



RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION No.: **421-03890**

BY: **MR. ARYA (NEPEAN)**

DATE: **MAY 17, 2019**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **PAM DAMOFF**

Response by the Minister of Health

SIGNATURE

Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

Autism

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

The Government of Canada is committed to helping Canadians with disabilities, including Canadians living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families and caregivers.

The federal approach to ASD will continue to focus on significant research investments, such as filling gaps in data and funding community-based projects that will provide information as well as on providing, resources and tools to those that need it most. These areas are complementary to and respectful of provincial and territorial roles in early detection, diagnosis, treatment and services.

The Government of Canada is investing \$10.9 million over the next five years to create the Autism-Intellectual-Developmental Disabilities National Resource and Exchange (AIDE) Network, led by the Pacific Autism Family Network and the Miriam Foundation. The AIDE Network will provide online access to credible and evidence-based ASD information, as well as an inventory of services, employment opportunities and local programming across the country. In addition, six AIDE locations across Canada will provide a point of access for Canadians to obtain resources and supports on ASD. The objective of this project is to make it easier for families to access the resources and information they need.

In addition to this investment, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has established the ASD Strategic Fund to better support the needs of individuals living with ASD and their families. The ASD Strategic Fund will invest \$9.1 million over five years in community-based projects that provide tangible opportunities for individuals living with ASD, their families and caregivers to gain knowledge, resources and skills. In August 2018, PHAC launched an open call for proposals and many submissions were received from organizations from across the country. On April 2, 2019, the Minister of Health announced the first of several projects. Autism Nova Scotia will receive more than \$800,000 in funding and in-kind contributions to scale up an existing Healthy Relationships, Sexuality & Autism Program geared to adults with ASD, aged 18 and older, across Atlantic Canada. These projects will aim to promote improved health behaviors and, in the longer-term, improved wellbeing for individuals affected by ASD.

PHAC is also supporting the Canadian Paediatric Society to collaborate with a national group of experts to develop clinical assessment guidelines. These guidelines will support health care practitioners to diagnose and provide follow-up care for children and youth with ASD.

An essential aspect in supporting front-line efforts in the health care, education and social service sectors is developing an understanding of the magnitude, and characteristics, of individuals with ASD both across regions and over time. Although there are existing repositories of ASD data across the country, there are no comprehensive and comparable national level data. In response, PHAC established the National ASD Surveillance System (NASS) with an initial focus on child and youth populations. The NASS is a collaboration of federal, provincial and territorial governments working to build a comprehensive picture of ASD in Canada. The key objectives of the NASS are to:

Estimate how many children and youth in Canada have ASD (i.e. prevalence) and how many new cases (i.e. incidence) are emerging over time;

Describe the population of children and youth in Canada with ASD and compare patterns within Canada and internationally;

Increase public awareness and understanding of ASD; and,

Inform research, policy and program decision-making.

On March 29, 2018, PHAC, together with the provinces and territories, released the first NASS report, Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children and Youth in Canada. The report stated that based on 2015 data, it is estimated that among children and youth, aged 5-17 years, 1 in 66 has received an ASD diagnosis. Moving forward, PHAC will release NASS findings regularly as new data are received.

Research is instrumental to augment our understanding of ASD and to establish evidence-based practices to better support individuals through the lifespan. Between 2014-15 and 2017-18, the federal government invested close to \$42 million in research related to ASD through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). This investment contributes to the ongoing efforts to advance knowledge about the underlying causes of ASD and to translate this knowledge into better diagnostic tools and treatments for patients. These research translation efforts are supported by CIHR's Research Chairs, one of which was held by Dr. Jonathan Weiss. As the Chair in Autism Disorders Treatment and Care Research (2013-2018), Dr. Weiss' research focused on the prevention and treatment of mental health problems in people living with ASD. Dr. Weiss launched the ASD Mental Health Blog to disseminate research and resources on mental health and ASD to a diverse audience which includes parents, caregivers, physicians and researchers.

The Canada Health Act (CHA) requires that medically necessary hospital and physician services be covered by provincial and territorial health care insurance plans. The Act does not specify diseases or conditions. Any service provided by a

physician or in a hospital that is considered to be medically necessary in the treatment of a disease or condition should be covered by the provincial and territorial health care insurance plans.

Other health care services provided outside hospitals and by non-physicians, such as Applied Behaviour Analysis and supports for individuals with ASD, are outside the scope of the CHA. For these services, it is up to the provincial and territorial governments to determine whether to cover them, and if so, how, either under their health care plans or under separately funded programs.

The federal government continues to support this approach, which is respectful of provincial and territorial jurisdiction in health. There are no plans to amend the CHA to include treatment of specific diseases or conditions.

Finally, I would like to affirm the Government of Canada's commitment to an open and ongoing dialogue with provincial and territorial partners and stakeholders to help address the needs of those living with ASD.