



Autism | Alliance canadienne de
Alliance of Canada **l'autisme**

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By Autism Alliance of Canada

August 2025

I. Recommendations:

- Recommendation 1: That the government provide **\$5 million annually over four years to support the implementation of Canada’s Autism Strategy**, with a focus on scaling and spreading evidence-informed programs and practices.
- Recommendation 2: Expand CMHC’s commitment to accessible and affordable housing by **increasing the target for new units dedicated to people with developmental disabilities from 2,075 to 10,000, and modernize program criteria** to align with inclusive, community-based housing priorities.
- Recommendation 3: That the government **increases the maximum disability supplement amount of the Canada Workers Benefit (CWB)** to \$2,500 (from \$737).
- Recommendation 4: That the government **increases the Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED) for children who are eligible for the Disability Tax Credit (DTC)** to cover the first \$1500 of child care expenses per month.
- Recommendation 5: That the government **makes the Canada Caregiver Credit (CCC) refundable** to provide direct financial support to caregivers of Autistic individuals.
- Recommendation 6: That the government **creates a dedicated Fund to Train Primary Care Practitioners to Diagnose Autism** in children, youth and adults by investing \$15M over 3 years in targeted training for community health practitioners.
- Recommendation 7: That the government establishes a **time-limited Autism Wait Times Reduction Fund** of \$95 million annually to accelerate access to diagnosis and services across Canada.

II. Introduction

Autism Alliance of Canada is pleased to submit its 2026 federal budget recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. These proposed measures call for a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to advancing equity and inclusion for Autistic people in Canada and to realizing the full potential of *Canada's Autism Strategy*, released in September 2024. While the release of the Strategy marks an important milestone, it was launched without dedicated implementation funding—placing its ambitions at risk without sustained, cross-departmental investment.

The needs of Autistic people and their families span multiple areas—health, education, employment, housing, income security, transportation, and beyond—and therefore require a unified response from across federal portfolios, including Finance, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), Infrastructure Canada, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Budget 2026 presents a critical opportunity to move from strategy to action by aligning investments with the priorities identified through extensive engagement with Autistic people, families, and experts during the Strategy's implementation.

More than one million people in Canada are Autistic. Together with their families, caregivers, and communities, they represent a vital part of our society and economy. By releasing Canada's Autism Strategy, the government has recognized the need for a comprehensive and inclusive national approach to meet their diverse needs and uphold their rights. This budget submission outlines concrete recommendations to strengthen implementation, promote inclusion, and improve quality of life for Autistic individuals and those who support them—advancing Canada's commitments to disability inclusion and social equity.

III. Explanation of Recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

Autism Alliance of Canada is working to support the implementation of Canada's Autism Strategy, released in September 2024 without any dedicated funding. As the government prepares to move from policy development to implementation, dedicated federal investment is essential to ensure the Strategy translates into meaningful improvements in the lives of Autistic people and their families.

We recommend a targeted investment of \$5 million per year for four years (2026–2030) to support implementation activities that focus on scaling and spreading promising and proven practices, ensuring national reach and equitable access across provinces and territories. Without dedicated implementation funding, this Strategy risks becoming a static policy document rather than a catalyst for transformative systems change.

While PHAC has provided leadership in the development phase, implementation will require coordinated action across federal departments and provincial/territorial systems. Earmarked resources will enable the government to deliver on its public commitment to the NAS by investing in (1) Evidence-informed programs and service models with demonstrated impact; (2) training initiatives to build capacity across health, education, and social services; (3) Partnership-building with provinces, territories, Indigenous communities.

This investment would signal the government's commitment to real-world impact, equity, and lifelong inclusion for Autistic people in Canada.

Recommendation 2:

Autistic adults and other individuals with developmental disabilities face persistent and disproportionate barriers to securing safe, affordable, and appropriate housing. While the National Housing Strategy (NHS) has generated new supply, current affordability definitions, design standards, and support models remain misaligned with the realities and needs of this population. As a result, many Autistic people in Canada remain in unsuitable or unsafe living conditions, or are at risk of homelessness and institutionalization.

To align with the federal government's priorities of inclusive growth, housing equity, and disability inclusion, we recommend the following:

- Increase the target to 10,000 new units of deeply affordable, accessible housing for people with developmental disabilities by 2030;

- Modernize CMHC eligibility and affordability definitions to reflect actual income levels of individuals receiving provincial disability benefits;
- Mandate accessibility and neurodiversity-informed design features, such as sensory-friendly environments, quiet spaces, visual wayfinding, soundproofing, and communication supports;
- Integrate flexible support hours and wraparound services into CMHC-funded supportive housing programs;
- Incentivize partnerships with non-profits, Autistic-led organizations, Indigenous housing providers, developers, and local governments to co-design inclusive housing models;
- Expand the Home Accessibility Tax Credit (HATC) to include sensory-related modifications and autism-specific home adaptations (e.g., sound insulation, calming spaces, visual supports), recognizing the unique needs of Autistic individuals and enabling families to make necessary home improvements that enhance safety, autonomy, and quality of life.

Together, these investments would help ensure that Canada’s housing system delivers on its promise of equity, inclusion, and dignity for all, and would support the federal government’s commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and the continued modernization of the National Housing Strategy.

