



2023-2024

# Annual Report

AutismONTARIO

50<sup>TH</sup>

ANNIVERSARY



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## A Message From Our Chief Executive Officer & Board President

What a year it has been! As we celebrate 50 years, we've been reflecting on the thousands of Ontario families who have brought us from 1973 to today. At the core of all the volunteer hours, support, education, and advocacy are relationships and meaningful connections — the kind that provide just the right support at exactly the right time. This often happens from parent-to-parent, autistic youth to autistic adult, and within the communities across our vast province. Bob Hart, one of Autism Ontario's founding members, reflected on those early days of Autism Ontario, stating, "To realize that we weren't isolated, that there is strength in numbers" — and that has been a lifeline for fifty years.

Building on our vision of "Best Life, Better World, Making Autism Matter," we've had over 100,000 supportive conversations with caregivers and families, in over 30 languages, at over 1,200 events where over 60,000 people showed up to connect, participate, and feel included. Almost all of our staff work remotely, connecting with people online, and helping them to navigate service systems. We are so excited about the development of resources that are timely, relevant, and evidence-informed for families, adults, and the professionals who support them.

This past year, in partnership with CMHO, we trained thousands of professionals on how to support autistic children and youth who also face mental health challenges. In our Regions, we are expanding the capacity of our dedicated volunteer SEAC representatives to advocate for students and their families within their local school boards. Through Autism Ontario, adults and caregivers have shared how our programs have positively impacted their lives, helping them navigate parenting and live life to the fullest.

Autism Ontario's Board of Directors has been focused on our mandate to service across the lifecourse. We've delved deep into discussions about the lack of supports and services for autistic adults and seniors, particularly in areas such as housing, employment, and independent living. We are also aware and mindful of the inequities our young families sometimes face. We continue to be dedicated to all individuals and families navigating the environment of neurodiversity, and we'll continue to advocate for their voices to be heard.

We hope you will join us for the next 50 years. We can't do the work without you - our volunteers, partners, and supporters. You make Autism Matter!



**Margaret Spoelstra**  
CEO, Autism Ontario

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Spoelstra".



**Lisa Vezeau-Allen**  
2023-2024 Board President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L Vezeau-Allen".

## Autism Ontario 50th Anniversary

Autism Ontario marked its 50th anniversary by hosting celebratory events for families throughout the province. Each region enjoyed one special event commemorating this milestone. Our events team collaborated with partners to add unique 50th anniversary touches to each gathering. Autism Ontario staff members joined the celebrations, distributing exclusive anniversary merchandise and connecting with numerous families across Ontario.

- **North** – 2 Autism Ontario exclusive cruises for over 150 autistic children and their families from Sudbury and surrounding area.
- **East** - Over 200 people cheered on the Ottawa Red Blacks
- **Central** – Over 1000 people were given the opportunity to visit Canada’s Wonderland where we had exclusive use of Planet Snoopy for 1 hour, character meet and greets and a lunch area to meet up with other families.
- **West** – Relaxed performance of Wrinkle in Time at Stratford theatre, and a Great Wolf Lodge exclusive offer.
- **Toronto** – We capped off our 50th with a weekend celebration at Ripley’s Aquarium. Ripley’s team generously gave us exclusive use for 3 hours on both days, and donated almost 2000 tickets so we could extend this opportunity across the province. Over 30 Autism Ontario staff were on site both days as well as dignitaries including, Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow and Ontario Minister Michael Parsa.



# Welcome to **Autism**MONTARIO

## Who We Are

A charitable organization founded in 1973. We have a history of over 50 years supporting, representing, and advocating for all autistic individuals across the province regardless of race, ethnicity, income, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

## What We Do

We provide information on autism, support autism research, and implement programs and services for the autism community to address the issues that affect Ontarians with autism, their families, and their caregivers. The work we do helps all autistic individuals and families in their communities have access to meaningful supports, information, and connections so they are equitably and seamlessly supported across their life course.



We are guided by a Board of Directors with 10 diverse members - people on the autism spectrum, parents, caregivers, siblings of autistic people, and professionals.



We are Ontario's #1 source of information and referral on autism and one of the largest collective voices representing the autism community.



7 regions supporting people on the autism spectrum and their families across the province.



## Our Vision

Best Life, Better World, Making Autism Matter!

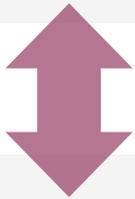
## Our Mission

Creating a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism.

Advocacy into  
action

Services and  
Supports Across  
the Lifecourse

Organizational  
Health



### ENDS Level 1:

Because Autism Ontario exists: Individuals and families in their communities are equitably and seamlessly supported across the life course.

### ENDS Level 2.1:

Individuals, families and communities have meaningful supports, information and connections.

### ENDS Level 2.2:

Information/knowledge is created, curated and mobilized that is trustworthy, timely and relevant.

## Services We Offer

- Community events
- CommunityConnect Portal
- OAP Provider List
- Provincial newsletter
- Regional newsletters
- Adult programs
- Caregiver support groups
- French Language Services
- Regional supports
- Learning and positive advocacy resources
- Webinars and workshops
- Child and family supports
- March Break funding
- Summer support funding

## Our CARE Values

### COLLABORATION

We believe in the power of working side by side with individuals, families, and communities to make informed choices about autism.

C

### ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others responsible for achieving successful outcomes through high standards of integrity and fiscal responsibility.

A

### RESPECT

We value equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we listen to understand.

R

### EVIDENCE-INFORMED

We use and create knowledge to guide our decisions and work.

E





## Board of Directors

Autism Ontario is guided by an elected Board of Directors comprising parents, autistic adults, and respected professionals. They provide governance, expertise, and direction to the organization on a volunteer basis.

- Lisa Vezeau-Allen, President
- Audrey Susin, Vice Chair
- Dr. Barry Bruce, Treasurer
- Tanya Rocca, Secretary
- Kim Moore, Past Chair
- David Moloney
- Desmond O'Connor
- Dr. Hadley S. Koltun, Ph.D., C.Psych, Psychologist
- Sophia Tsouluhas
- Susan Boehnke, PhD

## Land Acknowledgment

The Autism Ontario provincial office is located in Toronto, which is on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties, signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

We recognize, however, that our staff, volunteers, members, and the wider community are located all over the province on different Treaty lands and unceded territories.. It is important to recognize that wherever we are in Ontario, we are located on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples dating back to time immemorial.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.



