

# Building Integrated Capacity In Autism and Mental Health

## Training Profile

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

Autistic children and youth who have co-occurring mental health challenges often struggle to access mental health treatments due to limited service provider capacity and siloed service delivery models. Our project goal is to develop and deliver bilingual service provider training to autism and mental health service providers to build both sectors' capacity in delivering integrated mental health services for autistic children and youth. The objective of this training is to support professionals to improve their expertise in treating and supporting autistic children and youth with co-occurring mental health challenges and their families.

To determine the training needs of autism and mental health professionals, CMHO partnered with York University and Dr. Jonathan Weiss and surveyed mental health and autism providers in 2021 and 2022 to assess public and private providers' attitudes, knowledge, confidence, and training needs. From there, CMHO partnered with Autism Ontario and Dr. Weiss to develop foundational and advanced training for public and private mental health and autism providers.

CMHO is focused on sustainability to ensure that both sectors' knowledge and expertise are maintained. To do this, CMHO will launch five provincial communities of practice and one provincial francophone community of practice supported by Dr. Weiss. Additional booster sessions will be hosted in Fall 2023.

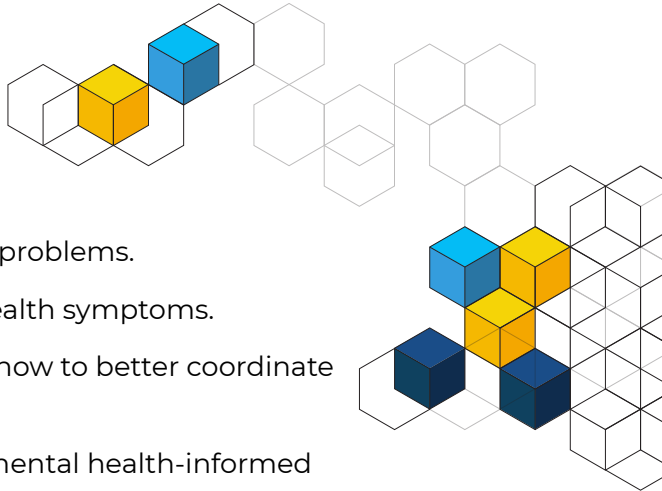
This project is funded by the Government of Ontario.

### APPROACH TO TRAINING

The training program is informed by the prior surveys, which received input from 652 mental health providers and 448 autism providers. Based on the survey results, a majority of mental health (83%) and autism providers (91%) indicated that they would be interested in additional training if it was provided. The most commonly endorsed topics of interest included mental health symptoms, how to adapt the services they already provide, and communication strategies to improve delivery. There was a greater preference for online training compared to in-person training. Because there was also interest in learning about who they could consult with within their regions, we have aimed to provide the same training opportunities at regional levels (West, Central, Toronto, North, East). Providers who cannot make their region's availabilities can attend at another training session in a different region.

In keeping with best practices in online delivery, we are breaking up trainings into two half-day sessions and offering different days and time slots. The trainings will include opportunities to hear from autistic young people and parents, discuss cases with peers, and learn about what other professionals can do to best support the mental health of autistic clients across the mental health and autism sectors.

There are two main phases to the training: Foundational training provided to autism and mental health professionals simultaneously (Phase 1) and focused advanced training that is more tailored to each sector's clinical mandates (Phase 2).



# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will increase their knowledge of:

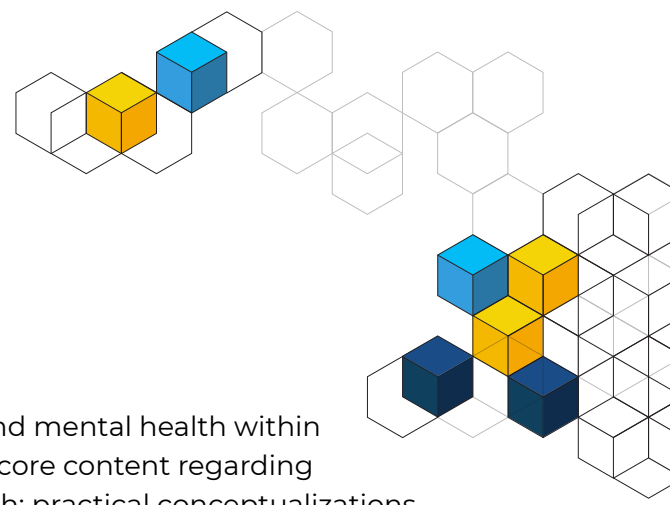
- 1) Evidence-based factors regarding autism and mental health problems.
- 2) Methods of differentiating autism symptoms from mental health symptoms.
- 3) Different professional roles in supporting mental health and how to better coordinate services across sectors.
- 4) Ways of adapting their practice to be autism-informed and mental health-informed in the work that they do.

