



Effective Election Advocacy

At all times, it is important for decision makers to hear a variety of perspectives. However, the leadup to a provincial election is a critical time to raise our collective voices and advocate to government to help inform local and provincial public policy, programs, and supports as they relate to the lived experiences of autistic children, youth, adults, and families across Ontario.

Starting a conversation with your municipal, provincial, and federal government representatives is an important part of advocacy. These conversations will help you see where they stand on supports for people on the autism spectrum in their early years, the school years, and into adulthood.



Election Advocacy Looks Like:

- Speaking up for the issues that matter to you.
- Asking for what is needed.
- Knowing your rights and responsibilities.
- Using the resources that are available to you.
- Encouraging others to do the same!
Voting is one of the most important and effective ways to have our voices heard.



How to Vote

elections.on.ca

Visit the Elections Ontario website for information on how, where, and when to vote.

ADVOCATING FOR **AUTISTIC ADULTS**

The Ontario Provincial Election is a critical opportunity to engage with political parties and candidates to secure their support in addressing the critical gaps that continue to confront services and supports for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families who depend on them across the province.

Let's work together to ensure that supports and services for autistic adults are on the agenda this provincial election.

Autism Ontario's election campaign encourages all provincial political parties to commit to addressing the following key issues and to share in our vision for a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism.



ADVOCATING FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS

1. HOUSING

Work to create innovative approaches to increase the supply of affordable, supportive housing options for autistic adults.



2. EMPLOYMENT

Invest in programs for autistic adults that focus on employment, life skills, and social skills to prepare, successfully enter into, and maintain fulfilling employment. Invest in inclusion by promoting neurodiversity in the workplace and supporting leadership through education.

3. TRANSITIONS

Invest in expanded access to transition services for youth beyond the age of 18, adults, and seniors that reflect life transitions across the life course.



4. MENTAL HEALTH

Adequately fund and implement an integrated response to the delivery of mental health services that underpin the social and economic wellbeing of autistic individuals.

KEY ELECTION DISCUSSION TOPIC: **HOUSING**

Autistic adults[1] face a housing crisis in many provinces, and population-based trends increasingly describe them as at-risk for food and shelter insecurity and homelessness.

They, and their families, face two housing crisis “cliffs”: 1) at the transition into adulthood (age 18–30 years) there is a lack of access to affordable housing and 2) at the transition into seniorhood (50–55 years), when they need to sustain their housing once their original primary caregivers become too old to provide care, pass away, or when a broader circle of support is lacking. Falling off either of these cliffs results in a precarious slide into a housing crisis. This issue is largely invisible, as individual family units continually cobble together makeshift, one-off stop-gap solutions.



In Canada, 1 in 66 persons is diagnosed with autism[2], denoting a significant population who experience, or will experience, barriers to securing stable and suitable housing. Research shows that most people with autism live at home well into adulthood, and often middle age, with their family functioning as their fundamental source of support; are much more likely to be on social assistance; and have the poorest employment outcomes of people with disabilities[3].

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability disproportionately affects the autistic adult population. Most autistic adults are living on social assistance and so are living close to poverty.

Because of eligibility requirements, government-funded Developmental Services may not explicitly support autistic individuals, where approximately only 38% of autistics qualify for government-funded support through developmental services[4]. The majority of autistic adults struggle to find a quality home, contributing to inadequate support and unsuitable living environments that lead to more intensive, and costlier, downstream support.

Housing for autistic adults continues to be segregated and expensive. People on the autism spectrum require affordable, safe, supported residences, where they are a meaningful part of their communities.

Housing opportunities must consider the individual's existing community and offer the necessary supports to encourage inclusion and integration in the broader community.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES:

1. How would your party support autistic adults in accessing and maintaining affordable and inclusive housing best suited to their needs?
2. If elected, what kinds of inclusive and supportive housing initiatives would your party fund?
3. If elected, what kinds of inclusive and supportive housing initiatives would your party fund?