*"It is extremely rewarding, both professionally and personally, to work at Autism Ontario. Autism Ontario has many dedicated, compassionate, knowledgeable, and inclusive professionals who put people with autism and their families at the forefront of supports and services. I'm grateful to be part of this community!"*

- Heather Hartley, Care Coordinator - Toronto Region

## Language Statement

At Autism Ontario, we recognize that language is powerful. We understand that the language we use can educate, frame ideas and perspectives, and empower, but it can also harm and stigmatize [1].

The use of referential language, as it relates to autism, is a sensitive, important, and ongoing conversation.

Identity-first language reflects the belief that being autistic is important to a person's identity. Person-first language, including phrases such as "living with autism," reflects the idea that autism can be separated from a person. Results from a recent survey of over 7,000 autistic people suggest that approximately 90% of autistic people prefer identity-first language, with a smaller proportion preferring person-first language [5].

According to the Autism Alliance of Canada, there is a growing body of scientific and community literature documenting the dislike — among autistic individuals — of person-first language and its potential for increasing stigma [6]. Disability scholars have also objected to the use of person-first language [7].

Although we acknowledge that there are varying beliefs within the autistic community about which language standards are 'correct,' based on the existing literature on language preferences in the autistic community, Autism Ontario recommends using identity-first language (i.e., autistic person).

The clinical model defines autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder as a lifelong

neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people and the world around them.

The Public Health Agency of Canada references the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) in classifying autism as a disorder [2]. However, many autistic people prefer the terms neurological "difference" or "condition," which remove the negative associations with the word "disorder" [3].

At Autism Ontario, our goal is to support and advocate alongside all autistic individuals across the province, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, religion, or gender identity. We aim to actively and deliberately listen to and include all autistic community members to guide our choices relating to language.

We understand that many individuals in the autistic community prefer certain types of referential language [4], such as identity-first language ("autistic person" or "autist") over person-first language (the terms "person with autism" or "person on the autism spectrum" are often used interchangeably).

**It is important to understand that each person may have a different preference for how they would like to be identified [8]. Autonomy and self-determination are the most important aspects to consider when talking about autism [9]. It is often best to ask an individual directly if they are comfortable telling you how they would prefer to be identified.**

To be inclusive, respectful, and representative of the many people within our diverse community [10], we will use identity-first and person-first referential language. We acknowledge that the use of language evolves rapidly and will continue to be an ongoing discussion within the autism community.

## Autism Ontario: A Year in Review

### Our Community

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Autism Ontario had **227 full-time staff** supporting the autism community.



There are **165 active volunteers** who help with various activities and initiatives across the province.

### Supporting Families

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**The Adult Services Team connected** with approximately **600 individuals** - the majority of those calls were with **autistic adults** or **caregivers**.



We had **104,795 Service Navigation** conversations.



**90% of webinar attendees** felt that the **content of the presentation was useful**.

### Workshops, Webinars & Events

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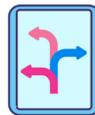
We **hosted 1175 events and programs** for **60,558 attendees**, including **222 bilingual** and **74 French** events.



**169** autistic adults **registered** for the **Personal Finance Module**.



We **hosted 18 webinars** and **10 workshops**.



**66** parents/caregivers of autistic youth participated in the **Journey to Adulthood Program**.

### Awards, Funding & Scholarships

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We **awarded 16 scholarships to individuals in the autism community** entering the first year of a post-secondary program.



We reimbursed **33 autistic adults through the Building Brighter Futures fund** for expenses related to diverse vocational, educational, and leisure activities. **108 applications were received**.



We **received 124 scholarship applications**.



We **reimbursed 4838 children** for March Break funding supports and **450 children** for summer funding supports.



## Advocacy into Action

### Indigenous Supports

In partnership with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centre's, we hired two Indigenous Supports – Care Coordinators (IS-CC) to collaborate with the Barrie Native Friendship Centre and the United Native Friendship Centre (Fort Frances) to support families that have a child with autism. We anticipate onboarding another IS-CC for the Odawa Native Friendship Centre in the coming months.

The unique support that these positions will provide to the Indigenous families that connect, will be tailored to their needs and the communities they reside in. We look forward to building relationships with these communities and listening to what supports they need to best serve their families.

### Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

SEAC representatives are vital links between Autism Ontario, school boards, and families, continuing our tradition of turning advocacy into action through systemic advocacy at the school board level. They empower families to confidently advocate for their children's needs by sharing their knowledge of board programs and policies. Their efforts have raised awareness of Autism Ontario, leading to increased collaboration with other organizations, invitations to join board committees and consultations, and a growing demand for information and support from school boards and families.



59 SEAC Reps covering 37 school boards



*"We got together a group of parents who had all been told to put our children in institutions. We had a solid core people say 'no we're not going to do that.'"*

- Bob Hart, Founding Board Member



## Autism and Mental Health Training Program

In 2023, CMHO, in collaboration with Autism Ontario and Dr. Jonathan Weiss, progressed the provincial autism and mental health training program with the introduction of advanced and booster sessions.

- 12 advanced training sessions which included 5 specialized advanced sessions for autism providers and 7 for mental health providers. Two additional last chance foundational training were also offered.
- A total of 17 booster sessions were delivered across various topics requested by providers, with 11 sessions in English and 6 in French.

"This was such a helpful training with an engaging and welcoming instructor. I am just starting my journey of learning more about ASD within my profession, and this training provided practical and creative tools I can apply moving forward. Thank you so much."



6,773 Participants for Foundational and Advanced Training

## AIDE

Autism Ontario continues to partner with the Autism and/or Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network (AIDE Canada). AIDE Canada is a tool to connect members of the community to the information and resources they need. AIDE Canada has 6 hubs across Canada; Autism Ontario is the Ontario Hub. Through this partnership, we deliver credible, reliable, and evidence-informed resources in an unbiased and accessible way.

This year, the Ontario Hub completed 4 major projects – a late diagnosis self-led course, a toolkit on how to be an ally, an animated video about describing an autism diagnosis to a child, and a 3-part extensive toolkit about rural mental health.

Along with those project, the Ontario Hub put together 5 webinars that discussed topics that families really asked for - ADHD & Autism, Empowering autistic parents who have autistic children, Estate planning with Pooran Law, Peer to peer support, and Masking and mental health.



