

## Statement from MacART on World Autism Acceptance Day 2024

On April 2<sup>nd</sup> we celebrate World Autism Acceptance Day. This day is not just about raising awareness, but also about fostering acceptance and promoting inclusion for the more than 75 million Autistic people worldwide. In Canada, 1 in 50 children and youth between the ages of 1 to 17 are Autistic, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada ([PHAC, 2022](#)). This underscores the importance of building a world that is inclusive for all.

The McMaster Autism Research Team (MacART; [www.macautism.ca](http://www.macautism.ca)) is excited to acknowledge World Autism Acceptance Day and the start of World Autism Month. MacART is a partnership between McMaster Children's Hospital, Hamilton Health Sciences, and McMaster University dedicated to closing the gap between autism research and practice. MacART encourages collaboration among individuals, families, researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers whose lives and work are touched by autism.

The theme of this year's World Autism Acceptance Day is *Moving from Surviving to Thriving: Autistic Individuals Share Regional Perspectives*, which encourages having dialogues about regional differences and similarities in the autism field. These efforts are in part aimed towards the goal of improving the implementation of the United Nations' overall [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) for encouraging Autistic people worldwide to thrive, rather than just survive. Through communicating information on key factors of well-being and how they are promoted in different regions, we can create collective learned lessons and informed change, multiplying the positive impact of once individual learnings.

MacART member Dr. Irene Drmic, a clinical psychologist and lead for MacART's Clinical Research pillar, is Clinical Director for the '[Integrated Pathway for Children and Youth with Extensive Needs](#)' program at Hamilton Health Sciences' McMaster Children's Hospital (MCH) and the Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre. This Proof of Concept program was announced in 2023 and is supported by \$97 million from the province of Ontario over three years across three sites (Hamilton, Toronto, and Ottawa). It is designed to connect families of children and youth with co-occurring neurodevelopmental, mental health, behavioral, and medical complexities, and/or social vulnerabilities, which may include children and youth with autism with complex needs, with an interdisciplinary team of healthcare professionals.

This tailored and integrated pathway of care aims to ensure that the most vulnerable children and youth and their families, regardless of diagnosis, are accessing timely, evidence-based, and trauma-informed services.

"We hope that the lessons we are learning from the pilot programs in these three regions can inform an evidence-informed expansion of this program across Ontario," says Dr. Irene Drmic. "We are excited about what we've been seeing on the ground; in our dialogues across sites, we already have learned much around approaching multi-organizational partnerships, engagement strategies, and forming models of service access across organizations. This is an important step in advancing patient-centred care in a way that promotes family empowerment."

MacART is steadfast in its commitment to work together with our partner members, organizations, and collaborators to advance autism care through meaningful research. Together, we can evolve the conversation surrounding neurodiversity, with the aim of improving quality of life for all Autistic individuals towards *thriving, not just surviving*.

MacART is proud to be supported by our partners:

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