

**Autism and Mental Health Literacy Project (AM-HeLP) in Canada**



<b>Geography and scale:</b>	Canada (but available online)
<b>Type of Disability</b>	Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

<b>Involved actors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)</li> <li>• York University Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Lab</li> <li>• Autistic people and their families</li> <li>• Spectrum Productions</li> <li>• Public Health Agency of Canada</li> </ul>



**Mental Health Literacy Guide for Autism**

**Best practice description**

The Mental Health Literacy Guide was developed to increase autistic adults' awareness, knowledge, and acceptance of mental health. The guide has nine sections that focus on building awareness of mental health, particular mental health concerns and coping strategies for autistic people, and resources for support. The guide is targeted primarily at autistic adults and quotations throughout the document showcase the lived experiences of autistic adults to provide the most appropriate, relevant, and valid information. The guide follows two years of consultation with 29 autistic adults and family members of autistic adults from across Canada who spoke about their personal lived experiences. The advisers informed the structure, topics and content of the guide, including chapters on the definition of mental health, what it's like to grow up autistic in Canada, strategies to maintain good mental health, appropriate identity-first language to use to talk about autism, signs of mental health problems and ways to promote well-being. The guide also includes information on the pandemic's impact on autistic people and resources for families and others.

**Origin / impetus for best practice**

- Lack of information about autistic people's experience of mental health and mental health needs.
- No mental health literacy materials that talk about the intersection between well-being, mental health problems, and autism.
- Limited mental health resources that specifically incorporate autistic peoples perspectives.
- High rates of mental health or substance use disorders among autistic adults (~50%).
- Desire to create a more friendly, welcoming, and accepting environment of autistic mental health, as well as develop more autistic-informed mental health supports in Canada.

**Impact / results of implementing best practice**

- A program evaluation is underway: researchers are interviewing autistic advisors to understand the experience of co-creating the guide and to develop lessons learned for the future.

**Critical success factors for best practice**

- Involvement of autistic adults in designing and producing the guide's content.
- Funding from government agencies for autistic mental health research.
- Plain-language summaries and accompanying videos/transcripts make it more accessible to all individuals.
- Specific sections focused on intersectionality.

**Impact statement**

"One of the biggest myths we try to dispel in this guide is that autism is a mental health problem. Autism is not a mental health problem; it is a different way of being," Dr. Jonathan Weiss, associate professor in the Faculty of Health and York Research Chair in Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disability Mental Health at York University and project lead on the guide ([News@York](#))

**Lessons learned**

- Importance of consulting and highlighting individuals with lived experience in guidelines.
- While action is important, individual awareness and autonomy can be critical to starting conversations on under-researched or underrepresented topics.

<b>Sources</b>	Autism Mental Health Literacy Project (AM-HeLP) Group. (2021). Mental Health Literacy Guide for Autism. <a href="#">Link</a> .
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<b>Further links &amp; information</b>	The guide has been turned into an animated video series, which can be found on <a href="#">YouTube</a> .
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