*"Autism Ontario works towards a multifaceted approach of not just making autism matter, but moving the needle towards how to truly support people on the autism spectrum."*

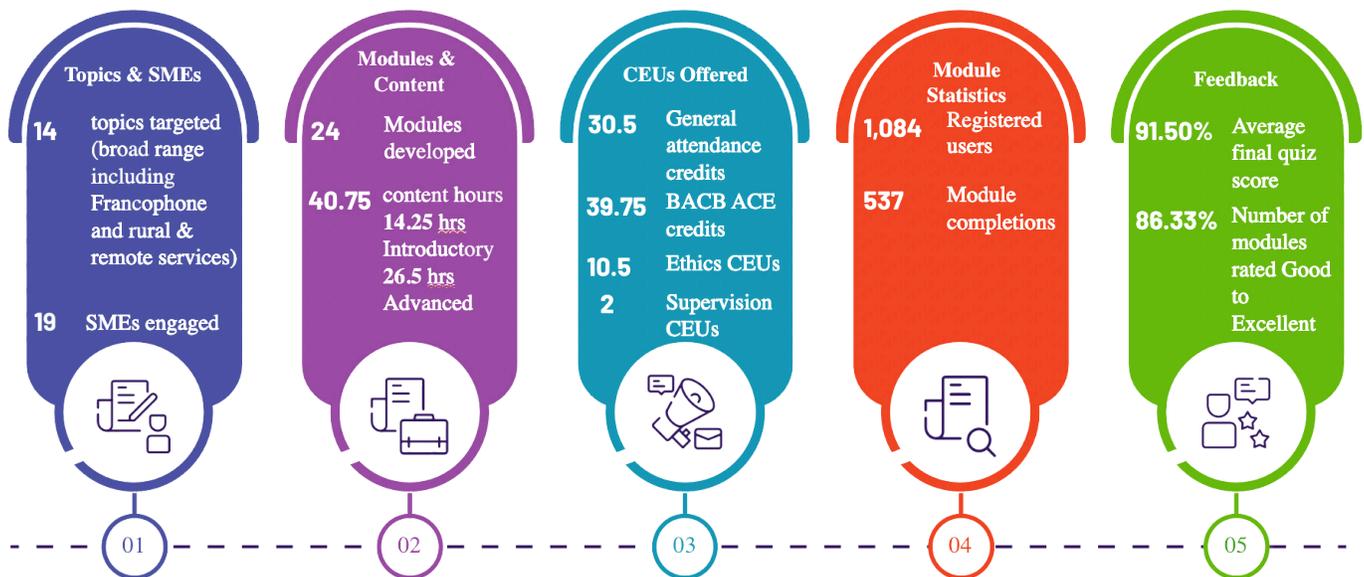
- David Moloney, Current Board Member



## Workforce Capacity Grant

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' (MCCSS), Ontario Autism Program Workforce Capacity Grant project was initiated to address the provincial capacity issues with the delivery of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) services. This project aimed to increase the competencies of behaviour analysts in Ontario by offering 24 training modules created by leading experts in the field. Particular attention was paid to increasing the skills of participants throughout Ontario who worked in rural and remote areas, worked with Indigenous autistics and their families, as well as those who worked with the Francophone population.

There are currently approximately 1,800 ABA professionals working in Ontario and the project saw an enrolment of 1,084 individuals across Ontario including 64 individuals providing services in rural and remote areas, 135 individuals providing services to Indigenous clients/families, and 21 individuals providing services to Francophone families. At project reporting, 537 modules were successfully completed with over 90% of participants demonstrating an increase in knowledge.



## Community Leadership Collaborations

Autism Ontario places importance on community connections working collaboratively with other leaders to inform and influence autism knowledge and program focus in Ontario. We are involved with Seneca College Behavioural Sciences Program Advisory Committee (PAC), Mohawk College Autism and Behavioural Science Program Advisory Committee (PAC), the Province of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Disorders Network Patient/Participant Advisory Committee (POND PAC), Peel Autism Collaborative, ODSP Action Coalition, RDSP Action Coalition of Ontario, and York Community Autism Partnership.



## Media Releases



Autism Ontario supported the regulation of Behaviour Analysts to ensure that families receive high-quality care from qualified professionals



Autism Ontario expressed concern over the use of autism as a defense strategy in recent criminal trials. We opposed the association of autism with criminal behavior, arguing that it should not be used to evade responsibility and calling for a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing criminal actions



Autism Ontario supported the Doan family in their HRTO complaint against Kismutt Dog Rescue. The Tribunal found that the rescue engaged in discriminatory practices and created a negative environment for autistic individuals, marking a significant victory against ableism and setting a precedent for future cases.



Autism Ontario celebrated a momentous occasion with an extraordinary event at Ripley's Aquarium in honour of its 50th anniversary. The event, held on November 4th, witnessed an incredible turnout, with nearly 1,600 enthusiastic attendees, including 30 Autism Ontario staff members, who all embraced and enjoyed this memorable experience.

## OAP Provider List

The OAP Provider List is an online listing of Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Clinical Supervisors of behavioural services for children and youth with autism. It is a resource that Ontario families can use to search for, select, and confirm the qualifications of those providing services funded by the Ontario Autism Program.



796 verified providers



*"Autism Ontario is the voice of the autism community, for those who aren't heard, for parents who fight for their children, young and old, and for those who are worn out by the chronicity of the fight. Fifty years strong. Many more ahead!"*

- Suzanne Murphy, French Language Services Consultant



## Services and Supports Across the Lifecourse

### AccessOAP

This year we continued our partnership with Accerta Services Inc., McMaster University (Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis ((CHEPA)) and the Offord Centre for Child Studies), and Serefin to deliver Care Coordination services to families through AccessOAP. This collaboration, funded by the Government of Ontario, will support children, youth, and their families access autism services across the province.

This partnership combines profound knowledge of autism services across Ontario, healthcare planning, clinical insight, and expert care-coordination with technical know-how in intake, registration, and reconciliation of payments. Families are at the centre of everything we do.

“To the entire OAP Care Coordination Team, I extend my heartfelt appreciation for the collective effort and tireless dedication you consistently demonstrate. Your collaborative approach and seamless coordination have made navigating through challenges much more manageable, and we are deeply grateful for your ongoing support.

In a world where genuine care and empathy can sometimes feel scarce, the OAP team shines brightly as a beacon of hope and compassion. Your unwavering dedication to help make our lives easier are really appreciated.”



