



Election Toolkit

Organizational Edition



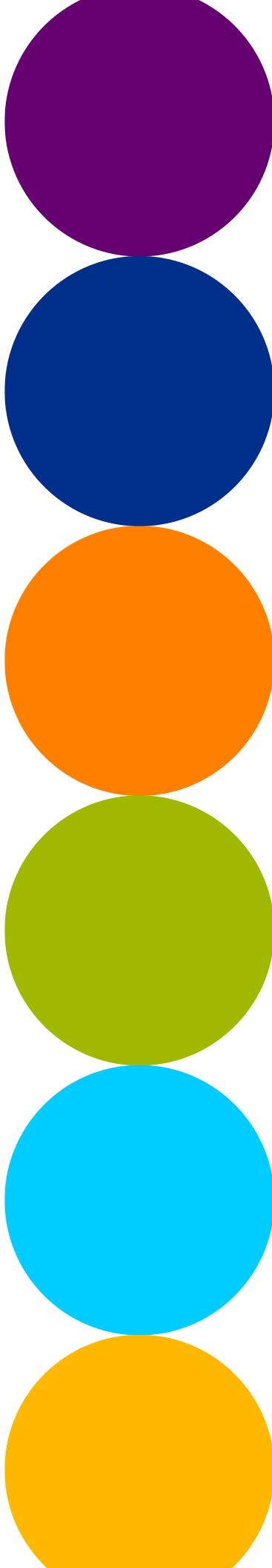


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Help advocate for a National Autism Strategy!

Canada's next federal election is taking place Fall 2019.

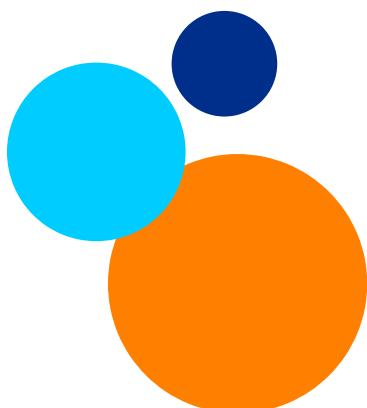
In the lead-up to the election, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) is reaching out to all party candidates about CASDA.

- Commitment to a National Autism Strategy to improve the life outcomes of autistic people and their families/carers across Canada.

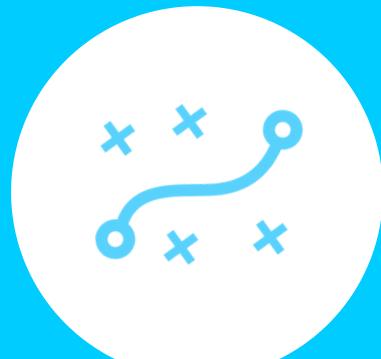
Candidates need to know the issues facing autistic Canadians and know what actions need to be taken to improve the lives of all Canadians living with autism. Your organization can **help** make this happen.

Sharing your experiences and views with your candidates can help them understand what is needed to better the lives of autistic Canadians and their families/carers.

The elected candidates will represent their ridings for the next four years - let's ensure that they understand autism, and make autism a priority at the federal level.



CASDA's Election Priority



A National Autism Strategy

This toolkit is a guide for contacting election candidates and creating conversations that spark change. Your organization can:

- Meet candidates
- Speak to them on the phone
- Send an email or mail a letter
- Use social media.

Together, we can ensure autistic Canadians and their families/carers are provided full and equal access to the resources they require to achieve their full potential. Please help #ASDCommitment.

Debbie Irish
CASDA Chair

How can our organization engage with election candidates?

Every organization can be an advocate for autism this election! You don't need fancy presentations or to know the ins-and-outs of politics and policy - advocacy is all about sharing your story - the story of your organization, the families you support or your own family's story, with candidates and asking for a commitment to a National Autism Strategy that enables autistic Canadians and their families to achieve their full potential.

The best way to do this is by arranging to meet with candidates face to face. If you are not comfortable meeting candidates in person, there are also huge benefits to calling, emailing, writing letters or engaging with them on social media. Take the approach that feels right for you.

This toolkit is full of practical advice for talking to candidates about autism and sharing the #NationalAutismStrategy campaign with your networks, so we can make sure autism is a part of the election conversation!

Who are the candidates running this year?

You can find which candidates are running this year through the Canadian government website:
<https://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>

We encourage you to contact as many representatives and candidates as possible. You never know which one will win!

