



# The VOICE of Albertans with Disabilities

April 1, 2023

## Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder, or autism, is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts brain development. The result is that most individuals experience communication problems, difficulty with social interactions and a tendency to repeat specific patterns of behaviour. They may also have a markedly restricted range of activities and interests.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is typically accompanied by co-occurring medical conditions such as epilepsy, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal (gut) abnormalities and immune dysregulation. Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression are common. Any of these conditions may severely impact an individual's quality of life.

The term "spectrum" refers to a range or continuum of severity or of developmental impairment. Children and adults with ASDs may have particular characteristics in common but the condition covers a wide spectrum, with individual differences in the following:

Number and particular kinds of symptoms

- Severity: Mild to severe
- Age of onset
- Levels of functioning
- Challenges with social interactions.

Individuals on the autism spectrum tend to have varying degrees and combinations of symptoms and therefore, treatment must be specific to the individual. It is also important to keep in mind that children, teens and adults with autism vary widely in their needs, skills and abilities. *There is no standard "type" or "typical" person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

According to the National ASD Surveillance System 2018 report, Autism Prevalence among Children and Youth in Canada an estimated 1 in 54 children and youth be-

tween 5 and 17 years of age have been diagnosed with ASD. The report is based on 2015 health, education and social services data collected from seven participating provincial and territorial governments representing 40% of children and youth in Canada.

Attention has recently shifted away from a focus that was almost exclusively on early diagnosis and interventions in young children on the spectrum. Autism is a lifelong condition. Society needs to recognize that adults on the spectrum deserve appropriate medical care, social support, educational accommodations, employment opportunities and housing.

<https://autismcanada.org/autism-explained/>

Each person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is unique. Words used to describe an individual who is on the autism spectrum are being questioned more and more by the autism community. Terms such as "mild" or "severe" and labels like "high-functioning" and "low-functioning" are not particularly accurate and could be viewed as harmful. Someone who can't talk might have better social skills than someone who speaks well. What if the person who can speak is unable to pick up on social cues? A medical diagnosis might label the non-verbal individual as being more "severely" autistic than the verbal one. While individuals with autism are on a spectrum, the line is possibly more blurred than originally thought.

Some children and adults with autism have serious cognitive disabilities and sensory problems. They may display extremely repetitive behaviours including meltdowns, self-injury, defensiveness and aggression. These

are often provoked by anxiety and/or pain. Without appropriate intervention and an understanding of the underlying cause, behaviours may become persistent and difficult to change. Living with and caring for a person with autism can be challenging, requir-

**Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD),** refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication.



Autism Awareness Month - April 2023



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ing tremendous patience and an understanding of the condition.

Individuals with ASD may present with some of the following exceptional characteristics:

- Non-verbal reasoning (the ability to understand and analyse visual information and solve problems using visual reasoning)
- Exceptional memory
- Perceptual motor skills (hand-eye coordination, body-eye coordination, auditory language skills)
- Computer proficiency
- Exceptional skills in creative and imaginative expression (music, art, writing, drama)
- Visuospatial ability (capacity to identify visual and spatial relationships among objects)

The above exceptional skills may be combined with subtle characteristics in other areas of development.

**Autism Edmonton's** calendar is always jam packed with things going on! Take a look below to explore what Autism Edmonton is up to over the next month.

<https://www.autismedmonton.org/events/>

## Parkinson Disease

Parkinson disease is a progressive neurological disorder. It mainly affects parts of the brain controlling movement. Cells in the brain (in a place called the substantia nigra) produce an important chemical called dopamine. When a person moves, dopamine is involved in producing movements that are smooth and coordinated. Many people have symptoms between the ages of 50 and 60 years, but some have symptoms at a much younger age (young onset), others at a much older age. As symptoms start to interfere with how one is able to do everyday things,

there are treatments that can help.

Life with Parkinson's is going to look different for everyone, and how it looks for you will likely change over time. We understand that

it is frustrating to have a body that won't cooperate. It's important to remember to be patient with yourself – learning to manage your PD is a marathon, not a sprint.

<https://parkinsonassociation.ca/pd-101/>

### Motor

There are four main motor symptoms that a doctor will look for in making a diagnosis of Parkinson disease:

- Tremor: An involuntary trembling or shaking that usually begins in a limb (often a hand or fingers) when it is resting.
- Slow movement (bradykinesia): Over time, movement may slow, making simple tasks difficult and time-consuming. Steps may become shorter and feet may drag when walking. It may be difficult to get out of a chair, off of a bed or out of a car.
- Rigidity: Stiffness of muscles that may occur in any part of the body. This can be painful and limit range of motion.
- Postural instability: Posture becomes stooped, and/or there may be difficulties with walking and balance (including possible falls).