*"From ten summers working at Autism Ontario's summer camp, it feels like I have now come full circle by gaining a full-time role at Autism Ontario.*

*I couldn't be happier to further my passion in supporting autistic individuals and their families!"*

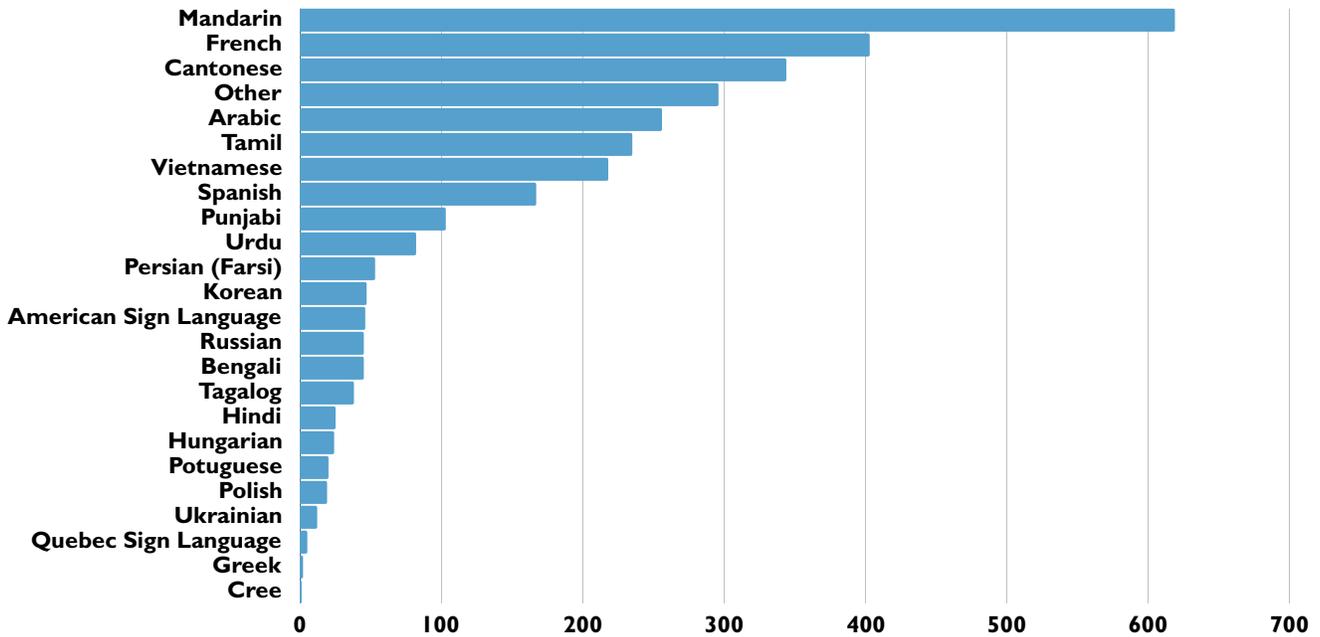
-Alex Gardner, Care Coordinator - Central Region



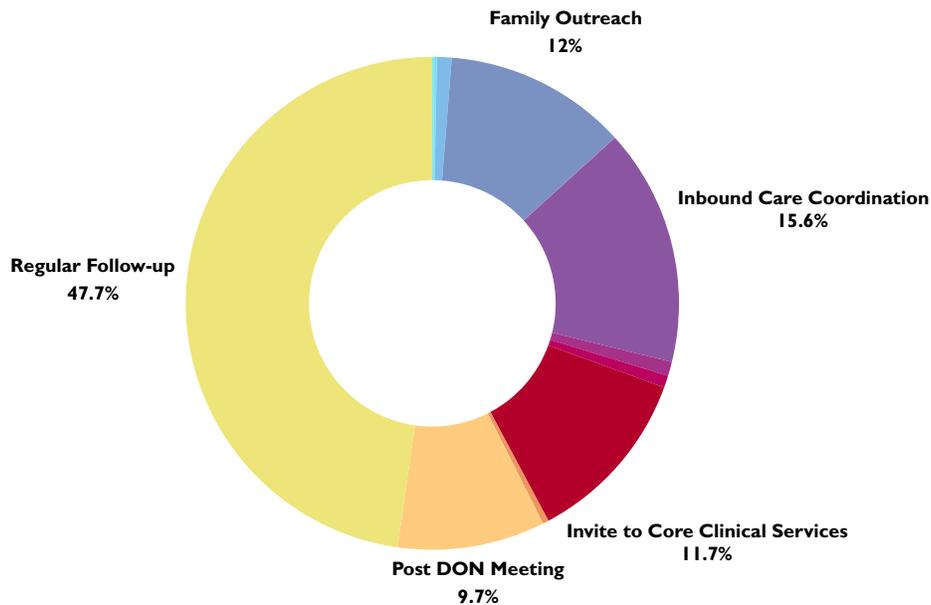
## AccessOAP

Our team of Care Coordinators can offer support to families in their preferred languages, we currently have staff that can speak 23 unique languages.

### Language Based Supports: 3,105



### Service Navigation Conversations: 104,795



\*Note: These are voice and video conversations; does not include electronic messages.



## French Language Services

Autism Ontario is committed to providing French language services (FLS) of superior quality across the province. Recognizing that there are Francophones living with or touched by autism in every area of the province and driven by its commitment to serve the entire autism community in Ontario, Autism Ontario’s French language services extend across the entire province. Autism Ontario engages with the Francophone autism community to better understand and advocate for its needs.

In 2023-2024, the Francophone community across the province had access to Autism Ontario’s 8 full-time FLS staff who offered support through various French programming and services. In total, 1,172 Francophone families participated in events, workshops and webinars.



7 Support Groups



13 Workshops and Webinars



14 Information sessions



74 Recreational Events for families



«Autisme Ontario est plus qu'une organisation pour moi, c'est une famille et une communauté. C'est un endroit où je peux me sentir à l'aise, respecté et compris. Nous sommes un, nous sommes unis, pour aider les enfants, les adultes et les familles qui sont touchées par l'autisme. Je suis fier de faire partie d'une agence aussi exceptionnelle. Félicitations, voici encore pour un autre 50 ans!»

