

WELCOME TO BCAAN!

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Many families have questions about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and how we do assessments. This handout answers some of the questions we hear most often from families. We will be available to help answer any other questions you may have.

1. What Is an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism affects how a person socializes with others. It also affects how a person acts, communicates and thinks about things. Because there is a wide variation in how autism takes form, these different forms of autism are sometimes generally referred to as “Autism Spectrum Disorders”.

Right now, nobody knows exactly what causes ASD. What we do know is that the way the brain develops and a person’s genes are likely involved.

People who have ASD do not all act the same. The one thing that every person with ASD has in common is that they have difficulty understanding how to socialize with others.

We are usually able to see some of the effects of ASD on a child by the age of three. Children do not outgrow ASD. They generally have a life-long developmental disability.

2. What Is The British Columbia Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN)?

BCAAN is the name of the program operated by the Provincial Health Services Authority and other regional Health Authorities across BC. BCAAN is a network of clinicians who assess and diagnose children and youth who may have ASD. A clinician is a person with special skills and training, like a psychologist, psychiatrist or pediatrician (children’s doctor). All the clinicians that are part of BCAAN use the same guidelines and standards to decide whether a child or youth has ASD.

3. What Is The Provincial Autism Resource Centre (PARC)?

The Provincial Autism Resource Centre, or PARC, is at Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children in Vancouver. PARC was opened in May 2003. The team at PARC assesses and diagnoses children and youth with autism. PARC also works with other health groups and teaches about ASD.

The PARC team includes nurses, social workers, pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists. Some of these people used to work for the Sunny Hill Autism Spectrum Resource Team, or for the Mental Health Program at BC Children's hospital.

4. How Can I Get My Child Assessed for Autism?

The first step is to make an appointment with your family doctor. Once you do that, your doctor will either refer you to a specialist, or may refer you to a professional who is an expert in diagnosing ASD. Your doctor will think about the best place for the assessment to be done, depending on where you live.

If your child is referred to a specialist, it is helpful to include any past reports, along with the referral letter. The specialist might want to see reports like:

- Doctor's meetings
- Hearing assessments
- Reports from your child's infant development program, or child development centre
- Psychological or psycho-educational reports
- Speech and language reports
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy

Ask your doctor if you do not know if your child has these reports done.

5. Do I Have To Have My Child Assessed By A BCAAN Clinician?

Clinicians who are not part of BCAAN can also assess and diagnose children, but they have to use the same guidelines as BCAAN clinicians in order for you to receive funding from MCFD. If you want your child assessed by a clinician who is **not** part of BCAAN, talk to your doctor.

You can find out about private psychological assessments at www.psychologists.bc.ca. There is information about private speech language assessments at: www.bcaslpa.bc.ca. You may also want to contact the Autism Society of BC ((604) 434-0880) for a list of names of professionals who can privately assess your child.

6. Do I Have To Go To Sunny Hill (PARC) For an Assessment, If I Want MCFD Funding?

No - you can go someplace other than PARC, but the person who assesses your child must follow the same rules that PARC follows. Those rules are set by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The rules are different for children under age 6 than they are for children over age 6.

The MCFD has different funding, depending on the age of your child.

Early Intensive Intervention (EII) funding is for *children under 6*. Extended Autism Intervention (EAI) funds are for *children 6 and over*. EII and EAI have different funding requirements. Details are available at www.mcf.gov.bc.ca or contact your local MCFD office. The number is in the Blue Pages of your phone book.

7. Do All BCAAN Clinicians Follow The Same Standards?

Yes. All assessments at PARC and all the clinicians in BCAAN must follow the same standards. These standards have been tested and have been shown to work in studies.

The standards are called "*Standards and Guidelines for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in British Columbia, 2003.*" You can see them at:

http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/cpa/publications/asd_standards_0318.pdf

8. How Long Will I Wait For An Assessment?

Unfortunately, there is a waitlist for BCAAN assessments. We will do everything we can to see your child as soon as possible.

9. What Can I Do While I am Waiting?

We know that waiting is difficult. If you run into difficulties while you are waiting, contact your doctor for help. The BC Autism Society also has a support network.

BCAAN may mail you some questionnaires and forms before your assessment. Some of the forms are for your child's preschool or school to fill in, with your permission. You should try to fill out these questionnaires and send them to us before your child's first appointment, so that we are better prepared.

10. Can I Get Help For My Child During The Waiting Period?

It is important to use the Early Intervention services in your community while you are waiting. You can access these services through your local community health office. You do not need a doctor's referral to use these services.

Services include:

- Infant Development Program (IDP)
- Child Development Centres
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Occupational Therapy, and
- Supported Child Care (SCC)

11. Where Do I Get More Information About These Services?

- For IDP locations and contacts phone (604) 822-4014 or go to www.idpofbc.ca.
- For information on SCC and early interventions such as Speech and Language therapy go to http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/index.htm

12. Who Do I Call During The Waiting Period?

Until we have assessed your child, please call your family doctor or specialist.