How to advocate for autism:



Meet with candidates

Meeting face to face with the candidates is a great way to share your organization's story and help candidates better understand the lived experiences of autism.

Your organization may wish to send one representative, or a group. You may meet at candidates' offices, at your offices or in a public space. Do what feels best for your organization and representatives, make sure everyone is comfortable and the location is fully accessible.

Invite them to meet

Call or email the candidates you wish to meet with, giving a brief description of who you are, what your organization does, what will be discussed, while also requesting a meeting and suggesting a time and place.

See the example email on this page which can also serve as a script if you would prefer to call the candidate. Invite the candidate(s) at least two weeks before you'd like to meet.

Prepare for the meeting

To prepare, please refer to the *Preparing for a meeting or phone call* guide on page 11 of this toolkit.

At the meeting

Meetings with candidates usually go for 15 to 30 minutes. The main purpose of the meeting is to share how your organization helps autistic Canadians and the importance of National Autism Strategy.

During or after your meeting, ask if the candidate would like to fill out a Letter of Support for our Blueprint. The letter can be found at the end of our toolkit and can be printed before your meeting.

After the meeting

It can be useful to contact your candidate after the meeting to thank them for their time. This can help you build your relationship with the candidate, which may be valuable if they are elected and you want to advocate to them in the future.

We also want to hear how your meeting went! Go to the *What next?* section of this toolkit on page 13 to find out how you can let us know what happened and how you feel about your meeting.

Example

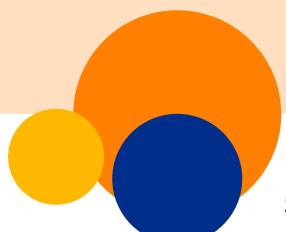
Subject: Meeting Request

Dear (insert candidate's name),

My name is (insert name) and I work at (insert workplace) Alliance. We are an organization that supports autistic people in your electorate who will be voting in the upcoming federal election. I would like to meet with you to discuss my experiences and what you can do to make life better for autistic people and their families in Canada.

Would you be available to meet us at the Tim Horton's, 50 Eglinton Ave E. on September 25th at 10am? You may contact me via this email address or on my cell at 416-123-4567.

Regards,
(insert name)



Write a letter or email

Writing letters or emails to your candidates is another great way to share your organization's priorities. In turn, receiving many emails and letters regarding the same issues informs candidates about what matters most to their voters.

Tips for writing to candidates:

- Candidates will put more importance on letters/emails from people who live in their riding. Consider asking your constituents/members/stakeholders to write letters to their candidates as well.
- An email should be no longer than 300 words and letters no longer than one page. Any longer and it is unlikely that it will be read in full.
- Be clear about why you are contacting them - name the important issues, and write about how those issues impact your community.
- Ask for the candidate to take a specific action. A commitment to a National Autism Strategy. CASDA's Blueprint for a National Autism Strategy, which you can read on [our website](#), is a good start to a conversation about a National Autism Strategy. You can use the Blueprint as a reference.
- Remember to include your contact details so they can respond to you.
- Share this template with your members (etc.) so they have the opportunity to engage with candidates as well.

Example

Dear (insert candidate's name)

We support the hundreds of autistic people in your riding who will be voting in the upcoming federal election. They want to vote for a candidate who is committed to creating a better Canada for autistic people and their families.

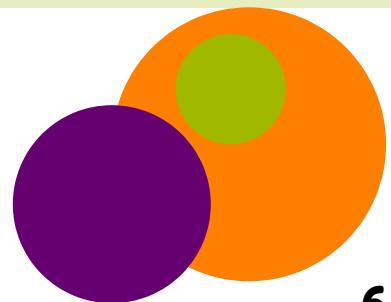
(insert here your organization's mission, goals, hopes for the future and what area(s) you'd like to see change in).

Please commit to a National Autism Strategy and if elected, you work with autistic Canadians and their supporters such as our organization, to develop the National Autism Strategy to better support autistic Canadians and their families. For more information about how to support autistic Canadians, go to the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance's (CASDA) website and check out its Blueprint for a National Autism Strategy.

We would also be happy to meet you and may be contacted through our [website](#) (insert website link here).

All the best for the election!

Regards,
(insert name)



Make a phone call

Phone calls to candidates are a great way to engage in conversation, and gives them an opportunity to ask questions. If they get lots of calls about the same issue they will know it is important to Canadians and constituents in their riding.