- Mélanie Laurin, Superviseure des services en français



## Webinars

We are proud to have delivered 18 impactful webinars this fiscal year, reaching an audience of 13,334 people within our community. The provincial webinars collectively reached 6,893 individuals across the community, with 2,416 participants attending the presentations live.

Fulfilling our commitment to providing support across the lifespan, we focused on amplifying autistic voices and delivering content on a wide range of topics, such as:

<a href="#"><u>Healthy Sexuality from Puberty to Adulthood</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Understanding Autistic Burnout, Inertia, Meltdown, and Shutdown (BIMS)</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Indigenous Perspectives on Building Inclusive Autism Practices</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Navigating Special Education</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Exploring and Engaging Autistic People's Experiences with Applied Behaviour Analysis</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Autism, Sexuality, and the Law</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Leveraging Special Interests for Everyday Enrichment</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Navigating the Unique Experiences and Needs of Autistic Girls and Women</u></a>

## Workshops

Autism Ontario’s Education and Training team hosted 10 workshops, reaching 881 caregivers. These small group sessions give attendees greater access to subject matter experts and enable more opportunities for conversations and connections. The topics were carefully chosen based on community feedback, addressing the challenges, interests, and requests from our audience.

Workshops that were offered this year included:

- Caring for the Caregiver
- The No-Sleep Club – An Interactive Workshop About Sleep
- Understanding Challenging Behaviour
- Let’s Talk Teen Mental Health Workshop
- ‘Feel Better Box’- A toolkit for school-aged children with anxiety and autism
- ABA and SLP planning for adolescence and adulthood
- Building Connections: Introduction to Early Childhood Mental Health
- "What's in your backpack?": Back to School Mental Health Strategies and Supports for Kids and Teens
- “Paperwork Party” – Monthly Workshop

Autism Ontario provided caregivers of autistic children the opportunity to attend a monthly “Paperwork Party” workshop, which aimed to support caregivers in completing an application for Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD) or an application for Special Services at Home (SSAH). These workshops were offered 11 times, reaching 536 people.



## Regional Programs and Events

The program and events teams in our regions routinely engage with businesses, both large and small, to improve sensory inclusivity. In the past year, the Events and Outreach team forged numerous distinctive partnerships, resulting in expanded services for our families. The venues mentioned below have worked with our events and occasionally education teams to educate their staff and offer consistent opportunities for people with autism and other neurodiverse individuals. Below are a few highlights.

- The CN Tower now offers monthly sensory inclusive experiences.
- Dave and Busters in Oakville and Vaughan offer sensory inclusive times at their venues
- The Shaw theatre, Stratford theatre, London's Grand Theatre and other smaller community theatres offer relaxed performances in partnership with Autism Ontario.



1175 Events  
and Programs



60,000 Total Attendees



*"Thank you for providing a multi-week opportunity for my newly diagnosed daughter; we know we will wait years for support, so we are grateful for this program.*

*I love watching her grow with peers and speaking with the staff each week."*

*South Region Family*



## Caregiver Supports

### CARES

The CARES Caregiver Support Program is an innovative group-based intervention targeting the social, emotional, and psychological challenges that can arise among caregivers of children with autism. The CARES program provides a safe space for caregivers to share their experiences and develop a sense of shared identity as caregivers. **We ran 14 Cares Groups supporting 89 caregivers.** In our January 2024 feedback 100% of participants reported they would definitely recommend the CARES program.

“I really found this a valuable program. It helped me to understand the cause of physical symptoms and helped me to understand stress and how it affects us. It also helped me to find better coping skills when dealing with stress. The groups was very nice and non-judgmental and very understanding. It was nice to talk to others that are feeling and going through the same feelings.”



“This program was a great reminder of how to manage stress and have effective communication. The program is very practical and structured well. Meeting with the same group on a weekly basis helped us be more open in sharing stories and strategies. It was nice to know that I am not alone in how I feel and in my experiences with my child. Thank you for such a wonderful program!”



*“This was our first outing and event with Autism Ontario and were so pleased with the execution and organization of everything! Well done! I always feel a tad anxious with attempts to do outings, but this was so smooth and I knew I could seek assistance if needed. So it was just so lovely!”*

- Toronto Region Family



## Caregiver Supports

### Ausome Moms & Rad Dads

Ausome Moms is an online group for moms, mother figures, maternal caregivers, and caregivers who identify as female. Rad Dad is an online group for dads, male caregivers, and transgender/non-binary folks. Both groups meet virtually with an Autism Ontario facilitator to socialize, share experiences, and listen to one another.

Both groups continue to grow and have consistent participants that attends to support each other month after month. Participants have shared with our facilitators that some caregivers have formed friendships and met up at other Autism Ontario events!

"This group is amazing. Over the past two years the level of support I have gotten was beyond what I expected. I have learned so much with this group and keep on learning every time. This group has been a life changer."



"This was my first ausome mom's zoom meet and I was blown away. It was so raw and relatable. I had tears several times during the meet. It was so refreshing knowing I'm not alone and hearing others experiences and stories gave me hope and comfort. It was such an amazing experience."



"This group has quickly become one of my "must do" self-care activities each month. It is a time to be with other people who understand how my family lives and the unique challenges of parenting a child with ASD. It feels judgement free, full of support, and a reminder to see "the wins" in our parenting journey. Thank you so much for creating this space each month."



*"Working at Autism Ontario has been such a refreshing, welcoming, and motivating experience for a mom who has fought long and hard, advocating for her autistic son in Northern Ontario. By working here, I can contribute and continue to advocate, promote, and support the critical and much-needed work Autism Ontario has been doing for the last 50 years."*

- Erika Luoma, Fund and Volunteer Coordinator, North Region



## Celebrate the Spectrum 2023



Celebrate the Spectrum is an opportunity for positive action to provide spaces of support and advocacy for our diverse communities — while learning about autism and how we can all make our communities better and more inclusive places for autistic people.

We launched the first School Giving Challenge Campaign. This challenge is not just about raising funds, it's about celebrating inclusion and acceptance. It's about spreading awareness and understanding of autism, and how we can support the entire autistic community.

Our winning school Cornell Junior Public School in Scarborough raised \$21,826!

