



Families in flux: Findings from the 2021 Ontario Autism Caregiver Survey on education, service access and well-being in the context of COVID-19

Key Recommendations for the Ontario Government

1. Recognize that both **therapy and respite are essential** services for families, and both services require full funding to serve all families based on their individual needs.
2. **Provide needs-based therapy** (based on a child's clinically assessed individual level of need, as opposed to set allotments based on age), as well as enhance other supports such as **respite**, to all eligible families with minimal wait times. **Aim to eliminate waitlists** entirely for these essential services, as soon as possible. **Fully fund the Ontario Autism Program (OAP)**, as well as other programs, such as **Special Services At Home (SSAH)**, to ensure all individuals can receive the services and supports they require, based on individual needs.
3. **Enhance collaborations** between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education, to ensure that autistic individuals receive a **full suite of complementary, wrap-around services**, across the various domains and stages of their life, from early diagnosis, to adulthood.
4. **Expand provincial health coverage** to fully fund medically necessary therapies and aids, including mental health services and assistive devices and supports.
5. **Improve and expand mental health, social support, and crisis services** for autistic individuals and their caregivers. Provide crisis services immediately for those in need.
6. Expand **training and recruitment of therapists and mental health professionals** with specialized training in autism. Prioritize **underserved populations and regions** (e.g. Indigenous, Francophone, immigrant, and northern, rural and remote).
7. Improve and expand **autism service navigation supports** for all families.
8. Fully fund the **education system** to provide the in-school supports (e.g. therapists, education staff) necessary for each child to have a safe, meaningful and uninterrupted education (including avoiding school exclusions). Provide further autism-specific training to teachers and educators.

9. Learning from experiences of the pandemic, **prioritize in-person education and services** for families, while **allowing remote options**, as needed, for those who prefer or require it.
10. **Adjust the current curriculum** in recognition of the significant loss of learning for ALL children over the course of these school disruptions, with the added acknowledgement that children with an autism diagnosis were particularly vulnerable to unsatisfactory or inadequate education over the 2020-21 school year. **Substantial supports** are necessary to ensure students recoup these significant losses in the coming years.
11. Note the **significance of physical activity and recreation** for children and youth with autism and their families, both from a physical and mental health perspective for the child, but also from a respite perspective for the families. Provide adequate supports to enable families' access and to ensure these activities are conducted safely in person, whenever possible.

The above are highlights of recommendations arising from the findings of the 2022 LARC-Autism Ontario report¹. For our earlier, more comprehensive related recommendations, see the [2019 LARC Report](#).²

Many of our recommendations overlap with those made in the [Ontario Autism Program Advisory Panel Report](#), which provides much more detailed and specific suggestions.

¹ Gentles, Stephen, Janet McLaughlin, & Margaret Schneider (Primary Co-Authors), Alisha Stubbs, Philip Lerner, Lauren Tristani, Margaret Spoelstra, Jonathan Weiss, Vivian Lee, Stelios Georgiades, and James LeClair (Contributing Authors). **Families in flux: Findings from the 2021 Ontario Autism Caregiver Survey on education, service access and well-being in the context of COVID-19** [Report]. Ontario, Canada: Laurier Autism Research Consortium and Autism Ontario; Available April 2, 2022: www.wlu.ca/LARC.

² McLaughlin, Janet and Margaret Schneider (2019). **Autism Services in Ontario: Impacts on Family and Child Well-being—Research Summary** [Report]. Ontario, Canada: Laurier Autism Research Consortium: <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-human-and-social-sciences/faculty-profiles/janet-mclaughlin/larc/assets/documents/larc-report.pdf>.