

Election Toolkit

**FOR ORGANIZATIONS
2021 EDITION**



CASDA  ACTSA

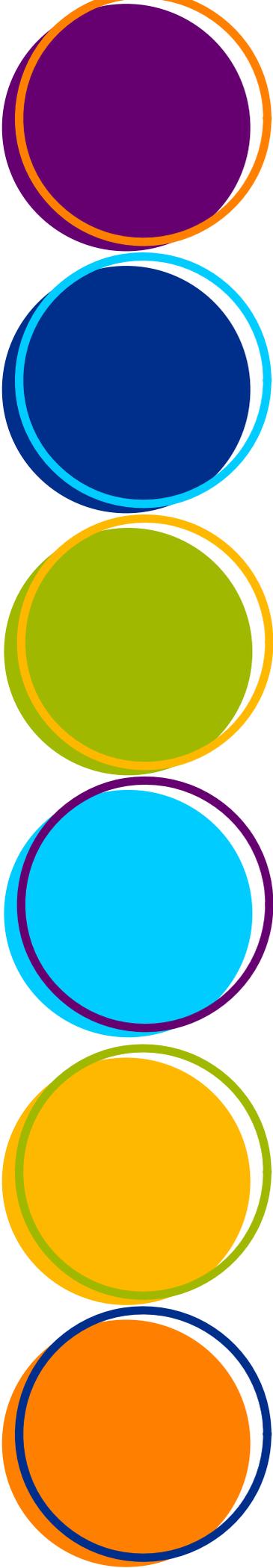


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HELP ADVOCATE FOR A NATIONAL AUTISM STRATEGY!

CANADA'S NEXT FEDERAL ELECTION IS TAKING PLACE ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

In the lead-up to the election, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) is reaching out to all party candidates to inquire about plans to implement a National Autism Strategy by 2023, including how such a strategy will address the barriers identified by Autistic people and their families across Canada.

Candidates need to be made aware of issues faced by Autistic people, their family, friends, and those who support them, as well as know what actions need to be taken to significantly improve their quality of life. Your allyship can **help** make this happen.

Sharing your experiences and views with your local candidates can help them understand what is needed to better the quality of life of Autistic people living in Canada and their families. 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 the complexities of autism and makes autism a priority at the federal level.

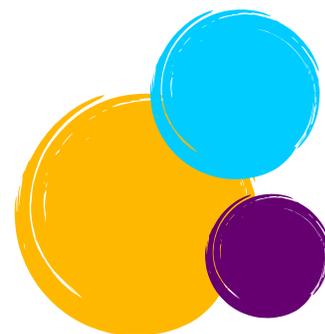
This toolkit is a guide for contacting election candidates and creating conversations that spark change. You can:

- Meet candidates virtually
- Make a phone call or send an email
- Use social media

Together, we can ensure Autistic people living in Canada, their families and those who support them, are provided full and equal access to the resources they require to achieve their full potential. Please support National Autism Strategy outreach and feel free to access any information you may wish to use.



Debbie Irish
CASDA Chair



HOW CAN OUR ORGANIZATION ENGAGE WITH ELECTION CANDIDATES?

Every organization can be an advocate for autism this election! Advocacy is all about sharing stories with candidates - the story of your organization and the families you support, as well as asking them to commit to implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023 so you, other Autistic people, and their families can achieve their full potential.

A great way to engage is to meet with a candidate virtually. There are also huge benefits to calling, emailing, writing a letter, or engaging 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 implementation campaign with your networks, so we can make autism a part of the national election conversation!

WHO ARE THE LOCAL CANDIDATES AND REPRESENTATIVES IN MY AREA?

You can find your local representatives and candidates 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
VIRTUALLY

WRITE
A LETTER
OR EMAIL

MAKE A PHONE
CALL

POST ON
SOCIAL MEDIA

ASK A
QUESTION AT A
MEETING

MEET WITH CANDIDATES



Meeting virtually and sharing your organization's story is a great way to help candidates better understand the lived experiences of autism.

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 virtual platform to meet on (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams).

See the example email on this page which can also serve as a script if you would prefer to call the candidate. Invite the candidate(s) at least two weeks before you'd like to meet.

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

To prepare, please refer to the *Preparing for a meeting or phone call* guide on page 10 of this toolkit.

AT THE MEETING

Meetings with candidates usually go for 15-30 minutes. The main purpose of the meeting is to share how your organization helps Autistic people living in Canada, and the importance of implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023.

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.

AFTER THE MEETING

It can be useful to contact your candidate after the meeting to thank them for their time. 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 12 to find out how you can let us know what happened.

EXAMPLE

Subject: Meeting Request

Dear [insert candidate's name],

My name is [insert name] and I work at [insert workplace]. We are an organization that supports 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 living in Canada.

