



MEDIA RELEASE:

Funding change in B.C. speaks to urgent need for National Autism Strategy

For Immediate Release

December 1, 2021 (Toronto, ON): The Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) is calling on the federal government to hasten and prioritize a National Autism Strategy in light of the drastic changes being made to autism supports in British Columbia; changes that will significantly impact those on the autism spectrum in the province.

“The current situation in British Columbia speaks to the fragmented and inconsistent approach to resource and service delivery across the country—it’s what happens when we base autism policies on political ideology rather than evidence and best practice, and it has to stop,” said Dr. Jonathan Lai, Executive Director of CASDA. “Unfortunately, this isn’t an isolated incident. Similar upheavals are a frequent occurrence in Canada – a similar nightmare unfolded a few years ago in Ontario. This trend will continue until a Strategy is developed to provide a consistent and equitable approach to supporting Autistic people in Canada.”

Last month, the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) announced the implementation of a new service system for neurodiverse children where one-stop [Family Connections Hubs](#) will be implemented across BC. This system will be fully implemented by March 2025, at which point children and youth on the autism spectrum can no longer access individualized funding. Families and caregivers who cannot afford to continue to fund service providers out-of-pocket will have no other option but to receive services and support through one-stop family connections hubs, resulting in the support and professional relationships they have come to depend on being severed.

Lai notes that discrepancies between provincial policies and support services for Autistic people across the lifespan often result in families moving across provincial and territory borders to seek better health services.



Allison Annesley, an advocate and parent of an Autistic adult, has experienced this situation first-hand. Annesley moved from Ontario in anticipation of policy changes, to seek better support for her daughter in British Columbia—where there are far better supports for adults with developmental disabilities to live independently.

“If you live with someone who has autism, you’re in a unique position to understand their needs and preferences,” says Annesley. “This is one of the most important reasons why families should be able to choose the right professionals to support their children. Families should also be able to access funding easily and quickly to avoid the many risks associated with unnecessary delays.”

The federal government initiated the process of developing a National Autism Strategy in 2019, after significant pressure from autism advocates across the country. To date, the most substantial progress made towards the development of the Strategy has been a consultation on the science of autism by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. Yesterday, the Senate of Canada [held the second reading of Bill S 203, “An Act respecting a federal framework on autism spectrum disorder.”](#) The proposed legislation calls on the federal government to act on “Pay Now or Pay Later,” the Senate report published in 2007, by implementing a federal framework on autism, including measures such as financial supports and accountability in the use of federal funds, research and improved data collection, awareness campaigns and online resources.

“It’s nonsensical that each province and territory in the same country has a different approach to supporting people on the autism spectrum,” says Lai. “We need federal leadership and oversight to guide models of service delivery that survive the politics and contain key ingredients that all the provinces and territories adopt—and a place where we can share lessons learned and generate new evidence as we go.”

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