

# News Release

Senator Leo Housakos, Senator Jim Munson and Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard



## Senators seek meeting and urge Prime Minister and Health Minister to take action on autism

**Ottawa, November 2, 2017** – Senators Wanda Thomas Bernard, Leo Housakos and Jim Munson today urged Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor to implement a national strategy on autism.

The need for a national strategy was a key recommendation in the Senate's report titled [\*Pay Now or Pay Later: Autism Families in Crisis\*](#).

The ground breaking report was published ten years ago but its recommendations have yet to be implemented. Since then, the situation for families impacted by autism has not significantly improved.

The Senate completed a month of autism-related awareness at the end of October. A total of thirteen Senators spoke in support of a [\*special inquiry\*](#) during October sitting days and some of them shared their personal experiences with autism in touching testimonies.

Senators agreed that the *Pay Now or Pay Later* recommendations must be implemented.

In addition, *Autism Awareness Day* in the Senate was held on Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, during which a resource fair was organized and a roundtable which was broadcast live on Facebook and viewed 2,500 times to date.

Round table panelists included researchers, members of the medical community, educators, parents of children with autism, and self-advocates. All participants underlined the difficulty of accessing adequate services.

From testimony we heard during this month-long campaign, it is clear that parliamentarians from all parties must start working together immediately to bring a better quality of life to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians on the autism spectrum.

Unfortunately, autism is increasing in Canada and in many parts of our country, resources are limited or non-existent. It is time to act and develop a national strategy to deal with this growing public health crisis.

We have requested a meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister of Health Petitpas Taylor, to discuss how we can collaborate to make progress on this most crucial human issue.

### Quick Facts

- Estimated number of Canadians with some form of autism: 1 in 68.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the most common neurodevelopmental disorder diagnosed among children in Canada today.
- The prevalence of ASD has increased over 100% in the last 10 years. Autism is now the fastest growing and most commonly diagnosed neurological disorder in Canada.
- Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups.
- Autism is a lifelong spectrum disorder.
- Early intervention can make a world of difference.
- Co-occurring mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression are common in individuals with ASD.

- The unemployment rate for individuals with ASD is over 80%.

## Quotes

“Let us work together to establish a national strategy that will enhance the lives of individuals and families living with ASD and provide an opportunity for them to succeed and thrive across their lifespans.”

- **Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard**

“Schools across Canada are bursting at the seams as they try to keep pace with the rising number of students with autism. While schools like *Giant Steps* in Montreal are to be commended for their efforts in filling the gaps, without sufficient support from the federal government that task is daunting and things will only get worse.’

- **Senator Leo Housakos**

"Imagine a mother running scared down a country road, her normally loving son who has autism is having an angry outburst. She is not running toward him but away from him for her own protection. The normal instinct is to call the police, the right instinct is for all of us to step in and help. We must be there for her and her son."

- **Senator Jim Munson**

## Associated Links

- Learn more about the [Senate’s Autism Awareness Campaign](#) and hear what Senators said in the Chamber.
- Sign up for the Senate’s [eNewsletter](#).

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