# SUSTAINABILITY

Upon completing the foundational and/or advanced training, providers will be invited to attend regional communities of practice, which will be led by providers in each region and with agendas set by that community and focused on real world advice giving and problem solving. These 1-hour online meetings will allow providers within each region to connect, learn about the services that are accessible to their clients, and continue to increase their knowledge based on the wisdom that is held within that community. Dr. Weiss will support the communities of practice until the completion of the project in March 2024. To build upon the lessons and skills acquired in the training, in Fall 2023, CMHO, in partnership with Autism Ontario and Dr. Weiss, will host additional booster sessions based on the needs identified through our evaluation and communities of practice. After the completion of the project, the communities of practice will continue.

# FRANCOPHONE PROVIDERS

The project has developed a modified training plan for francophone providers across the province based on advice from francophone stakeholders. A francophone trainer will be working with Dr. Weiss to deliver the foundational and advanced training to a provincial francophone cohort. The foundational training will launch January 2023 with the specialized advanced training launching in February 2023. We will develop a provincial francophone community of practice for autism and mental health service providers. The francophone trainer will participate in the community of practice with support from Dr. Weiss. In September 2023, there will be additional booster sessions provided based on the needs of francophone providers identified from the training evaluations and community of practice. After the completion of the project in March 2024, the community of practice will continue.



## PHASE 1

# Integrated Foundational Autism-Mental Health Training

## TRAINING DESCRIPTION

Attendees will receive foundational knowledge about autism and mental health within an interprofessional education context. Participants will review core content regarding the broad spectrum of needs that are common for autistic youth; practical conceptualizations of mental health; up-to-date evidence about the causes of mental health problems for autistic youth; and psychosocial interventions to address symptoms. Case-based learning and speakers with lived experience will be included to make concepts concrete for participants, with a particular focus on the intersecting sociodemographic factors that can affect mental health. The regional focus will reinforce existing relationships between providers in both sectors and build new ones, setting the stage for increased collaboration by connecting to others who share similar foundational knowledge.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To improve participants' understanding of professional roles; foster connections; and improve holistic autism mental health support planning and delivery.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

- All mental health and autism service providers practicing in Ontario who deliver support and treatment to autistic children and youth can participate. Providers may be working within a context where autism is a main focus of their service or within a context where it is not.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

- **Length of Training:** 2–3-hour sessions.
- **Program Delivery:** Virtual. Training will also be recorded and accessible to participants.
- **Language(s) of Instruction:** English. Please note that a separate French version of the training will also be provided.
- **Cost:** There is no cost for the training. Funding for this training is provided by the Government of Ontario.

## CERTIFICATION/CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS

- Continuing education credits are available depending on the college you are a member of.
- A certificate will be emailed to those who complete both sessions of the foundational training.



## PHASE 2

# Specialized Advanced Training: Mental Health Providers Integrated Foundational

### TRAINING DESCRIPTION

Provider-specific training involves dedicated and tailored training time for mental health professionals, centred on a more in-depth focus on how mental health problems present in autism; adaptations to service delivery that span multiple kinds of intervention; and communication strategies to improve interactions between provider and client. Case-based examples of the delivery of psychological interventions to autistic youth will be used to demonstrate adaptations.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Increased knowledge of how to adapt psychological interventions to be autism-informed.
- Increased awareness of how autistic mental health involves biopsychosocial considerations.
- Increased connections with other mental health providers within the region.

### TARGET AUDIENCE

- Mental health providers in the child and youth mental health sector (CYMH) in Ontario.
- Those who provide services publicly or privately. This includes any professional who is responsible for delivering mental health care to children and youth.

### STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

- **Length of Training:** 2–3-hour sessions.
- **Program Delivery:** Virtual. Training will also be recorded and accessible to participants.
- **Language(s) of Instruction:** English. Please note that a separate French version of the training will also be provided.
- **Cost:** There is no cost for the training. Funding for this training is provided by the Government of Ontario.

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## PHASE 3

# Specialized Advanced Training: Autism Providers

## TRAINING DESCRIPTION

This training will deliver autism mental health literacy training, focusing on how to first identify potential mental health concerns, including steps to take to provide mental health care first aid (e.g., being supportive of the client and family, identifying current informal and formal supports, looking for easy immediate steps that can help, etc.); learning about the mental health resources that exist (both informal and formal support sources), and identifying what they can do within their scope of practice to promote positive mental health in autistic clients.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Increased knowledge of mental health symptoms in autistic children and youth.
- Increased knowledge on steps providers can take to support the mental health of autistic people before and after the presentations of mental health symptoms.
- Increased knowledge of when to refer clients to other services for mental health concerns.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

- Any provider within the publicly funded or private context, who delivers core autism services, family support services, caregiver-mediated early years programs, entry to school programs, urgent response services, and care coordinators in Ontario. This includes any professional who is responsible for delivering care to autistic children and youth.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

- **Length of Training:** 2–3-hour sessions.
- **Program Delivery:** Virtual. Training will also be recorded and accessible to participants.
- **Language(s) of Instruction:** English. Please note that a separate French version of the training will also be provided.
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