## Celebrate the Spectrum 2023 - Social Media Metrics



**526,468 impressions** during Celebrate the Spectrum.



**177,486 users reached** across all social media platforms.



**64,245 followers** across all social media platforms. **521 new followers** during Celebrate the Spectrum.



*"The most memorable was actually the founding.*

*To realize that we weren't isolated, that there is strength in numbers."*

- Bob Hart, Founding Board Member



## Educational Resources

Our suite of Educational Resources offered valuable support to families navigating autism. These resources, alongside others, have reached over 20,000 people, driving thousands of meaningful engagements through clicks, shares, likes, and comments across our owned social media channels — over 99% of which have been overwhelmingly positive.

By addressing key challenges and providing practical guidance, these resources have become essential tools for families, empowering them with knowledge and strategies. Their success and resonance strengthen Autism Ontario's brand recognition and, more importantly, create tangible, positive outcomes for families across Ontario.



## Adult Services

### Strong Minds through Active Bodies:

#### Promoting Autistic Mental Health through Physical Activity and Planning

Strong Minds Through Active Bodies is a free online course for physical activity students, professionals, and people supporting autistic youth and adults to access physical activity programs and spaces.

- 291 new students registered to take this course
- Delivered in-person training at Variety Village for a class of students from Centennial College involved in adapted physical education.
- In 2023 296 new students registered to take this free, online course, 46% of those registered completed the course and received a certificate (137 students).



## Scholarships and Awards

Each year, Autism Ontario awards scholarships to outstanding students entering their first year of a post-secondary program across Ontario.

In 2023 we awarded the following:

- **5 Eleanor Ritchie Scholarships.** The Eleanor Ritchie Scholarship is awarded to students on the autism spectrum. It is named after Eleanor Ritchie, a long-standing member of Autism Ontario, in recognition of her dedication and support for autistic individuals.
- **5 Jeanette Holden Scholarships** to siblings of a person on the autism spectrum. The Jeanette Holden Scholarship was named after Dr. Jeanette Holden, a sibling of a person on the spectrum, in recognition of her dedication and contributions to autism research.
- **1 MacDonald Family Scholarship** for a student with an autistic parent. Autism Ontario's newest scholarship is named after Carole Ann MacDonald and her family. Ms. MacDonald was the first member of the Board of Directors of Autism Ontario who has an autism diagnosis.
- **5 Hollylynn Towie Scholarships** to students on the autism spectrum living in Durham Region. The scholarship was created in memory of Hollylynn Towie so her dream of going to post secondary education can live on.
- **1 David Conforti Reach for the Stars Award.** The award was created by David's family to to further encourage and recognize volunteerism with community impact among other people with autism in memory of David
- **Autism Ontario's Building Brighter Futures Fund (BBFF)** provides financial assistance directly to autistic adults in Ontario through a reimbursement of funds spent to access greater participation in their local communities. Autism Ontario was able to award 33 autistic adults this reimbursement.



**Nadine Simmons**  
BBFF recipient



**Giulia Congi**  
Jeanette Holden Scholarship Recipient

*"Autism Ontario's Jeanette Holden Scholarship has changed my life by allowing me to pursue my post academic studies in the Neuroscience program at the University of Windsor. I am beyond grateful to be receiving this award that will help alleviate some financial stress for me next year.*

*I would like to thank Autism Ontario in their generosity in funding this scholarship and bringing me closer to reaching my dreams."*



## Journey to Adulthood

Autism Ontario launched the Journey to Adulthood virtual workshop series for caregivers of autistic youth navigating the journey from youth to adult.

These virtual, six-week workshops are offered by Autism Ontario Transition Resource Specialists and discuss topics including funding, consent capacity and legal issues, post-secondary options, building community connections, employment, and advocacy.

This year, Autism Ontario delivered four 6 week workshops (3 for caregivers of youth aged 15-21 who are still in school, 1 for caregivers of youth aged 12-15) to a total of 66 caregivers attended these 6-week virtual workshops. As well as three 1.5-hour-long Journey to Adulthood overview sessions to 125 caregivers of youth aged 12-21 who are still in school.



## Program Feedback

*"Exceptional workshop with exceptional presenters ...I will definitely be referring back to my slides over the next years. Jane is an engaging and resourceful presenter and I particularly loved Stacey's perspective as a self-advocate, that is invaluable insight."*

- Participant Caregiver, J2A Workshop

*"For prospective parents please attend this workshop, it's packed with lots of insightful and very helpful information."*

*The presenters are thoroughly knowledgeable, and the topics discussed are properly researched and presented."*

- Participant Caregiver, J2A workshop



*"Working in a positive and uplifting environment at Autism Ontario while making an impact in the autistic community is more than I could ask for. I hope that I can continue to empower individuals in the community in this way for years to come."*

- Emilie Stevens, Care Coordinator



## Living Life to the Full

Living Life To The Full is an online, 12-hour, eight-week mental health promotion program offering free opportunities for Ontario adults on the spectrum to learn wellness and coping skills using the tenets of cognitive behavioural therapy. Participants are taught how to deal with their feelings when fed up, worried, or hopeless, and learn skills that help them tackle life's problems.

- Autism Ontario offered 2 virtual, 8-week groups for autistic adults this year
- One group for autistic women and autistic non-binary people, and another group for autistic adults aged 30+
- Each group composed of 6 adults, 12 adults total attended groups

*"Thank you so much, this is the best program I have ever been a part of and I will definitely use these tools in the future."*

- Program participant

*"This was a wonderful experience to be part of. Really opened up new opportunities and dealing with everything. Thank you."*

- Program participant



*"There were a few beliefs I had previously held, that were not helpful to me. The biggest one was probably that I needed to get an entire task done; whereas "Living Life to the Full" teaches that any project can be achieved by breaking the task down into smaller steps, thereby becoming less daunting."*

- Program participant



### Autism Career Connections

- 318 new students registered to take Autism Career Connection courses



### Personal Finance Course

- 169 new students registered to take Personal Finance course



## Organizational Health

### Volunteers

We are proud to have 165 active volunteers supporting our program, fundraising and advocacy needs. This year we welcomed 76 new volunteers to our team, 45 of them supporting our region and 31 new Special Education Advisory Committee representatives.

We welcomed a new Volunteer Coordinator who helped create a new onboarding system for volunteers. This onboarding includes more training, opportunity to connect with Autism Ontario staff, and learn what to expect as a volunteer. Sessions are offered twice monthly and have been well received.

*"I enjoy volunteering and helping to raise funds and awareness for our programs. It is a special place where my son fits in and can be himself."* - South Region Volunteer

### Staff

This year Autism Ontario grew from 175 to 227 staff located all across the province. After a couple of years with only virtual meetings the staff were thrilled to resume regional in person meetings in the fall. Almost all of our staff work remotely and are most often connecting with people online.