Calling candidates:

When you call a candidate's office it is unlikely that the candidate or their adviser will be able to speak to you straight away. The person who answers the call is likely to ask you to leave a message.

Before you call, you may find it helpful to prepare what you want to say in your message - see the example. Your message should be short, but highlight the issues that are important to you and your interest in making a time to talk.

You should receive a call back within a week, at least to arrange an appointment for a call with your candidate or staff member.

If you haven't heard back from a candidate's office within a week, you may wish to call again and let them know you are still waiting for a call back.

Example

Hi, my name is (insert name) from (insert organization) in (insert city). We support the hundreds of autistic Canadians in your riding who will be voting in the federal election. We would like to have a short telephone chat with (insert candidate's name) so that we can share our mission and lived experiences of our members with him/her, and hear about what he/she will do to make life better for autistic Canadians in our community. Could you please pass this message along to (insert candidate's name) and let us know a better time to reach them? Our phone number is 416-123-4567. Thank you for your time.

Prepare for the phone call

To prepare for the phone call, refer to the Preparing for a meeting or phone call guide on page 11 of this toolkit.

During the phone call

Phone calls with candidates usually last for 15-30 minutes. Remember, the main purpose of this is to share your organization's mission and the benefits of a National Autism Strategy.

Post on social media

Engaging with local candidates can also be done via social media. Most candidates will have a dedicated Facebook and Twitter account.

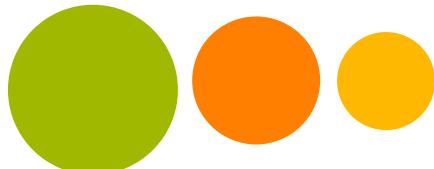
Social media is an effective way to build momentum for a campaign, in particular with the use of hashtags (#) on Twitter or Instagram. CASDA uses a number of hashtags to advocate; #CASDA, #Autism #NationalAutismStrategy #ASDCommitment.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular social media platform in Canada and many candidates will have their own Facebook page.

How to use Facebook to engage with your local candidate:

- Share a status, photo or video on your organization's page and tag local candidates so they can see it. You could post a photo or video of your organization's meeting with candidate. For guidelines on how to approach taking a photo with a candidate, see the *Meet with candidates section* on page 5.
- If the candidate posts on their page about a relevant topic such as autism, education, employment or health care, you can comment on their post.
- Some candidates will have direct messaging (DM) enabled. This means you can send them a private message on Facebook. This is similar to sending an email or text message.



Example

(You can use this for a status, post, comment or private message)

Dear (Facebook page name of candidate): We represent some of Canada's 500,000 autistic people, some of who will be voting in your riding in the upcoming Federal election. We will support a candidate who will take action for autistic Canadians and commit to a National Autism Strategy. If elected, will you support a commitment to a National Autism Strategy? We urge you to read CASDA's National Autism Strategy Blueprint and learn more about this important issue.

Twitter

Twitter is a conversational, real time network known for its 280 character message limit. Hashtags are most often used on Twitter.

How to use Twitter to engage with your local candidate:

- Post a tweet on your organizations' profile. They can be read by your followers and anyone who searches the chosen hashtags.
- You can add an image to your post, but this is optional.
- If a candidate replies to your tweet, you can respond offering to meet with them to discuss things further.

See example tweet on next page.

Post on social media (cont.)

Twitter Example

Only about 1 in 5 adults with autism are in the labour force. Worst education outcomes of any group. **@(Candidate Twitter handle)** how will you help autistic ppl contribute & have their skills recognized?
#NationalAutismStrategy

Twitter Example

Many people with autism who need supportive housing face long wait lists in their housing communities. **@(Candidate Twitter handle)** how will you help autistic ppl find affordable and supportive housing?
#NationalAutismStrategy

Twitter Example

An autism diagnosis comes with a massive price tag. Most therapies costs' exceed families' entire income. **@(Candidate Twitter handle)** how will you ensure autism services become more affordable?
#NationalAutismStrategy

Twitter Example

1 in 66 Canadians aged 5-17 and an estimated 500,000 people are #Autistic **@(Candidate Twitter handle)** how will you ensure these Canadians have the proper support?
#NationalAutismStrategy

Instagram

Instagram is an image-based social media platform where users post a photo with a caption. It is a good way of giving visibility to your message particularly with younger Canadians.

How to use Instagram to engage your local candidates

- Write a caption to explain why you are posting and tag your local candidate if they have an Instagram account.
- Make sure you use the hashtags #CASDA and #NationalAutismStrategy #ASDCommitment #NASCommitent.

Instagram Example

Will our politicians help make life better for #Autistic Canadians and support a #NationalAutismStrategy?

@(Instagram handle of candidate): We represent some of Canada's 500,000 autistic people, some of who will be voting in your riding in the upcoming Federal election. We want to support a candidate who will take action for autistic Canadians. Will you commit to a National Autism Strategy? We urge you to read CASDA's National Autism Strategy Blueprint and learn more about this important issue. #CASDA #NationalAutismStrategy.

Host a Town Hall

Engaging your candidates at community events offers the opportunity to speak with them in an informal setting, and highlight the work your organization is doing.

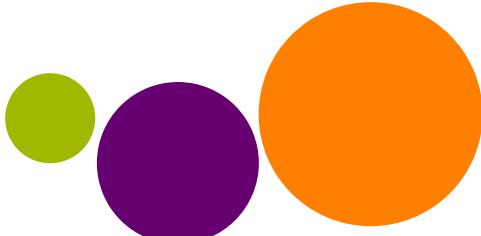
Send an invitation

Town Hall meetings increase the opportunity for public engagement and media coverage.

Make sure to invite all the candidates who are standing for election in your area. You might have to select a particular riding within your organization's catchment. Are any of the candidates already appointed Ministers? That is a good way to help narrow down a riding to focus on. You also need to inform your stakeholders and volunteers if you would like them to be involved.

Having a broad group of autistic people, families and professionals to contribute to the discussion will help your local candidates to better understand the complex issues that autistic people and their families often have to navigate. This will be a busy time for constituents, so they might not respond to your invitation right away.

Identify a format, either a moderated debate, round table discussion, Q&A session or a combination of these options. Choose a moderator and let your invitees know who the person is so they're confident the event will be well run.



Set a time and place

Choose a location that attendees feel comfortable, pick a familiar location that won't be too busy or noisy so you can hear the discussion. If your organization does not have space, civic space is often a good choice to hold a discussion (i.e., libraries, city halls, schools, etc.). Ensure the location is fully accessible and barrier-free.

Utilize several platforms for publicizing the meeting such as posters, posting to social media and sharing the event through professional networks, to name some examples. Notify local media and share details.

Prepare

The Town Hall is about introducing your candidates to what it's like to live with autism in your community and how your MP can help. The discussion topics should be decided ahead of time, and help guide your group's discussion.

Assign board members or organizational leaders to greet candidates when they arrive, and escort them to their seat. The liaison should be knowledgeable about the issues.

Be sure there are beverages, even if it is just water, available.

Preparing for a meeting or phone call

Meeting with your candidates is all about telling your story as an autism organization, and asking candidates to take action to better support your goals and the autism community.

Remember: a meeting or phone call will likely only last 15-30 minutes, so it is important to focus on the most important areas to your organization. You also want to make sure you leave enough time for the candidate to ask you questions - this will help them further understand your organization's goals and the benefits of committing to a National Autism Strategy.

Sharing others lived experiences

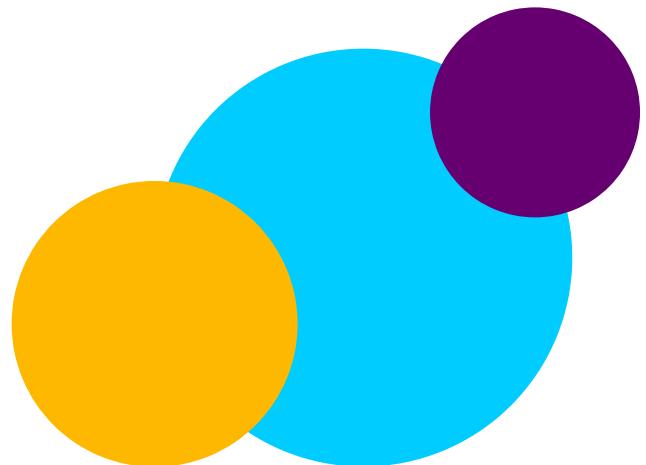
You may want to think about and include:

- The positive and challenging aspects of being autistic or supporting an autistic person.
- The biggest barriers autistic Canadians experience when trying to be social, or access and participate in public life, e.g. public events, school, university, employment, etc.
- Your hopes and concerns for the future of the autistic people your organisation supports.

Highlighting what you want the candidate to do

The focus of the meeting should be on your organization and how committing to a National Autism Strategy is what you'd like them to do. How can a National Strategy make autistic Canadians' lives better now, and in the future? How can the next Canadian government best support autistic people and their supporters?

Before the meeting, it may help to review the policy changes listed in CASDA's National Autism Strategy Blueprint and choose the commitments you would most like the candidate to advocate for if they are elected. Remember the Blueprint is merely a plan of action for a National Autism Strategy and will need federal commitment and leadership to bring to life.



Social Story Template

If you will have an autistic person accompanying you to meetings with candidates, it may help to prepare one or more social stories.

This will help the accompanying person to know what to expect at the meeting. This template may aid in developing social stories for each meeting. You may want to call candidate's offices to ask for photos of people who will be attending your meetings, and a photo of where you will meet (if you are meeting at their offices).

[Insert a photo of the person you are accompanying, and a photo of the candidate]	I am meeting a Canadian federal election candidate named [insert name]
[Insert photo of meeting place]	The meeting will take place at [insert location] It will start at [insert time] and most likely go for about 15-30 minutes.
[Insert photos of attendees]	At the meeting, there will be [insert names of attendees]
[Insert photo of candidate]	At the meeting, I will tell [candidate's name]: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• About my life as an Autistic Canadian; and• How a National Autism Strategy will make my life, and the lives of all Autistic Canadians better.
[Insert a photo of the person you are accompanying smiling/calm, or another photo/symbol the person you are accompanying relates to]	[Insert candidate's name] may ask me questions to learn more about me They may not agree with everything I say, but that is okay, I can repeat my view and stay positive.
[Insert picture of Blueprint]	At the end of the meeting, I can ask [candidate's name] to take a copy of the Blueprint to read and understand. If they don't want to take a copy this is okay, it doesn't mean they don't support me or other autistic people.

What next?

Sharing your experience

We would love to hear about your experience or your members' experiences. If you met election candidates face-to-face or had a conversation on the phone, did you feel the candidates listened to your story? Did they ask good questions? What did they say they would do if elected? Did they have questions CASDA should be aware of? If you emailed or sent a letter to one or more of your candidates, did you receive a response? Are you willing to share it with us?

To share your experience meeting with candidates, please email admin@casda.ca.

Share on social media

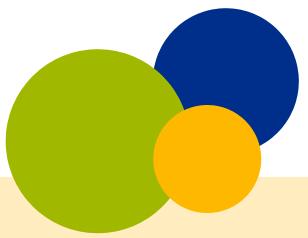
You may also want to share other positive aspects of your meetings, such as any commitments made by the candidates. This will help spread the word of which candidates are committed to supporting autistic Canadians. You may want to include the candidate's handle or account name if you know it, and you can include us by using #CASDA. #NationalAutismStrategy.

Follow up with candidate

Building a positive relationship with the winning candidate will mean that you can continue to speak to them about a National Autism Strategy once they are in Parliament and have the power to make change. We suggest sending thank you emails to the candidates you met, thanking them for listening to your story and any commitments they made in the meeting. This is also a good chance to provide them with any additional information.

Link your members to either this toolkit or the toolkit we've developed with individuals in mind. The more candidates are informed about the issues related to autism the better.

About the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance



The Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) was formed July 2007 shortly after the Senate Committee Report "Pay Now or Pay Later: *Autism Families in Crisis*". During this time the federal government sent a clear message to the autism community: We need to work together with a unified voice. The autism community responded by forming CASDA.

CASDA brings together organizations representing autistic people, their families and carers and professionals who provide services which aim to improve the life outcomes of all autistic Canadians.

Our Strength:

- We provide a vehicle to convene networking, information sharing and priority debates among Canada's leaders in the autism sector.
- We provide on-going communications, partnerships and advocacy with federal government departments that impact the lives of autistic Canadians.

For more information, contact us:

Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance

E: admin@casda.ca

W: casda.ca

Acknowledgements:

Resources for this election toolkit have been adopted from information provided by the following organizations.



www.autismontario.com



www.australianautismalliance.org.au



#National Autism Strategy

