Canada. "Capturing and communicating this critical information is invaluable for emergency responders and will change their ability to quickly assist people with autism and help save lives."

In addition, emergency responders and police will be trained to, at-a-glance, recognize a situation involving an autistic individual because of the unique blue and red emblem created specifically for the MedicAlert Autism Program.

"Regardless of the subscriber's age or where they fall on the spectrum, this program will be vital to supporting autistics in an emergency situation," says Dermot Cleary, Autism Canada Board Chair. "The uniquely colored emblem will become an instantly recognizable symbol for autism among emergency responders and will help give a voice to those with autism when they need it most."

Dr. Yona Lunsky, Senior Scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), whose research has focused on crises and emergencies in the autism community, says "We need a simple mechanism, like this program, that we can make widely available that alerts others in an emergency to the needs of somebody who, under stress, has difficulties communicating their needs. The first step is flagging these needs and the next step is responding accordingly, using this additional information to adapt emergency responses."

To learn more about the MedicAlert Autism Program, please visit [medicalert.ca/autism](http://medicalert.ca/autism).



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**About Autism:**

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. With an estimated 1 in 66 children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, it is the most commonly diagnosed neurodevelopmental condition.

**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. Together with our counterparts, we collaboratively work 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 about Autism Canada, visit [autismcanada.org](http://autismcanada.org)

**About MedicAlert Foundation Canada**

MedicAlert Foundation Canada (MAFCA) is the largest membership-based registered charity in Canada and it is the leading provider of emergency medical information services. MedicAlert's mission is to ensure that all Canadians have access to high-quality health information at time of need, and has protected more than one million Canadians since 1961.

MedicAlert® is backed by robust electronic health records maintained by medically trained professionals, a state-of-the-art secure database, and a 24/7 Emergency Hotline that answers calls from emergency responder personnel in 140 languages within an average of 5 seconds, all linked to customized identification products for Canadians with medical conditions and special needs. Universally recognized and respected, MedicAlert speaks for you, when you can't™.

Learn more about MedicAlert, how it works, and how you or a loved one can sign up to a service plan by visiting [medicalert.ca](http://medicalert.ca) or calling 1.877.217.7448.