

## NEWS RELEASE

March 29, 2018 (Toronto, ON)

# **1 in 66 Canadian Children is Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Canadian rates are now more in line with how the rest of the world is counting prevalence rates

Today, the National ASD Surveillance System (NASS) released the most up-to-date Canadian prevalence rate **1 in 66 Canadian children is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder**. These results impact Canadians living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as well as their families and caregivers. Autism Ontario can now say with confidence that the rates of ASD are increasing in Canada and so is the urgency to meet the needs of children, youth and adults on the autism spectrum, and their families.

Prevalence rates are calculated by dividing the number of children identified with ASD who live in a specific area at any time during a given year by the total number of children who live in that specific area in that year. The ratio is an average, based on a period in time, surveying a specific area and a specific age group.

In Canada, surveillance varies from province to province. For this initiative, the NASS studied Canadian children diagnosed with ASD, ages 5-17 across all provinces, which is different from the popularly quoted American prevalence rate, [1 in 68 children is diagnosed with ASD](#) which only takes into account 8 year-old children from 11 surveillance regions. It's important to note that while Ontario isn't reflected in the 2015 data, our province has been actively engaged with this project which is good news for our families.

It's also important to note this data was collected in 2015. This doesn't necessarily mean the data will be different now that it is 2018, but readers should take note. Other key findings of the [National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System Report](#) include that boys have received an ASD diagnosis four times more frequently than girls. More than half of children and youth with ASD were diagnosed by age six, and more than 90% received a diagnosis by age 12. Canadian prevalence estimates found in the report are similar to the most recent CDC rates.

The 2018 Federal Budget proposes to fund two new initiatives to support people living with ASD and their families: A national resource exchange network to help connect people with ASD and their families to information, resources, employment opportunities, and local programming; including funding for community-based projects that will help to reduce stigma and to integrate and strengthen health, social and educational programs.

## **Why is the rate of Autism Spectrum Disorder growing?**

While we don't know why, we do know the rate of ASD is increasing and it is placing huge demands on the health care systems and showing glaring gaps in the supports available. Updated figures are important because prevalence rates and surveillance studies perform an important service for policy makers, system administrators and advocates.

Canadian research is not only vital to understanding the causes and effects of Autism Spectrum Disorder, but to make sure that people and their families living in Canada who are affected by ASD receive the best possible support. The NASS project reflects the most up-to-date epidemiological study to look at autism rates in Canada and this is important to us as an Ontario/Canadian organization.

**There are so many numbers, which is the right one?**

There is no correct rate. There are a number of averages out there to describe a number of areas reporting ASD diagnoses. These numbers will change over time for a variety of reasons.

The way researchers collect data for prevalence rates is inconsistent. Tracking ASD isn't done in the same way across Canada, the United States, Europe, Africa, Central and South America, Asia, and Australia. This means that globally, there are different pictures of the rates of ASD diagnoses. Flipping onto a website based in the United States will give you one rate, where you might find a different rate on a website in Europe.

It's easy to think about ASD as a number, however, we are not talking about a number. We are talking about a *person* with ASD. We are talking about a person with individual needs. We are talking about a person with loving family members. We are talking about a person who is granted equal opportunity preparing for and succeeding in adulthood. Rates like this help us to advocate for the individual needs of a person with ASD throughout their lifespan using evidence-based treatment and intervention, while remembering that developmental trajectories are constantly changing. Our province must be prepared to support children, youth and adults within the context of development, learning, family and community. This new rate will help to ensure that policy makers, system administrators, advocates and self-advocates have current data to support their work in ensuring each person with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

**About Autism Ontario:** Autism Ontario has a 45 year history of representing thousands of families and people with ASD across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has formal parent representation in all areas of the province through our 25 Chapters. We advocate on behalf of all people with ASD and their families. To connect with us, visit [autismontario.com](http://autismontario.com)

**Vision:** Acceptance and Opportunities for all people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**Mission:** To ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

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