Would you be available to join us for a quick Zoom call on [date] at [time]? You may contact me via this email address or on my cell at [number].

Regards,
[insert name]



WRITE A LETTER OR EMAIL



Writing letters or emails to your candidates is another great way to share your organization's priorities. 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. Consider asking your constituents/members/stakeholders to write letters to their candidates as well.
- 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 important issues, and write about how those issues impact your community.
- Ask for the candidate to take a specific action: a commitment to implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023. CASDA's Roadmap for a National Autism Strategy, which you can read on [our website](#), is a good start to a conversation about a National Autism Strategy.
- Share this template with your members (etc.) so they have the opportunity to engage with candidates as well.

EXAMPLE

Dear [insert candidate's name]

We support the hundreds of Autistic people in your riding who will be voting in the upcoming federal election. They want to vote for a candidate who is committed to creating a better Canada for Autistic people and their families.

[insert here your organization's mission, goals, hopes for the future and what area(s) you'd like to see change in].

Please commit to implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023. If elected, please commit to working with Autistic people living in Canada and their supporters, such as our organization, to develop a strategy that better supports Autistic people and their families. For more information about how to support Autistic people living in Canada, go to the website of the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance and check out the [Roadmap to a National Autism Strategy](#).

We would also be happy to meet you and may be contacted through our [website](#) (insert website link here).

All the best for the election!

Regards,
[insert name]



MAKE A PHONE CALL

Phone calls to candidates are a great way to engage in conversation, 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 constituents in their riding.

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 take 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.

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

PREPARE FOR THE PHONE CALL

Refer to the Preparing for a meeting or phone call guide on page 10.

EXAMPLE

Hi, my name is [insert name] from [insert organization] in [insert city].

We support the hundreds of Autistic people in your riding who will be voting in the federal election. We would like to have a short telephone chat with [insert candidate's name] so that we can share our mission and lived experiences of our members with him/her, and hear about what he/she will do to make life better for Autistic people living in Canada.

Could you please pass this message along to [insert candidate's name] and let us know a better time to reach them? Our phone number is 416-123-4567. Thank you for your time.

DURING THE PHONE CALL

Phone calls with candidates usually last for 15-30 minutes. Remember, the main purpose of this is to share your organization's mission and the benefits of implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023.

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Engaging with local candidates can also be done via social media.

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; #NationalAutismStrategy, #elxn44 #CdnPoli.

FACEBOOK

Facebook is a social networking site that makes it easy for you to connect and share with family and friends online. 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 organization's page and tag local candidates so they can see it. You could post a photo or video of your organization's meeting with candidate.
- 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.



EXAMPLE

Dear [Facebook page name of candidate]: We represent some of Canada's 700,000 Autistic people, some of who will be voting in your riding in the upcoming Federal election. We will support a candidate who will take action for Autistic people living in Canada. If elected, will you support a commitment to implement a National Autism Strategy by 2023?

We urge you to read CASDA's Roadmap to a National Autism Strategy to learn more about this important issue.

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 on your organizations' profile. They can be read by your followers and anyone who searches the chosen hashtags.
- 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.

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA (CONT.)

TWITTER EXAMPLES

Only 1 in 5 Autistic adults are in the labour force. Autistic people living in Canada also have the worst educational outcomes of any group. @[Candidate Twitter handle], how will you help Autistic people contribute & have their skills recognized?

#Elxn44 #CdnPoli #NationalAutismStrategy

Autistic people who need supportive housing often face long waitlists in their housing communities. @[Candidate Twitter handle], how will you help Autistic people living in Canada find affordable & supportive housing?

#Elxn44 #CdnPoli #NationalAutismStrategy

*An autism diagnosis comes with a massive price tag. The cost of supports exceed families' entire income. @**(Candidate Twitter handle)**, how will you ensure autism supports become more affordable?*

#Elxn44 #CdnPoli #NationalAutismStrategy

*1 in 66 Canadians aged 5-17 and an estimated 700,000 people in Canada are #Autistic @**(Candidate Twitter handle)** how will you ensure these individuals have the proper support?*

#Elxn44 #CdnPoli #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 #Elxn44, #cdnpoli #NationalAutismStrategy.

INSTAGRAM EXAMPLE

Will our politicians help make life better for #Autistic people living in Canada and implement a #NationalAutismStrategy by 2023?

*@**[Instagram handle of candidate]**: We represent some of Canada's 700,000 Autistic people, some of who will be voting in your riding in the upcoming Federal election. We want to support a candidate who will take action for Autistic people living in Canada. Will you commit to implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023?*

We urge you to read CASDA's Roadmap to a National Autism Strategy to learn more about this important issue.

PREPARING FOR A MEETING OR PHONE CALL

Meeting with your candidates is all about telling your story as an autism organization, and asking candidates to take action to better support your goals and Autistic people, their family, friends, and those who support them.