KEY ELECTION DISCUSSION TOPIC: **EMPLOYMENT**



Despite being significantly qualified for work, autistic individuals remain unemployed or underemployed. In Ontario, most autistic adults (58%) rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program as their primary source of income[5].

Autistic adults have the poorest employment outcomes of those with disabilities. Only 25% are employed and only 6% are competitively employed[6]. Most earn less than the national minimum hourly wage, endure extended periods of joblessness and frequently shuffle between positions, further diminishing their housing prospects.

After high school, there is little support for youth looking to access post-secondary education or employment opportunities.

Diversifying a workforce by employing people on the spectrum is an opportunity for businesses to invest in creating accessible environments and for employers to develop their abilities to support and develop a workforce filled with potential.

Bill 148 ended the on-the-job training exemption currently being offered to many people with developmental disabilities and instead funds the provision of this training exclusively through colleges and universities. This creates a barrier for adults on the spectrum who are not attending post-secondary education and negatively impacts autistic adults who are seeking or maintaining their employment.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES:

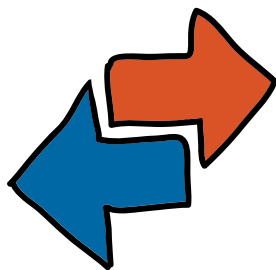
1. How would your party encourage diversity in the workforce so that businesses can hire and support people on the autism spectrum?
2. If elected, how would your party expand employment supports and programs for autistic youth and adults?



KEY ELECTION DISCUSSION TOPIC: **TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

Autism doesn't go away in adulthood, and the system must be responsive to the needs of youth transitioning into adulthood. After high school, there is little support for youth looking to access post-secondary education or employment opportunities.

Transition planning for individuals on the autism spectrum needs to start sooner to help ease the shift to adulthood. Public policy development can support the needs of autistic youth in their transition to adulthood.



Current services for adults, funded through the developmental services system, are designed for people with an intellectual disability (IQ lower than 70).

Up to 50% of autistic individuals do not have an intellectual disability, yet their needs for support are as great as autistic individuals with an intellectual disability[7].

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES:

1. How would your party support autistic youth in the transition to adulthood so they can successfully navigate employment, housing, and education needs?
2. If elected, what kinds of inclusive and supportive transition to adulthood services and supports would your party fund?
3. How does your party propose making changes to our current system to accommodate the needs of autistic youth who do not have intellectual disabilities during the transition to adulthood?



KEY ELECTION DISCUSSION TOPIC: **MENTAL HEALTH**

Autistic people are at increased risk of developing mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression, which may result from the challenges of growing up in a non-autistic world[8].

Mental health challenges in autistic youth and adults can have a marked effect on their quality of life. Anxiety disorders and mood disorders occur at a higher rate in autistic individuals compared to the general population. However, the dearth of services for youth and adults on the spectrum means that mental health issues may not be adequately addressed[9].



Some mental health services may turn away autistic people because they have an autism diagnosis.

It is possible that professionals may not notice or see difficulties as mental health problems when a person has an autism label, or they may not listen to what autistic people are telling them. This can greatly affect mental health.[10]

Stigma & Seeking Support

Stigma is a crucial factor why some autistic people may not seek help.

Autistic people may not seek help because of a fear of being stigmatized by other people, including by service providers. Learning about mental health can address the mental health stigma in youth and adults.[11]

Generally, there are few mental health supports for autistic people and there is a lot of inconsistency, which leads to a lot of confusion for autistic people and their family members. Services are often fragmented, which means they are provided separately from each other and may not know what other services are doing[12].



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES:

1. What is your party's plan to make mental health a key priority and support better mental health outcomes for autistic youth and adults?
2. How will your party fund and implement an integrated response to the delivery of mental health services that underpin the social and economic wellbeing of autistic individuals?
3. What does a supportive, inclusive Ontario that supports autistic Ontarians' mental health look like?



REFERENCES

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