Recommendation 3:

The CWB is a refundable tax credit to help low-income workers and families made up of two portions: a basic amount and a disability supplement. The CWB is one of the best tools to help Canadians climb the “welfare wall” by counteracting disincentives to work that are built into many social support programs. However, the disability supplement amount of the CWB is currently inadequate because low-income Autistics with jobs face clawbacks, reducing the incentive to work. The CWB disability supplement is modest, and eligibility for it is tied to the Disability Tax Credit. The current maximum CWB amount for a person with a disability is \$2,165 (\$1428 base amount, plus \$737 disability supplement). Our recommendation would increase the total maximum benefit for a person with a disability to \$3,928. Further, we would suggest that there would be consideration to lowering the threshold to receive the benefit. This would encourage more Autistic people in Canada to join and remain in the workforce, elevating their economic independence and their quality of life. Increasing the maximum disability

supplement in the CWB would help to ensure Autistic Canadians who are able and want to work are rewarded and not penalized.

Recommendation 4:

The CCED is a tax deduction that supports affordability for working families by taking into account the cost of childcare. The CCED increased by \$1000 in Budget 2015, but has not increased since – not even to account for consumer price index change. As such, current levels do not reflect real-life costs facing families needing specialized care for their Autistic children. The estimated annual out of pocket cost of care for an Autistic family member is in the tens of thousands (\$25,000 to \$130,000) for specialized care services including specialized therapies, respite services, specialized programming and camps. By increasing this deduction, the government would ease the financial burden on these families, and support financial access to quality care, which could in turn permit some full time caregiver parents of Autistic children to return to the workforce.

Recommendation 5:

The Canada Caregiver Credit (CCC) does not benefit the low-income caregivers who need help the most. The CCC is a non-refundable tax credit to support caregivers who have to take time away from work or have additional expenses to support a spouse or dependent with a physical or mental impairment. Non-refundable tax credits lower payable taxes, but do not contribute to tax refunds, therefore providing less benefit to low-income Canadians who do not pay little or no income tax. The recommended change would provide much-needed support to families and caregivers who often face significant financial strain due to the additional care requirements of Autistic individuals, such as leaving the workforce. This would ensure existing benefits for caregiving reach those who need support the most.

Recommendation 6:

A specialist-only approach to autism assessment limits capacity unnecessarily, creating barriers and delays to diagnosis. Autism diagnosis wait times are at a crisis point across the country. Meanwhile, a 2023 Canadian study showed that general pediatricians can often diagnose Autism in children accurately. But most primary health providers currently lack the needed training. Boosting training for such providers would increase capacity, resulting in shorter waitlists and less need to resort to private assessment. This proposed fund would support specialized training for community health practitioners to diagnose Autism. By investing in the training of healthcare professionals, the government can speed the diagnostic process, reduce wait times, and ensure that more Autistic people have increased access to appropriate supports at any age. This initiative will help build a more responsive and effective healthcare system for Autistic people in Canada.

Recommendation 7:

Canadians are facing crisis-level wait times for autism diagnosis and publicly funded services and supports, with delays stretching from months to years. These delays have lifelong consequences - undermining early intervention, exacerbating mental health needs, and limiting inclusion in education, employment, and community life. The federal government has committed to improving access to critical health services to Autistic people through Canada's Autism Strategy. An Autism Wait Times Reduction Fund offers the federal government a response to a known crisis. This time-limited, \$95 million/year Autism Wait Times Reduction Fund is designed to support provinces and territories in strengthening diagnostic and service capacity. The fund would be governed by new bilateral agreements over a six- to ten-year term, with cost-matching from provinces/territories, per capita allocations, and a funding floor for smaller jurisdictions.

Key elements of the fund would include:

- Multilateral priority-setting aligned with *Canada's Autism Strategy*;
- Investment in both diagnosis and service access to avoid downstream bottlenecks;
- Support for training, workforce expansion, and rural/remote service access; Development of common wait time benchmarks and public reporting;
- Participation in a multilateral working group to ensure coordination and accountability.

The fund would operate for a defined period, support locally led solutions, and align with Autism Strategy and Bill S-203 priorities without imposing permanent structural change. Importantly, it does not ask the federal government to become a permanent funder of autism services but to play a time-bound, strategic role in accelerating systems change.

Investing now will create long-term cost savings and improve outcomes for over one million Autistic Canadians. It will also support broader federal priorities—including disability inclusion, caregiver support, and health system sustainability—by building capacity where it is most urgently needed. A federal wait times fund would signal real leadership and turn the promise of *Canada's Autism Strategy* into measurable, meaningful action.

Conclusion:

This submission outlines targeted, actionable measures to advance the implementation of *Canada's Autism Strategy*, released in September 2024 without dedicated funding. These recommendations build on priorities identified during the Strategy's development and reflect the urgent need for cross-departmental coordination and investment to address long-standing barriers faced by Autistic people and their families.

By committing to these measures, the federal government can fulfill the promise of the Strategy and give meaningful effect to the principles of **Bill S-203**, which affirms the right of Autistic people in Canada to full inclusion, participation, and equity. Budget 2026 presents a critical opportunity to move beyond commitment and into action—delivering tangible outcomes that promote inclusion, economic empowerment, and well-being for over one million Autistic people across the country.