CanNRT Annual Summer School 2025 | Year 1

Sunday, August 17, 2025	Monday, August 18, 2025	Tuesday, August 19, 2025	Wednesday, August 20, 2025	Thursday, August 21, 2025	Friday, August 22, 2025
	Breakfast: 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Breakfast:** 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Free time** until 9:30 a.m.	**Breakfast:** 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Breakfast:** 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget
	Introductions and welcome *Ellie-Anna Minogianis* *Vanessa Tamburro* 9:30 - 10:15 a.m. | University Club	**Early identification of autism** *Lonnie Zwaigenbaum* 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. | University Club	**Breakfast:** 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**The diagnosis of neurodevelopmental conditions: Understanding the use of diagnostic tools** *Julie Scorah* 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. | University Club	**Introduction to autistic mental health** *Jonathan Weiss* 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. | University Club
	Neurodiversity-affirming and peer-focused approaches to supporting autistic and other neurodivergent students *Heather Brown* 10:15 - 11:15 a.m. | University Club	**Early intervention programs for toddlers with emerging autism or related social communication challenges** *Jessica Brian* 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | University Club	**Introduction to the genetics of neurodevelopmental conditions** *Ryan Yuen* 10:30 -11:30 a.m. | University Club	**Community-based care for autistic children and youth** *Melanie Penner* 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | University Club	**Understanding and promoting brain health of older adults with developmental disabilities** *Yona Lunsky* 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | University Club
	Break: 11:15 - 11:30 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.
	[Continued from above] *Sandy Thompson-Hodgetts* 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	**Free time** 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.	**Introductory lecture on early neuronal development** *Graziella Di Cristo* 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. | University Club	**ECHO-Autism: Diagnostic assessment** 12:15 - 1:45 p.m. | University Club	**Social inclusion needs in adults** Mackenzie Salt 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. University Club
	Lunch : 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 12:45 - 2:00 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 12:45 - 2:00 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 1:45 - 2:30 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch** : 12:45 - 2:00 p.m. Maison Forget
	3-minute thesis (3MT) workshop *Gabriel T. Blanco Gomez* 1:30 - 2:45 p.m. | University Club	**Epidemiology of autism** *Eric Fombonne* 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. | University Club	**A different look at career paths** *Martine Habra and Kelly D'Souza (moderators), Beatrice Alain, Nancy Neamtan, Margie Wendell, Sarah Huxley, Thomas Henderson* 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. | University Club	**Inclusive co-creation with CanNRT: Progress, outcomes and next steps** *Michelle Phoenix and CanNRT Curriculum Co-Design Committee* 2:30 - 3:00 p.m. | University Club	**Free time**
	Free time or **McGill University walking tour** 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	**Break:** 3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	**Break:** 3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	**Break:** 3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	
		Situating your research for policy impact *Yvonne Hung, Keiko Shikako* 3:15 - 4:45 p.m. | University Club	**[Continued from above]** 3:15 - 4:00 p.m.	**[Continued from above]** 3:15 - 4:00 p.m.	
Hotel check-in 4:00 p.m.	**Welcome reception** OMNI Hotel 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	**Free time:** 4:45 - 5:30 p.m.	**Free time:** 4:00 – 4:30 p.m.	**Free time**	
Fellows' dinner Casa Grecque 5:30 – 8:00 p.m.		**Pitch Fest** Maison Publique McLean's 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.	**Networking event and dinner** Hotel Le Cantlie 4:30 - 8:00 p.m.		

CanNRT Annual Summer School 2025 | Year 2

Sunday, August 17, 2025	Monday, August 18, 2025	Tuesday, August 19, 2025	Wednesday, August 20, 2025	Thursday, August 21, 2025	Friday, August 22, 2025
	Breakfast: 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Breakfast:** 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Free time** until 9:30 a.m.	**Breakfast:** 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Breakfast:** 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Maison Forget
	Introductions and welcome *Ellie-Anna Minogianis* *Vanessa Tamburro* 9:30 - 10:15 a.m. | University Club	**Intro to environmental epidemiology** *Eric Fombonne* 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. | Maison Forget	**Breakfast:** 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. Maison Forget	**Are you ready for inclusive research?** *Rachel (Rae) Martens* 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. | Maison Forget	**Speech and language in autism: Understanding variability, complex needs, and bilingualism** *Myriam Beachamp* 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. | Maison Forget
	Introduction to clinical trials *Danielle Baribeau* 10:15 - 11:15 a.m. | Maison Forget	**Neuroimaging (mostly MRI) in autism and ADHD** *Kara Murias* 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | Maison Forget	**"Indigenizing" or decolonizing neurodevelopmental research?** *Hiba Zafran* 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. | Maison Forget		**Introduction to Open Science** *Emily Kirby* 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | Maison Forget
	Break: 11:15 - 11:30 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.	**Break:** 11:30 - 11:45 a.m.
	Atypical development and transdiagnostic insights into neurodevelopmental conditions across the lifespan *Evdokia Anagnostou* 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. | Maison Forget	**Understanding the emergency of autism in the early years: Utility of biomarkers** *Mayada Elsabbagh* 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. Maison Forget	**Media basics: Communicating your research with confidence** *Vanessa Tamburro, Anita Kar, Jacqueline Di Bartolomeo* 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. Maison Forget	**Free time** 11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	**From principles to practice: Embedding Open Science in your research workflow** *Gabriel Pelletier* 11:45 - 12:45 p.m. | Maison Forget
	Lunch: 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 12:45 - 2:00 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 12:45 - 2:00 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. Maison Forget	**Lunch:** 12:45 - 2:00 p.m. Maison Forget
	The art of the 3-minute thesis: Turning research into a story *Gabriel T. Blanco Gomez* 1:30 - 2:45 p.m. | University Club	**Introduction to iPSC-based models in autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions** *Yun Li* 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. | Maison Forget	**A different look at career paths** *Martine Habra and Kelly D'Souza (moderators), Beatrice Alain, Nancy Neamtan, Margie Wendell, Sarah Huxley, Thomas Henderson* 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. | University Club	**Inclusive co-creation with CanNRT: Progress, outcomes and next steps** *Michelle Phoenix and CanNRT Curriculum Co-Design Committee* 2:30 - 3:00 p.m. | University Club	**Free time**
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CanNRT Annual Summer School 2025

Session summaries and speaker information

Contents

Y1

10:15 - 11:15 a.m. – Heather Brown, Sandy Thompson-Hodgetts

Neurodiversity-affirming approaches for supporting autistic and other neurodivergent students

This presentation examines how educational, clinical, and community environments can better support Autistic and other neurodivergent students by adopting neurodiversity-affirming frameworks. Rather than viewing neurodivergence through a deficit lens, we center Autistic voices and lived experiences to reframe common assumptions about behaviour, communication, and support needs. Drawing on research, practice-based examples, and participatory initiatives, we examine how ableist narratives, trauma exposure, and social misunderstanding contribute to mental health challenges and exclusion in school settings. We present alternative, affirming approaches grounded in principles of psychological safety, belonging, and positive identity development.

Heather M. Brown (she/her) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and a dedicated Autistic researcher with a passion for advancing the academic achievement and overall well-being of Autistic individuals across the lifespan. Originally trained as an elementary school teacher, Prof. Brown has transitioned to a leadership role in autism research, where she integrates her teaching expertise with her lived experience as an Autistic person. Her research is rooted in community-based participatory methods, prioritizing collaboration with Autistic individuals to empower them to embrace their neurodiversity and thrive in all areas of life.

Prof. Brown serves as the director of the Autism, Neurodiversity, and Academic Achievement (AIDAN) Lab and co-leads the Neurodivergent Scholars Working for Equity in Research (ANSWER) initiative for the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) at UCLA. She is an active member of the global autism research community, sitting on the Scientific Program Committee for the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) and co-leading its Autism Community Issues and Experiences Topic Area. Through her work, Prof. Brown seeks to identify and amplify the factors that best support the success and well-being of Autistic individuals in education, at work, and in daily life.

Sandy Thompson-Hodgetts (she/her) is Professor and Chair of Occupational Therapy at the University of Alberta. Her research is focused on affirming, participatory approaches to support inclusion, participation and belonging for autistic people in home, community and educational contexts.

Y2

10:15 - 11:15 a.m. – Danielle Baribeau

Introduction to clinical trials

This session provides an introductory overview of pharmacological clinical trials in autism and related neurodevelopmental conditions. It will examine current challenges in treatment development, including the limited availability of effective medications, the gap between basic science and clinical application, and the complexities of targeting underlying biology in heterogeneous populations. The session will also explore issues related to regulatory frameworks and outcome measures aligned with stakeholder priorities. Looking ahead, it will open the conversation toward building national infrastructure to support more precise and effective therapeutic strategies in the field.

Learning objectives:

1. Discuss the purpose of pharmacological trials in neurodevelopmental conditions
2. Provide an update on current approaches to clinical trials in autism and related conditions
3. Explore future directions for trial design, precision medicine, and network-based collaboration in Canada

Danielle Baribeau (she/her) is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and early career clinician scientist at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto. She completed her clinical training in child and adolescent psychiatry in 2019, and her PhD in clinical epidemiology in 2022, both at the University of Toronto. In her current position, she provides clinical care to children and youth with intellectual disabilities or autism, with a focus in rare genetic neurodevelopmental conditions, and psychopharmacology. Her research program is focused on clinically translating genetic advances into improved mental health care in autism and neurodevelopmental conditions, through innovative clinical trials and health administrative data research. She is also the lead of the Ontario Provincial Genetics Program expert group for genetic testing in neurodevelopmental conditions, and a parent to three young children.

Y2

11:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. – Evdokia Anagnostou

Atypical development and transdiagnostic insights on neurodevelopmental conditions across the lifespan

This session examines transdiagnostic approaches to neurodevelopmental conditions across the lifespan, drawing on recent Canadian data to explore how shared neurodevelopmental processes and overlapping features challenge traditional diagnostic categories. Transdiagnostic frameworks acknowledge that neurodevelopmental differences are common, individual variation is wide, and many traits span diagnostic boundaries. While the concept of "atypicality" is subject to debate, lived experiences of impairment, dysfunction, or distress must be recognized and validated. The session will discuss how these insights can inform diagnostic practice, health system design, and the development of targeted, individualized therapies that advance precision health across the lifespan.

Learning objectives:

1. Review recent Canadian data on transdiagnostic insights in neurodevelopmental conditions
2. Discuss implications of such insights for diagnostic labels and health system design
3. Specifically consider such implications for novel therapeutic development and precision health

Evdokia Anagnostou (she/her) is a Child Neurologist and Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Toronto, and Vice President of Research and Director of the Holland Bloorview Research Institute. