

## Statement from MacART on World Autism Awareness Day 2019

World Autism Awareness Day is April 2<sup>nd</sup> – an annual observance day to recognize those living on the autism spectrum. Here in Canada, 1 in 66 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 individuals, families, researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers whose lives and work are touched by ASD.

Our team members and trainees continue to work on various innovative research projects. One example is a feasibility project exploring the adaptation of the Family Check-Up (FCU) program for caregivers of children with ASD. The FCU is a brief, evidence-based, assessment-driven intervention that uses a strength-based and motivational interviewing approach to engage caregivers in the prevention and treatment of child emotional and behavioural problems. MacART co-Director Dr. Terry Bennett, along with Drs. Irene Drmic and Vivian Lee and other MacART members, are the first research group to investigate the utility of the FCU program in Canada, in addition to testing its acceptability for families of children with ASD. ***“The healthy development and emotional well-being of children with ASD and their parents/caregivers is tightly linked. We know this,”*** Bennett says. ***“It’s time to act on this knowledge to create new programs of care that support and strengthen families. Children deserve it and so do all the important people in their lives”.***

Further pioneering work is also being done by the next generation of autism researchers. Mackenzie Salt recently defended his PhD dissertation, which involved developing a new methodology using observations of people with ASD interacting with others in a naturalistic setting to make conclusions about how people with ASD interact in everyday life. There were distinct differences in how pragmatic language abilities were used depending upon who the person with ASD was interacting with – suggesting the pragmatic language deficits seen in ASD may not be deficits and may be more akin to cultural differences. ***“This study is the first to look at communication between adults with ASD,”*** Mackenzie says. ***“And being a person with ASD myself, I hope that this research can be used to give a more accurate picture of the communication abilities of people with ASD in everyday life and to improve acceptance and reduce stigma.”***

These projects are just two examples of the many initiatives and collaborations MacART currently has underway – all with the overarching goal of ***advancing autism care through meaningful research.***

MacART is thankful 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