Staying connected and providing opportunities for staff to be healthy and bringing their best selves to work is something we actively support. Throughout the year over 500 employees participated in a variety of employee engagement events ranging from virtual yoga, trivia, learn to knit and walking challenges.

### Engagement

Our social media channels have continued to grow, allowing Autism Ontario to engage and support a diverse and expansive audience. Across multiple channels, we have successfully connected with families and professionals in both English and French, extending the reach of our resources and advocacy efforts.

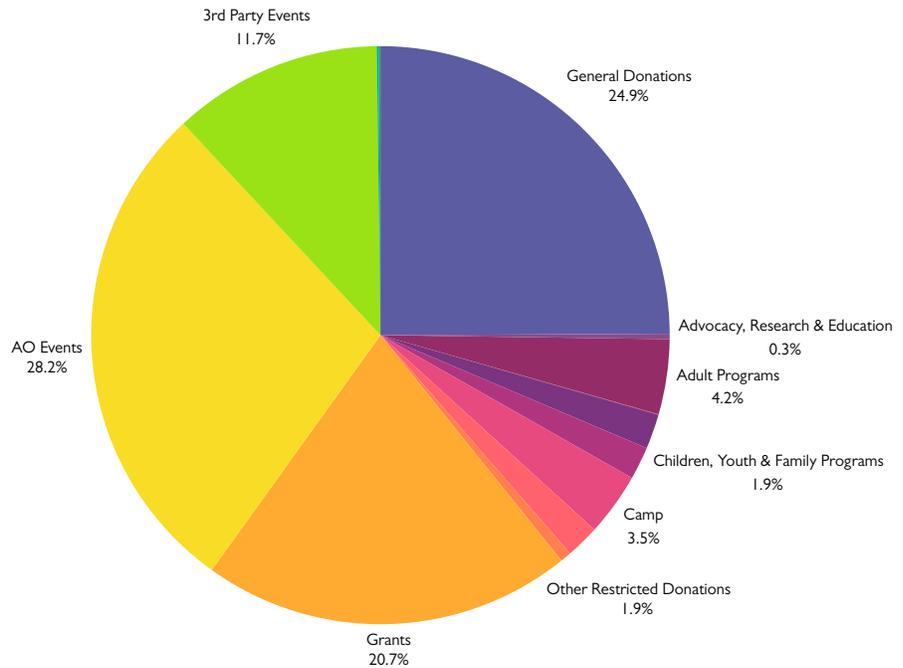
Our follower count has reached impressive numbers, with 28,572 followers on Facebook (English), 531 on Facebook (French), 8,757 on Instagram, 19,595 on X (Twitter), and 13,753 on LinkedIn. These platforms play a crucial role in raising awareness, sharing essential resources, and fostering a community that supports families across Ontario.

## Fundraising

The 2023-2024 Fundraising Revenue chart below demonstrates the fundraising initiatives and allocations that donors chose to direct their support.

As we reflect on the past year, we are acutely aware of the economic challenges that have shaped our journey. Despite these obstacles, the unwavering support of our donors, partners, and community has been nothing short of remarkable and heartwarming.

Their generosity has enabled us to navigate a complex landscape and continue to support our program and services such as CARES.



The words of a parent Sally, who attends Autism Ontario's programs reflect Autism Ontario's transformative influence. When faced with her daughter's autism diagnosis, Sally felt scared and uncertain. However, through Autism Ontario's CARES and Ausome Moms programs, she discovered a community of understanding and support.

**"I now feel like I have a new group of friends, like family"**



*"I would really like to thank Autism Ontario for offering free or low cost tickets to events such as hockey games or theatre experiences. I likely would not take my son to these events otherwise, for fear of wasting money on tickets and then having to leave. Everything that we have taken him to through Autism Ontario was a big hit. These tickets allow families to have experiences they would not have otherwise."*

-East Region Family

## Corporations, Foundations, and Community Groups

\$50,000 +

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\$20,000 - \$49,999

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\$10,000 - \$19,999

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- Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities
- Cotton Inc.
- Niagara Peninsula Foundation for Children
- PayPal Giving Fund Canada
- Solcz Family Foundation
- The Sherry & Sean Bourne Family Charitable Foundation

\$5,000 - \$9,999

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Berkley Insurance Company	Reuter Benefits
CIBC	Superbowl Lanes
Circle of Seven	Thunder Bay Police Association Charity
City of Niagara Falls	Foundation
City of Welland	TransForm (Hotel Dieu Grace Healthcare)
FM Sylvan Canada Ltd	Unifor Local 200
Intact Insurance	Unifor Local 2458
Kiwanis Club of Welland	Walmart Canada Corp
Local 444 C.A.W. Social Justice Fund	

Third Party Events \$5,000+

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A Bat, A Ball, and A Cause Cricket Match  
BXF's Swinging Fore a Cause  
Dundas Lions Foundation Ride4Autism  
In Honour of Ollie Larter  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
L.U. 353 Annual Golf Tournament  
Rival Business Solutions Golf Tournament  
Running for Awareness (Kelly Mahar)

## Individuals

\$5,000 +

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Bertoia, Susan  
Bondy, Joe  
Estate of Marti Lynn Candido  
Hunsberger, Ruth-Anne  
Richardson, Monica  
Shapiro, Joel



*"I was grateful for the opportunity to bring my 30-year-old daughter to the holiday party in Windsor; it was amazing to see individuals of all ages interacting. I enjoyed the unbiased atmosphere where I could sit and not be judged by my daughter's behavior. It was also great to see that you do not remove individuals over 18 years from your support"*

*-West Region Family*

\$1,000 - \$4,999

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Agnew, Carol  
Barrette, Leo and Colleen  
Baudler, Kathleen  
Bebko, James  
Boudeau, Janis  
Burton-Williams, Desmond  
Chua, Grace  
Claydon, Richard  
Dawson, Bill  
Eden, Chris  
Ellis, Peter  
Emrich, Shelby  
Francis, Donna  
Gionet - Del Gatto, Krista  
Hammoud, Catherine  
Helmer, Scott and Angela  
Kimball, Judith  
Kitchen, Deborah  
Kriegler, Elisabeth  
Lapas, Rick  
Lapico, Doris  
LeCouvie, Kelly and Ivan

