

Election Toolkit

Individuals Edition



CASDA  ACTSA

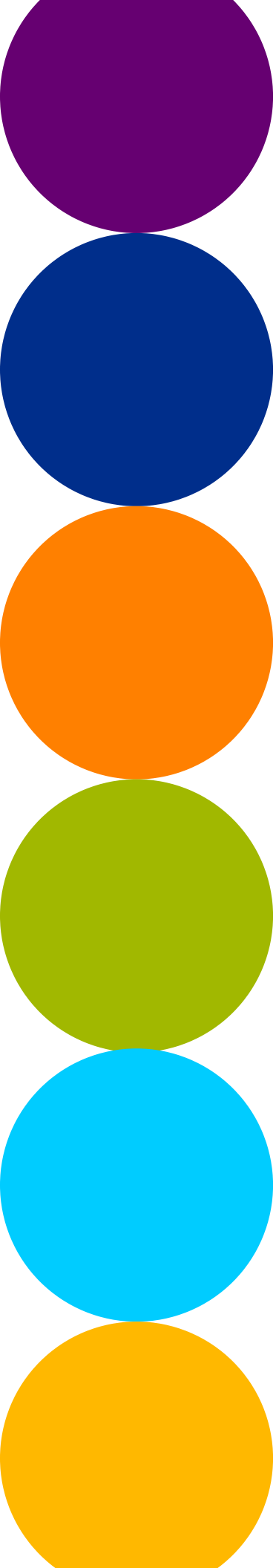


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Help advocate for a National Autism Strategy!

Canada's next federal election is taking place on (or before) October 21st, 2019.

In the lead-up to the election, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) is reaching out to all party candidates about CASDA.

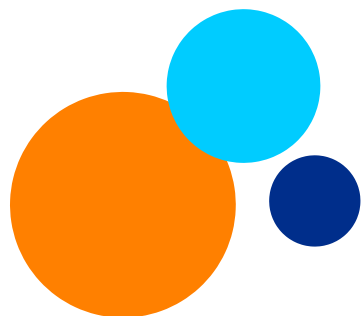
- **Commitment to a National Autism Strategy to improve the life outcomes of autistic people and their families/carers across Canada.**

Candidates need to know the issues facing autistic Canadians and know what actions need to be taken to improve the lives of all Canadians living with autism. Your organization can **help** make this happen.

Sharing your experiences and views with your local candidates can help them understand what is needed to better the lives of autistic Canadians and their families/carers.

They need to hear your unique and diverse stories.

The elected candidate in your riding will be your representative for the next four years-let's ensure that person understands autism, and makes autism a priority at the federal level.



This toolkit is a guide for contacting election candidates and creating conversations that spark change. You can:

- Meet candidates
- Speak to them on the phone
- Send an email or mail a letter
- Use social media

Together, we can ensure autistic Canadians and their families/carers are provided full and equal access to the resources they require to achieve their full potential. Please help #ASDCommitment. ed outreach strategies and information you may wish to use.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Debbie Irish'.

Debbie Irish
CASDA Chair

How can I engage with election candidates?

Anyone can be an advocate for autism this election! You don't need fancy presentations or to know the ins-and-outs of politics and policy - advocacy is all about sharing your story with the candidates and asking for a commitment to a National Autism Strategy that enables you, other autistic Canadians and their families to achieve their full potential.

The best way to do this is by arranging to meet with a candidate face to face. If you are not comfortable meeting candidates in person, there are also huge benefits to calling, emailing, writing a letter or engaging with them on social media. Take the approach that feels right for you.

This toolkit is full of practical advice for talking to your candidates about autism and sharing the #NationalAutismStrategy campaign with your networks, so we can make autism a part of the national election conversation!

Who are the local candidates in my area?

You can find out who your local representatives and candidates are through the Canadian government website:

<https://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>

We encourage you to contact as many representatives and candidates in your area as possible. You never know which one will win! It will also help you get to know each candidate and decide who you'd like to vote for on election day.

How to advocate for autism:

Meet face-to-face

Write a letter or email

Make a phone call

Post on social media

Ask a Question at a Meeting

Meet with my candidates

Meeting face to face with the candidates in your riding is a great way to share your story and help candidates better understand the lived experiences of autism.

