



## Ontario Autistic Adults and Adults with Other Developmental Disabilities are Dying Too Soon

### What is this research about?

Other countries have reported that autistic adults are more likely to die at a younger age (“premature mortality”) than other adults. However, these studies do not always look at the experience of autistic female individuals separately from autistic male individuals (based on sex assigned at birth). This is important because we know that there are sex differences in the most common causes of death.

Past studies have also tended to compare autistic adults to adults without autism, but it is important to see whether premature mortality is also a concern for adults with other types of developmental disabilities.

This research looks at premature mortality (dying before the age of 75) in three groups of male and female adults: autistic, with other developmental disabilities, and without developmental disabilities.

### What did the researchers do?

Scientists from the Health Care Access and Developmental Disabilities Program (H-CARDD) and ICES studied 7,426 autistic males and 3,226 autistic females, ages 19 to 65, between 2010 and 2016 to see how they died and the most common causes of death. They compared these individuals from across Ontario to age-matched peers with other developmental disabilities and without developmental disabilities.

### What you need to know

This study found that autistic males and females were over three times more likely to die prematurely (before age 75) than those of the same age without autism. They were less likely to die prematurely than same age adults with other developmental disabilities.

This means that we need to do more to improve health and social care for autistic males and females, and those with other developmental disabilities, to allow them to live long and healthy lives.

### What did the researchers find?

Researchers found that autistic males and autistic females were over three times as likely to die prematurely than age-matched males or females without developmental disabilities. The most common cause of death in the two groups of males were deaths by external causes, whereas the most common cause of death in the two groups of females was cancer. Researchers also found that autistic males and autistic females were less likely to die than age-matched males and females with other developmental disabilities. The most common cause of death in people with other developmental disabilities was circulatory system diseases.

## How can you use this research?

We now know that autistic adults are more likely to die prematurely in Canada, as has been found in other parts of the world. To best understand and address this issue, we need to take a gendered lens, and not treat autistic male and female individuals as if they are the same.

We also need to design our preventive health efforts to reach out to autistic people as well as those with other developmental disabilities. This is not simply a concern for autistic adults alone. The health of these adults cannot be ignored. We need improvements in health and social care to allow them to live long and healthy lives.

## Do you want to know more?

### Read the publication:

Lunsky Y, Lai MC, Balogh R, Chung H, Durbin A, Jachyra P, Tint A, Weiss J, & Lin E. (2022). Premature mortality in a population-based cohort of autistic adults in Canada. *Autism Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2741>

**Keywords** – premature mortality, autism, developmental disabilities, sex

[Click here](#) to read the larger report that this study is based upon.

## About the researchers

This study was led by Yona Lunsky at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and ICES, with Meng-Chuan Lai (CAMH), Rob Balogh (University of Ontario Institute of Technology, ICES), Hannah Chung (ICES), Anna Durbin (Unity Health Toronto, ICES) Patrick Jachyra (CAMH), Ami Tint (CAMH), Jonathan Weiss (York University), and Elizabeth Lin (CAMH, ICES).

## About H-CARDD

Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) is a research program that aims to enhance the overall health and well-being of people with developmental disabilities through improved health care policy and services.

H-CARDD research is conducted by dedicated teams of scientists, policymakers, health care providers, people with disabilities and families working collaboratively.

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You can find more information about H-CARDD and this research at [www.hcardd.ca](http://www.hcardd.ca).



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