Liburdi, Mario  
Lopers, Luke  
Morrison, Justin  
Partridge, Wade  
Phillips, Roy & Pauline  
Poulos, Jenny  
Purakal, Peace  
Rovira, Georgina  
Rovira, Jonathan  
Russell, Mark  
Salt, John  
Souch, Terry  
Southey, Mark  
Spoelstra, Margaret  
Stumpf, Trudy  
Vienot, Sarah  
Wanschura, Tammy  
Ward, Rebecca  
Ware, James  
Warren, Todd  
Yong, Elaine



*"I have enjoyed being part of such a supportive and forward-thinking organization. Both as an employee and parent of an autistic person, I appreciate all the dedicated staff that are working to make the world a more inclusive and caring place."*

-Rebecca Cunnington, Care Coordinator

## Financial Overview

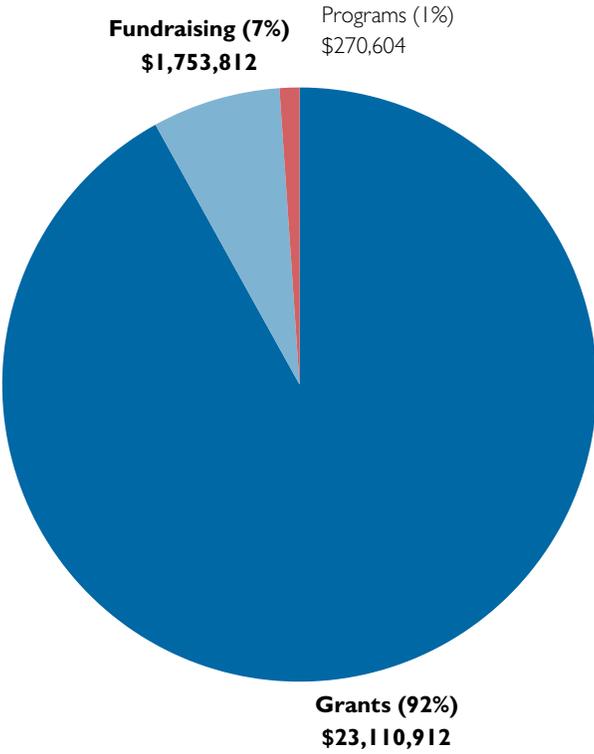
Autism Society Ontario Statement of Revenue and Expenses (from Audited Financial Statements 2023-2024)  
 Year ended March 31, 2024 with comparative figures for 2023

For the year ended March 31	2024	2023
<b>Revenues</b>		
Grants	<b>\$ 23,110,912</b>	\$ 15,230,945
Fundraising	<b>1,753,812</b>	1,545,927
Programs	<b>270,604</b>	426,483
Total Revenue	<b>\$ 25,135,328</b>	\$ 17,203,355
<b>Expenses</b>		
Grants	<b>\$ 21,902,086</b>	\$ 14,215,509
Fundraising	<b>343,254</b>	258,599
Programs	<b>1,660,950</b>	1,683,496
Admin	<b>115,642</b>	361,502
Total Expense	<b>\$ 24,021,932</b>	\$ 16,519,106
Excess of revenue over expenses	<b>\$ 1,113,396</b>	\$ 684,249

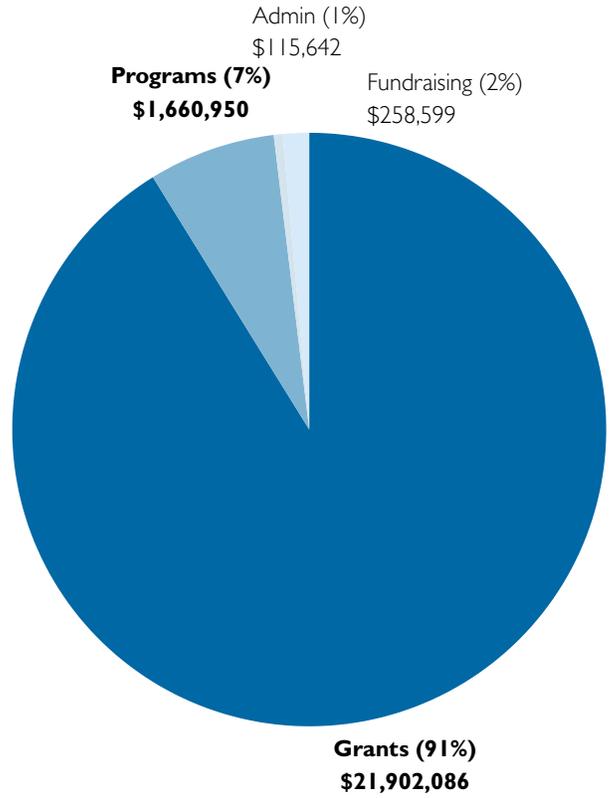


# Consolidated Financial Report

## Revenue



## Expenses



*"We are a new family to autism; we have felt very lost and have no idea where to go. I appreciated walking into an office and having the opportunity to speak to knowledgeable staff about resources and government support and all the great activities and programs that Autism Ontario offers.*

*We have attended a few activities and I'm beyond grateful for this."*

*- West Region Family*

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- [6] <https://www.casda.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CASDA-Language-Guide.pdf>
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"Welcome to the Autistic Community." Welcome to the Autistic Community!, [autismacceptance.com/read-the-book/](http://autismacceptance.com/read-the-book/).

Four Directions Autism (a parent-to-parent support group for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis parents who have autistic children): <http://fourdirectionsautism.ca/index.html>

## Share your story!

If you have been impacted by Autism Ontario, we want to hear from you!

Whether you are a donor, volunteer, or program participant, we want to know why you believe in Autism Ontario. Share your story with us! Personal stories inspire us and our community every day.

## Connect with us on social media



@autismONT



@autismontario



linkedin.com/company/autism-ontario



@autismontarioprovincial



youtube.com/user/autismontario



@autismeontarioprovincial  
(French)



**Autism**ONTARIO

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**50<sup>TH</sup>**

**ANNIVERSARY**

*"During my time at Autism Ontario I have seen the organization evolve and grow so much. We would not be where we are today without the incredible team of volunteers who, since the very beginning, have supported us along the way. I can't wait to see all the amazing work Autism Ontario will do over the next 50 years!"*

- Brittany Kok, Regions & Volunteer Manager