You may wish to meet the candidates by yourself, or take a family member or friend to contribute to the discussion and provide a range of experiences. You may meet at candidates' offices, in a quiet Tim Hortons, at your house or in a public space. Do what feels best for you, make sure you are comfortable and the location is fully accessible.

Remember, you may end up meeting with staffers, rather than the candidates themselves. This is okay as they can inform candidates about your concerns.

Invite them to meet

Call or email the candidates you wish to meet with, giving a brief description of what you want to discuss, requesting a meeting and suggesting a time and place.

See the example email on this page which can also serve as a script if you would prefer to call the candidate (it may also help you to pre-record a message asking for a meeting on a communication device, if this is your primary communication method).

Invite your candidate at least two weeks before you want to meet.

If the time and/or place you have suggested does not suit them, they may suggest a different time and/or place. You can then decide whether their proposed time/place suits you and is accessible for you.

Example

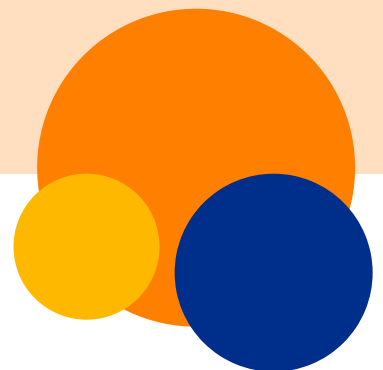
Subject: Meeting Request

Dear (insert candidate's name),

I am one of the hundreds of autistic people in your electorate who will be voting in the upcoming federal election. I would like to meet with you to discuss my experiences and what you can do to make life better for autistic people and their families in Canada.

Would you be available to meet us at the Tim Horton's, 50 Eglinton Ave E. on September 25th at 10am? You may contact me via this email address or on my cell at 416-123-4567.

Regards,
Jane Doe



Meet with my candidates (cont.)

Prepare for the meeting

To prepare, please refer to the *Preparing for a meeting or phone call* guide on page 9 of this toolkit.

At the meeting

Meetings with candidates usually go for 15 to 30 minutes. Remember, the main purpose of the meeting is to share your lived experience and what you want the candidate to do to make your life, and the lives of all autistic people and their families/carers better.

The candidate or staff member you meet with may not agree with everything you say. This can be very frustrating, but it is important that you do not get frustrated or angry at them. Try to repeat your views and state why you hold these views, always keeping the conversation constructive.

During or after your meeting, ask if the candidate would like to fill out a Letter of Support for our Blueprint. The letter can be found at the end of our toolkit and can be printed before your meeting.

Be sure to ask them whether they are comfortable to sign the letter. Let them know the letter will be shared with CASDA and in ongoing advocacy efforts. If the candidate does not want to sign the letter, calmly let them know this is fine. It doesn't mean that they are not committed to helping you or making Canada a better place for autistic people.

After the meeting

It can be useful to contact your candidate after the meeting to thank them for their time, and document your understanding of what was talked about in the meeting. This can help you build your relationship with the candidate, which may be valuable if they are elected and you want to advocate to them in the future.

We also want to hear how your meeting went! Go to the *What next?* section of this toolkit on page 14 to find out how you can let us know what happened and how you feel about your meeting.

Write a letter or email

Writing letters or emails to your candidates is another great way to share your experiences, concerns and wishes. In turn, receiving many emails and letters regarding the same issues informs candidates about what matters most to their voters.

Tips for writing to candidates:

- Candidates will put more importance on letters/emails from people who live in their riding.
- If you are sending an email, make sure you include a clear statement or request in the subject line.
- An email should be no longer than 300 words and letters no longer than one page. Any longer and it is unlikely that it will be read in full.
- Be clear about why you are contacting them - name the issues that are important to you, and write about how those issues impact you, your family and/or your community
- Ask for the candidate to take a specific action, a commitment to a National Autism Strategy. CASDA's Blueprint of a National Autism Strategy, which you can read on our website, is a good start to a conversation about a National Autism Strategy. You can use the blueprint as a reference.
- Remember to include your contact details so they can respond to you.

Example

Dear (insert candidate's name),

I am one of the hundreds of autistic people in your riding who will be voting in the upcoming federal election. I want to vote for a candidate who is committed to creating a better Canada for autistic people and their supporters.

I'm a 25 year-old who has been trying hard to get a job for over three years. It has been really hard because employment programs and support services don't seem to recognize the skills I can bring to the workforce and I struggle to communicate my strengths and needs in interviews. Potential employers are also failing to recognize my skills and strengths and seem unwilling to make the small adjustments I need to work.

Please commit to a National Autism Strategy and if elected, you work with autistic Canadians and their supporters to develop a strategy for showcasing the strengths of autistic employees to employment services and employers, and better support autistic people to find and retain meaningful employment. For more information about how to support autistic Canadians, go to the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance's (CASDA) [website](#) and check out its Blueprint for a National Autism Strategy.

I would also be happy to meet you and may be contacted on 416-123-4567.

All the best for the election!

Regards,
Jane Doe



Make a phone call

Phone calls to candidates are a great way to engage in conversation, tell your story and gives them an opportunity to ask questions. If they get lots of calls about the same issue they will know it is important to Canadians.

Calling candidates:

When you call a candidate's office it is unlikely that the candidate or their adviser will be able to speak to you straight away. The person who answers the call is likely to ask you to leave a message.

Before you call, you may find it helpful to prepare what you want to say in your message - see the example. Your message should be short, but highlight the issues that are important to you and your interest in making a time to talk.

You should receive a call back within a week, at least to arrange an appointment for a call with your candidate or staff member. If the day or time they suggest does not suit you, let them know. It is important the phone call takes place at a time and place you are comfortable with.

If you haven't heard back from a candidate's office within a week, you may wish to call again and calmly let them know you are still waiting for a call back.

Example

Hi, my name is Joe and I live in Toronto. I am one of the hundreds of autistic Canadians in your riding who will be voting in the federal election. I would like to have a short telephone chat with (insert candidate's name) so that I can share my story and experiences with him/her, and hear about what he/she will do to make life better for me and the others in my community. Could you please pass this message along to (insert candidate's name) and let me know I better time to reach her? My phone number is 416-123-4567. I would appreciate if you can call me first to let me know when they will be available to talk so I am able to prepare for the conversation.

Prepare for the phone call

To prepare for the phone call, refer to the Preparing for a meeting or phone call guide on page 11 of this toolkit.

During the phone call

Phone calls with candidates usually last for 15-30 minutes. Remember, the main purpose of this is to share your lived experience and tell them what actions you'd like them to take.

The candidate or staff may not agree with everything you say. This can be frustrating, but it is important you do not get angry at them. Try to repeat your views and state why you hold them, keep the conversation positive.

Post on social media

Engaging with your local candidate can also be done via social media. Most candidates will have a dedicated Facebook and Twitter account.

Social media is an effective way to build momentum for a campaign, in particular with the use of hashtags (#) on Twitter or Instagram. CASDA uses a number of hashtags to advocate; #CASDA, #Autism, #NationalAutismStrategy, #ASDCcommitment

Remember, everything you post on social media may be seen by others - even people you don't intend to see it. Be sure to only post what you're comfortable being public, and protect your privacy where needed.

Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media platform in Canada and many candidates will have their own Facebook page.

How to use Facebook to engage with your local candidate:

- Share a status, photo or video on your page and tag your local candidate so they can see it. Your Facebook friends will also see your status, so this is a good way of building support from your own community. You could post a photo or video of yourself on your way to meet the candidate, or with the candidate if they give permission. For guidelines on how to approach taking a photo with a candidate, see the *Meet with my candidates* section on page 6.

- If the candidate posts on their page about a relevant topic such as autism, education, employment or health care, you can comment on their post.
- Some candidates will have direct messaging (DM) enabled. This means you can send them a private message on Facebook. This is similar to sending an email or text message.
- You can try writing your own post on the candidate's page. This is a post that they will see as well as anyone who follows their page. Candidates may have this function disabled or review content before it is posted, so don't worry if it doesn't appear immediately.