### Non-Motor

Parkinson disease is primarily thought of as a movement disorder with symptoms that one can see – tremor, slowed movement (bradykinesia), rigidity/stiffness and postural instability. However, there is a host of other symptoms that do not affect movement and are much harder (if not impossible) to see. These are known as non-motor symptoms and they encompass a wide range of health concerns:

- Autonomic Dysfunction

**Parkinson's disease** is a progressive nervous system disorder that affects movement. Symptoms start gradually, sometimes starting with a barely noticeable tremor in just one hand. Tremors are common, but the disorder also commonly causes stiffness or slowing of movement.

April is Parkinson's Awareness Month.

*Together, We Hold the Power!*

**Full Participation - Accessibility - Equity**



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- Constipation
- Orthostatic Hypotension
- Parkinson's and Sweat Issues
- Sexual Dysfunction
- Restless Leg Syndrome
- Mood, Thinking & Psychological
- Anxiety & Depression

### Sleep Issues

From excessive daytime sleepiness to insomnia, sleep issues are considered an inherent part of Parkinson's with prevalence rates ranging from 75-98% within the Parkinson's population.

For people with Parkinson disease or Parkinson's Plus Syndromes, the seemingly simple acts of speech and swallowing are not something that can be taken for granted. Speech issues can include a variety of challenges from a softening of the voice to an abnormally fast rate of speaking. For people with Parkinson disease and Parkinson's Plus Syndromes the simple act of eating and drinking is not something that can be taken for granted. In fact, more than 80% of people with Parkinson's will experience difficulties with this process.

The good news is early intervention and treatment can help ensure optimum health, safety and quality of life.

### Speech & Swallowing Issues

- Bruxism
- Drooling
- Dry Mouth
- Dysphagia

### Mood, Thinking & Psychological

Most people with Parkinson's will experience some changes or decline in their mood and thinking; while others may also experience psychiatric disturbances including, but not limited to depression, impulse control or hallucinations.

## Barrier Free Alberta Campaign

### #BarrierFree23

In preparation for the upcoming election we are starting a social media campaign, and emailing all of the candidates, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and all-party leaders a version of this poster.

#### How Can You Help?

- Share on socials and tag your Candidates using hashtag #BarrierFree23
- Join as a supporter on our support page
- Voice your support when engaging with candidates at the door, events, over email, etc.

**Barrier-Free AB in 2023!**

ONLY 2 PROVINCES LEFT...

Will Alberta be the **LAST** province to create Accessibility Legislation?

<p><b>1/4 of Albertans</b> live with disabilities</p> <p>Which is roughly the population of Edmonton</p>	<p>Albertans with disabilities are more likely to live in isolation</p> <p>This has only increased during the pandemic</p>	<p><b>644,640</b> people w/ disabilities who don't work, but could in an inclusive labour market</p>
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#BarrierFree23

Contact us at [barrierfreealberta@gmail.com](mailto:barrierfreealberta@gmail.com)

[www.barrierfreeab.ca](http://www.barrierfreeab.ca)

**AAN** ALBERTA ACCESS NETWORK  
An Initiative of Central Policy Alliance

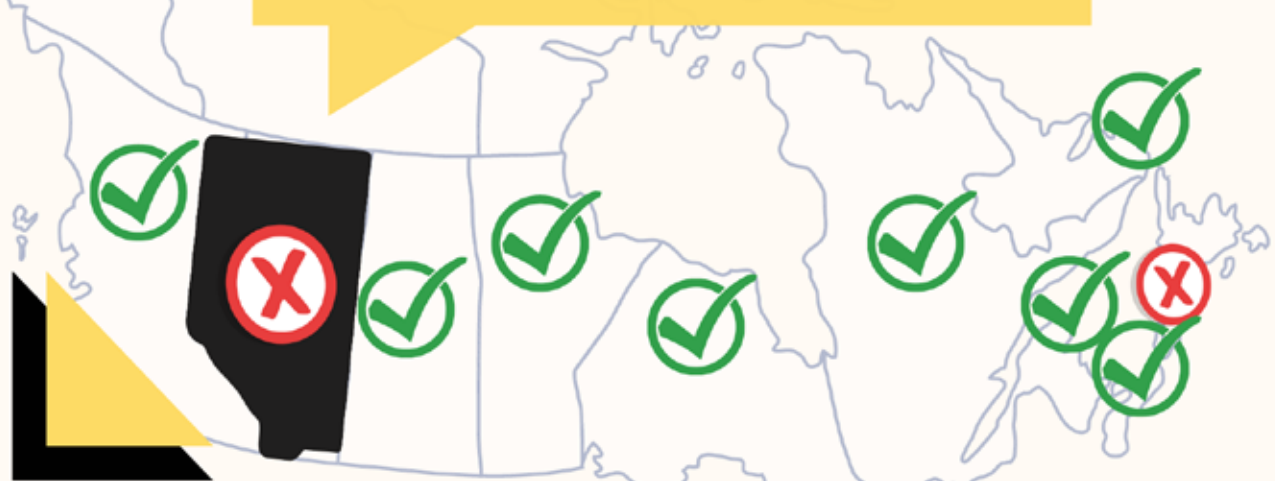
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