Remember: a meeting or phone call will likely only last 15-30 minutes, so it is important to focus on the most important areas to your organization.

You also want to make sure you leave enough time for the candidate to ask you questions - this will help them further understand your organization's goals and the benefits of implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023.

SHARING OTHERS LIVED EXPERIENCES

You may want to think about and include:

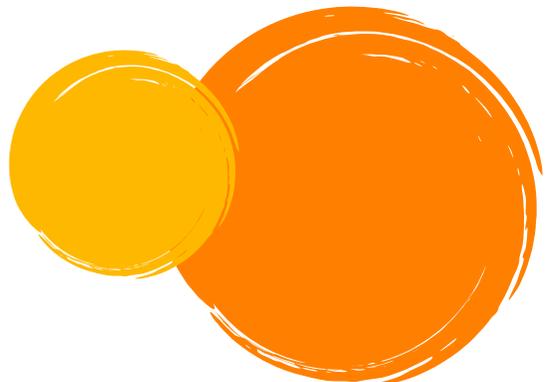
- Positive and challenging societal experiences that you have encountered while supporting an Autistic person.
- The biggest barriers you currently experience with regards to access and social inclusion .
- Your hopes and concerns for the future of the Autistic people that your organization supports.

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT YOU WANT THE CANDIDATE TO DO

The focus of the meeting should be on your organization and the candidate's commitment to implementing a National Autism Strategy by 2023. How can a National Autism Strategy make Autistic peoples lives better now, and in the future? How can the next Canadian government best support Autistic people and their supporters?

During the conversation ask them if they would feel comfortable with signing a letter of support, which can be found [here](#).

Before the meeting, it may help to review the [Roadmap to a National Autism Strategy](#) and the [policy compendium](#) to explore and select the commitments you would most like the candidate to advocate for if they are elected.



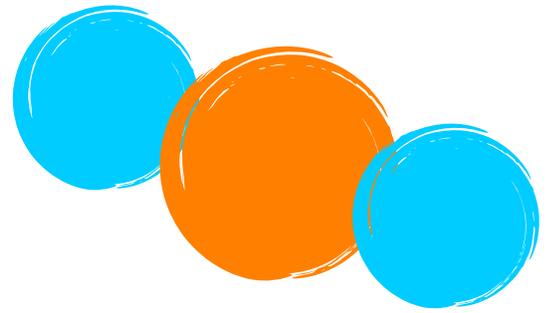
SOCIAL STORY TEMPLATE

If you will have an Autistic person accompanying you to meetings with candidates, it may help to prepare one or more social stories.

This template may aid in developing social stories for each meeting, and ultimately help the accompanying person know what to expect. You may want to call candidate's offices to ask for names/photos of people who will be attending your meetings.

<p>[Insert a photo of the person you are accompanying]</p>	<p>I am meeting a Canadian federal election candidate named [insert candidate's name].</p>
<p>[Insert a photo of the meeting place (in-person or virtual)]</p>	<p>The meeting will take place at [insert location, whether in-person or virtual].</p> <p>The meeting will start at [insert time].</p> <p>The meeting may last 15 to 30 minutes.</p>
<p>[Insert photos of attendees]</p>	<p>At the meeting, there will be [insert names of attendees].</p>
<p>[Insert a photo of the candidate you are meeting]</p>	<p>At the meeting, I will tell [insert candidate's name]:</p> <p>About my life as an Autistic person living in Canada.</p> <p>How a National Autism Strategy will better my life and the lives of Autistic people living in Canada.</p>
<p>[Insert a photo of the person you are accompanying or a symbol that 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 a picture of CASDA's Roadmap]</p> <p>www.casda.ca/roadmap</p>	<p>At the end of the meeting, I can ask [insert candidate's name] to send CASDA's Roadmap to read and understand.</p> <p>If they prefer not to, that's okay. It does not mean that they do not support me or other Autistic people.</p>

WHAT'S NEXT?



SHARING YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCE

We would love to hear about your experience. If you met election candidates online 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 info@casda.ca.

SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Did you get a photo of one or more candidates during your meeting? 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 people living in Canada. You may want to include the candidate's handle or account name if you know it, and you can include us by using #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 a 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.

Link your members to either this toolkit or the toolkit we've developed with individuals in mind.

The more candidates are informed about the issues related to autism the better.

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 Autistic people and their families: We need to work together with a unified voice. We - Autistic people, their families, and the people and organizations that support them - responded by forming CASDA.

CASDA brings together Autistic people, self-advocates, caregivers, community members, researchers, and representatives from leading organizations across Canada.

OUR STRENGTH

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US:

Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance

E: info@casda.ca

W: casda.ca

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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



www.autismontario.com



www.australianautismalliance.org.au

#NATIONAL AUTISM STRATEGY



CASDA  ACTSA