Example

(You can use this for a status, post, comment or private message)

Dear [**Facebook page name of candidate**]:
I am one of Canada's 500,000 autistic people, and I will be voting in your riding in the upcoming Federal election. I want to vote for a candidate who will take action for autistic Canadians. If elected, will you support us by implementing a National Autism Strategy? I urge you to read CASDA's National Autism Strategy Blueprint and learn more about this important issue.



Post on social media (cont.)

Twitter

Twitter is a conversational, real time network known for its 280 character message limit. Hashtags are most often used on Twitter.

How to use Twitter to engage with your local candidate:

- Post a tweet. They can be read by your followers and anyone who searches the chosen hashtags. Keep your message short.
- You can add an image to your post, but this is optional.
- If a candidate replies to your tweet, you can respond offering to meet with them to discuss things further.

Twitter Example

Many ppl with autism who need supportive housing face long wait lists in their housing communitites. @[Candidate Twitter handle] how will you help autistic ppl find affordable & supportive housing? #NationalAutismStrategy

Twitter Example

Only about 1 in 5 adults with autism are in the labour force. Worst education outcomes of any group. @[Candidate Twitter handle] how will you help autistic ppl contribute & have their skills recognized? #NationalAutismStrategy

Instagram

Instagram is an image-based social media platform where users post a photo with a caption. It is a good way of giving visibility to your message particularly with younger Canadians.

How to use Instagram to engage your local candidates

- Write a caption to explain why you are posting and tag your local candidate if they have an Instagram account.
- Make sure you use the hashtags #CASDA and #NationalAutismStrategy.

Instagram Example

Will our politicians help make life better for #Autistic Canadians and support a #NationalAutismStrategy?

@[Instagram handle of candidate]. I am one of Canada's 500,000 autistic people, and I will be voting in your riding in the upcoming Federal election. I want to vote for a candidate who will take action for autistic Canadians. If elected, will you support us by implementing a National Autism Strategy? I urge you to read CASDA's Blueprint at <https://www.casda.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Blueprint-for-a-National-ASD-Strategy-1.pdf> and learn more about this important issue. #CASDA #NationalAutismStrategy.

Preparing for a meeting or phone call

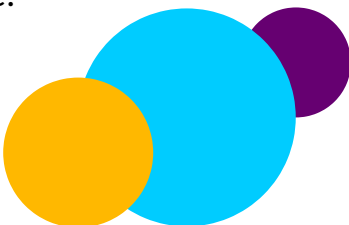
Meeting with your candidates is all about telling your story as an autistic Canadian, or supporter of an autistic person, and asking candidates to take action to better support you and the autism community.

Remember: a meeting or phone call will likely only last 15-30 minutes, so it is important to focus on the areas that are most important to you. You also want to make sure you leave enough time for the candidate to ask you questions - this will help them further understand your experience and what you want them to do.

If you are a family member, carer or friend who will be accompanying an autistic person to a face-to-face meeting, you may wish to adapt the social story template on page 13.

Sharing your lived experience

You don't need to write down everything you want to say, but it may help you to write down a few key points to prompt you during the meeting or phone call. Alternatively, if you use a communication device as your primary form of communication, or would feel more comfortable using such a device in your meeting, you could pre-record a 5-10 minute introduction about yourself and your lived experience.



You may want to think about and include:

- The positive and challenging aspects of being autistic or supporting an autistic person.
- The biggest barriers you currently experience when trying to be social, or access and participate in public life, e.g. public events, school, university, employment, etc.
- Your hopes and concerns for your future and/or the future of the autistic person you're supporting.

Highlighting what you want the candidate to do

The focus of the meeting should be on you and how supporting a National Autism Strategy is what you'd like them to do if they win the election. How can a National Strategy make your life better now, and in the future? How can the next Canadian government best support autistic people and their supporters?

Before the meeting, it may help to review the policy changes listed in CASDA's National Autism Strategy Blueprint and choose the commitments you would most like the candidate to advocate for if they are elected. You don't need to learn about all the policy issues or latest announcements - you can refer to CASDA's 4 election priorities on page 4. Feel free to use one or more of these asks in your list. Remember the [Blueprint](#) is merely a plan of action for a National Autism Strategy and will be refined further.

Social Story Template

If you are a parent, carer or friend of an autistic person and will be accompanying them to meetings with candidates, it may help to prepare one or more social stories.

This will help the person you are accompanying to know what to expect at the meeting. This template may help you develop your social stories for each meeting. You may want to call candidate's offices to ask for photos of people who will be attending your meetings, and a photo of where you will meet (if you are meeting at their offices).

<p>[Insert a photo of the person you are accompanying, and a photo of the candidate]</p>	<p>I am meeting a Canadian federal election candidate named [insert name]</p>
<p>[Insert photo of meeting place]</p>	<p>The meeting will take place at [insert location]</p> <p>It will start at [insert time] and most likely go for about 15-30 minutes.</p>
<p>[Insert photos of attendees]</p>	<p>At the meeting, there will be [insert names of attendees]</p>
<p>[Insert photo of candidate]</p>	<p>At the meeting, I will tell [candidate's name]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About my life as an Autistic Canadian; and • How a National Autism Strategy will make my life, and the lives of all Autistic Canadians better.
<p>[Insert a photo of the person you are accompanying smiling/calm, or another photo/symbol the person you are accompanying relates to]</p>	<p>[Insert candidate's name] may ask me questions to learn more about me</p> <p>They may not agree with everything I say, but that is okay, I can repeat my view and stay positive.</p>
<p>[Insert picture of Blueprint]</p>	<p>At the end of the meeting, I can ask [candidate's name] to take a copy of the Blueprint to read and understand.</p> <p>If they don't want to take a copy this is okay, it doesn't mean they don't support me or other autistic people.</p>

What next?



Sharing your lived experience

We would love to hear about your experience. If you met election candidates face-to-face or had a conversation on the phone, did you feel the candidates listened to your story? Did they ask good questions? What did they say they would do if elected? Did you enjoy speaking with them? If you emailed or sent a letter to one or more of your candidates, did you receive a response? Are you willing to share it with us?

To share your experience meeting with candidates, please email admin@casda.ca

Share on social media

Did you get a photo of one or more candidates holding the Blueprint? If you did, we encourage you to share this photo on your social media.

You may also want to share other positive aspects of your meetings, such as how it felt to share your experience and any commitments made by the candidates. This will help spread the word of which candidates are committed to supporting autistic Canadians. You may want to include the candidate's handle or account name if you know it, and you can include us by using #CASDA. #NationalAutismStrategy.

Follow up with candidate

Building a positive relationship with the winning candidate will mean that you can continue to speak to them about your needs once they are in parliament and have the power to make change. We suggest sending thank you emails to the candidates you met, thanking them for listening to your story and any commitments they made in the meeting. This is also a good chance to provide them with any further information.

Don't forget to vote

Don't forget to vote so you can have a say in which candidate represents your riding in the Canadian parliament for the next four years.

Election day will occur on or before October 21st, 2019.

For more information about how and where to vote, or to register to vote or update your details (such as your address if you have moved since the last election), please go to the Elections Canada website at <https://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>.

About the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance

The Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) was formed July 2007 shortly after the Senate Committee Report *"Pay Now or Pay Later: Autism Families in Crisis"*. During this time the federal government sent a clear message to the autism community: We need to work together with a unified voice. The autism community responded by forming CASDA.

CASDA brings together organizations representing autistic people, their families and carers and professionals who provide services which aim to improve the life outcomes of all autistic Canadians.

Our Strength

- We provide a vehicle to convene networking, information sharing and priority debates among Canada's leaders in the autism sector.
- We provide on-going communications, partnerships and advocacy with federal government departments that impact the lives of autistic Canadians.

For more information, contact us:

Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance

E: admin@casda.ca

W: casda.ca

Acknowledgements:

Resources for this election toolkit have been adopted from information provided by the following organizations.



www.autismontario.com



AUSTRALIAN
Autism Alliance

www.australianautismalliance.org.au

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#National Autism Strategy



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