

## Statement from MacART on World Autism Awareness Day 2018

April 2<sup>nd</sup> is annual World Autism Awareness Day – a day to recognize all those living on the autism spectrum. Here in Canada, 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The McMaster Autism Research Team (MacART; [www.macautism.ca](http://www.macautism.ca)) is proud to celebrate World Autism Awareness Day. MacART is a partnership between McMaster Children's Hospital, Hamilton Health Sciences, and McMaster University that aims to bridge the research-to-practice gap in ASD. MacART is designed to foster collaboration among the families, researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers whose lives and work are touched by ASD.

MacART has numerous initiatives underway. This includes collaborations with groups at McMaster University ([Offord Centre for Child Studies](#), [CanChild](#), [MacDATA Institute](#), [Health Leadership Academy](#)), community organizations (such as [CASDA](#), [Autism Speaks](#), [Autism Ontario](#), [Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services](#), and [South Asian Autism Awareness Centre](#)), and international projects (as the only Canadian site in an [NIH-funded study](#) to develop a social-communication measure for neurodevelopmental disorders). And after a successful [2017 Research Stakeholder Symposium](#), we are using the stakeholder feedback we received to guide the development of future training endeavours.

Our team members continue to produce cutting-edge research. Earlier this year, [a study](#) led by MacART member [Dr. Karun Singh](#) pinpointed a gene that is linked to neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism. "Our goal is to use these findings and search for medications that can be used to treat different forms of autism," said Dr. Singh, Scientist with McMaster's Stem Cell and Cancer Research Institute.

We also continue to work on the [Pediatric Autism Research Collaborative \(PARC\) Project](#) together with clinicians at McMaster Children's Hospital, embedding a research protocol into ASD Services. "We are looking to engage families in research in a way that minimizes extra burden for them," said Dr. Irene Drmic, clinical psychologist at Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre and a lead investigator on the PARC Project. "This research will then help us improve the services those families are receiving and continually advance clinical care."

MacART's various projects are spread across our foundational pillars – research, education, community and policy – all of which aim to advance autism care and help foster increased understanding and acceptance.

*MacART is proud to be supported by our partners:*

- *McMaster Children's Hospital & McMaster Children's Hospital Research Collaborative*
- *Hamilton Health Sciences & Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation*
- *McMaster University*