

Autism Diagnosis in British Columbia



This handout provides information and resources related to the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in British Columbia.

1. WHO ASSESSES **AUTISM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA?**

- **Qualified specialists who are able to make an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis in British Columbia are pediatricians, psychiatrists, or registered psychologists**

These professionals work with a qualified team or gather information from other professionals, in order to complete a full assessment. For publicly-funded assessments, a family doctor must make a referral to the BC Autism Assessment Network in your community. For private assessments, families can directly contact a qualified professional, who will be working under the guidelines of the BC Autism Assessment Network. If a child has received an Autism Spectrum Diagnosis outside of British Columbia, the diagnosis must be confirmed by a qualified B.C. specialist before a family can apply for autism funding. You can find more information about the assessment process for Autism Spectrum Disorder on the Government of B.C. website:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/child-behaviour-development/support-needs/autism-spectrum-disorder/diagnosis/how-autism-is-diagnosed?keyword=autism>.

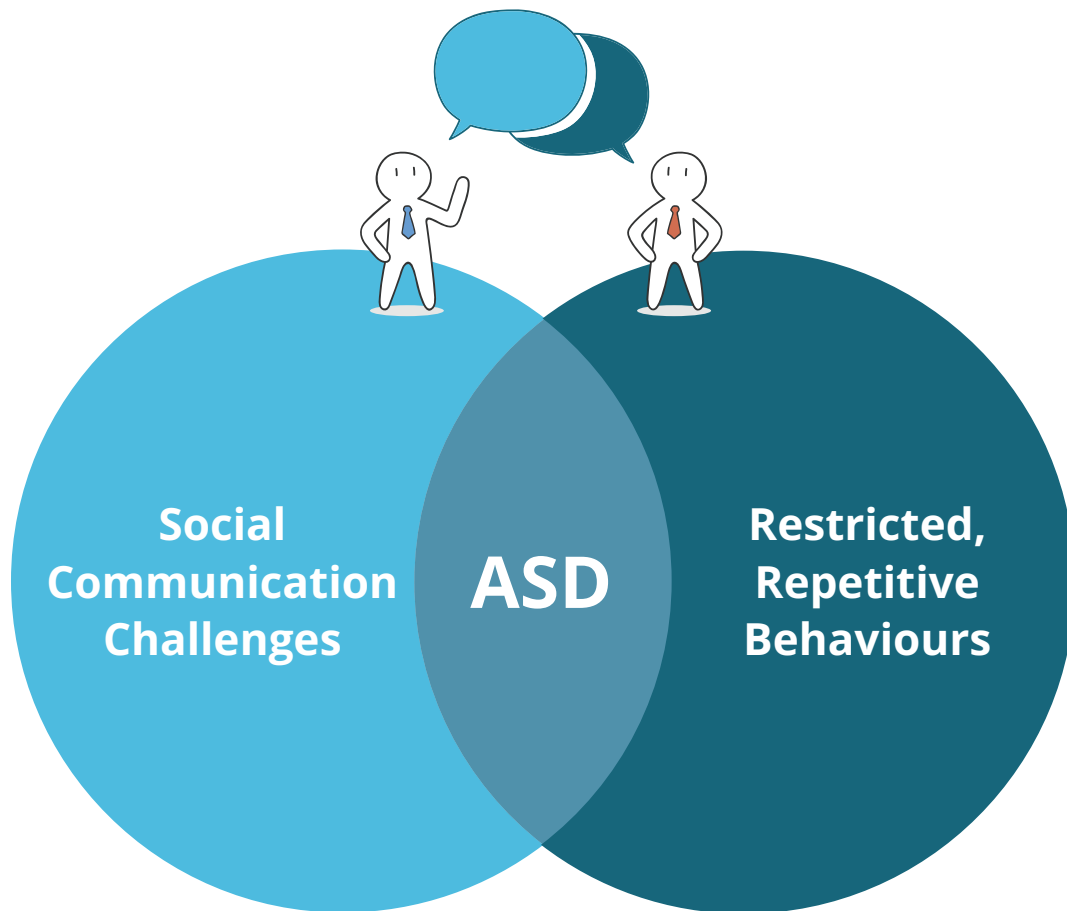


2. CRITERIA FOR DIAGNOSING **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

- During assessment appointments, professionals will examine a child's medical and developmental history, as well as behaviours, social interactions, and communication ability. In Canada and the United States, qualified specialists use the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) as the standardized criteria to diagnose Autism Spectrum Disorder. To meet diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder according to the DSM-5, an individual must have persistent impairments across two domains:

- 1. Social communication and interaction**
- 2. Restricted, repetitive behaviours**



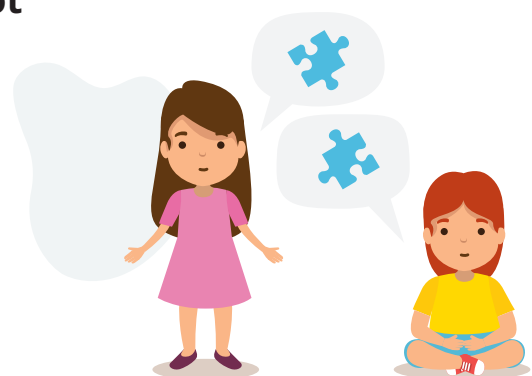


- Once a diagnosis has been made according to the DSM-5, the qualified specialist will describe the diagnosis as Level 1, 2, or 3, depending on the severity of impairments or how much support is needed in the child's daily life, for families to start planning for support. You can find more information regarding diagnostic criteria here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html>.

- It is important to recognize that the current edition of the DSM-5, which has been used clinically since 2013, only uses the classification "Autism Spectrum Disorder" and does not include subcategories of this diagnosis. The previous manual, DSM-4, which was used prior to 2013, included the following subcategory classifications:

- **Autistic Disorder**
- **Asperger's Disorder**
- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified**
- **Rett's Disorder**
- **Childhood Disintegrative Disorder**

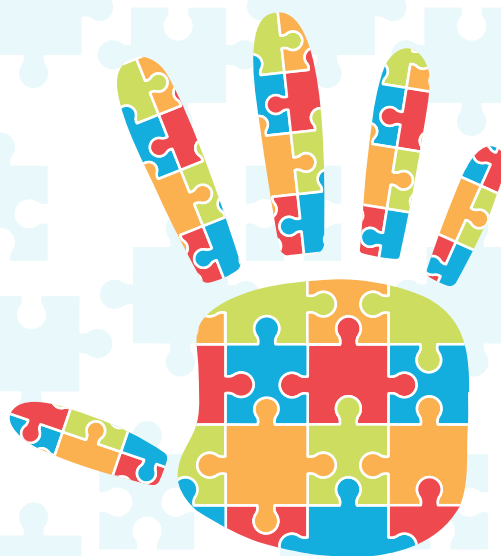


3. ASD PREVALENCE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

- In 2018, the National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System released a report with the current statistics regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder among children and youth in Canada. This report included the following information:
 - Approximately **1 in 66** children and youth are diagnosed with ASD in Canada.
 - Specifically in British Columbia, **1 in 68** children and youth are diagnosed with ASD.
 - Prevalence estimates are reported as being much higher in males than females, with males being identified **4 times** more frequently in Canada.
 - Among children and youth diagnosed with ASD in Canada, 56% had received their diagnosis by 6 years of age; 72% had been diagnosed by 8 years of age; and less than 10% were diagnosed after 12 years of age.

You can read the full National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System report here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder-children-youth-canada-2018.html#a2-4>.



4. SUPPORT FOR **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN BC EDUCATION**

- The Ministry of Education in British Columbia recognizes that students with special needs may require additional support and accommodations to enable them to access and participate in educational programs.
- Students in schools with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder will be classified by the Ministry of Education with a Category G – Autism Spectrum Disorder designation. Once a student has been designated, the school board must ensure that an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is designed for the student. An IEP is a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, accommodations, the services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement. You can read more about Individual Education Plans in the Special Education Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/inclusive/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf.



- Additional supplementary funding is also provided for students with special needs in schools in various categories. Autism Spectrum Disorder is a Level 2 funding category. These funds are not targeted to specific students; however, they are provided to boards of education to support the needs of students within their district. You can read more about K-12 Funding for Special Needs students here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/k-12-funding-special-needs>.

- British Columbia's Ministry of Education also funds a number of unique programs to help meet the educational needs of special needs students in British Columbia. The Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD) provides consultation, training and support services to all public and independent schools, as well as families, across the province of British Columbia with a primary focus on increasing the capacity of school district staff to support students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

You can read more about POPARD services, as well as access a variety of resources and learning materials related to students with ASD, on our website: <https://autismoutreach.ca/>.



REFERENCES

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.).
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4th ed., text rev.).