If you would like information about your child's referral and waitlist status, contact the health authorities where you live. The contact information is listed below:

Autism assessment programs

Fraser Health Autism Network (FHAN)

Carol Mores
Referral Coordinator
9460 – 140 Street, 2nd Floor
Surrey, BC V3V 5Z4
Phone 604 587-4290
Fax 604 581-1543

Interior Health Autism Assessment Network (IHAAN)

Tammy Gilmour, M.Ed - Referral Coordinator
Randy James, Program Manager
309 1664 Richter Street
Kelowna BC V1Y 8N3
Phone: 250 860 7461 (Tammy) or 250 860 5183 (Randy)
Fax: 250 860 9146

Northern Health Authority (NHA)

Beata Polanska, ASD Clinic Coordinator
523 Front Street
Quesnel, BC V2J 2K7
Phone 250 983 6818
Fax 250 983 6857

Vancouver Island Autism Assessment Services – Referrals

Jess Raimbault, Referral Coordinator
2400 Arbutus Road
Victoria, BC V6B 1V7
Phone 250 721 6749
Fax 250 721 6828

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority Autism Assessments

Catherine Jeffery/Lynn Bruce
3644 Slocan Street
Vancouver, BC V5M 3E8
Phone 604 453 8320
Fax 604 453 8305

Provincial Autism Resource Centre

3644 Slocan Street
Vancouver, BC V5M 3E8
Phone 604 453 8300
Fax 604 453 8305

13. Can I Get Service In A Language Other Than English?

Yes. Although English is most often spoken in the clinics, we can get an Interpreter to come to your appointments. You should let us know if you need an interpreter when we give you an appointment.

14. Can I Ask For A Specific Clinician?

Yes. If you ask for a specific clinician, we will do our best to help you see that person. If you will have to wait a long time for an appointment with the clinician that you want to see, we will suggest a different clinician who can see you sooner.

15. Are All The Appointments On The Same Day?

It depends on your child's needs and where you live.

16. Who Should Come To The Appointments?

You know your child best. At least one parent or guardian needs to be at the assessments to provide information and to support your child. You can bring along another family member or caregiver for support if you wish.

17. When And How Am I Told About The Results Of My Child's Assessment?

In most cases, we will talk with you about the results of your child's assessments after they are all finished. Once the assessments are done, your child's team will meet to talk about what they found out, and decide on a diagnosis and the best way to provide treatment. After they meet, they will contact you to set up a time to talk about the results.

The Doctor will usually meet with you alone, in a meeting called a "Family Conference." You can choose to have other people at this meeting, such as other family members or community professionals for support. They can be there in person or by telephone. It is up to you.

If you would like to talk with the other clinicians (psychology, speech language pathologist, and occupational therapy) about your child's assessment, you will need to arrange this with the case manager or program secretary either in person or by phone.

18. Can My Community Team Be Involved?

Yes, if you wish. It can be useful for the clinicians to talk to the people in your community who will be providing ongoing treatment and care to your child. These meetings, called community conferences, are arranged after the family conference. You decide who attends this meeting.

19. When Do I Get A Written Report?

You will get a written summary about your child's diagnosis at the family conference. The final reports may take up to 4-6 weeks to finish.

20. Can I Decide Who Will Get To See The Reports?

Yes. The reports are private and are only given out to you and your child's doctor. We will not give out the reports to schools, MCFD, and services such as child development centres until you tell us we can. If you prefer, you can distribute the report yourself.

21. What Happens If My Child Is Not Diagnosed With Autism?

BCAAN provides assessments and recommendations for all children and youth we see, regardless of the final diagnosis. If a child is not diagnosed with autism, he or she may still need help. We will make specific recommendations, and will help you to get the services your child needs, including developmental, mental health, education, and social supports, among others.

22. How Do I Make A Complaint If I Am Unhappy With The Service Or With A Specific Person?

Your suggestions, comments, and complaints help us to improve our services. We all benefit from listening to one another. Whether it is to answer a question, solve a problem, or to share a success story, it is important that we hear from you.

Just as much as we want to hear about good experiences that you have had with our services, we also want you to tell us when you have a problem so we can resolve it. Please get in touch with us in person, by telephone, mail, fax, or e-mail.

Resolving a Complaint

Start at the Source

If there is a problem, it may be resolved by speaking with the staff person concerned, either in person, or by telephone, or by e-mail. If the staff member is not able to help, ask to speak with the regional representatives listed above.

If you require more help you can contact the provincial manager of BCAAN.

BCAAN PROGRAM MANAGER

3644 Slocan Street

Vancouver, BC

Phone: 604 453-8300

Fax: 604 453-8301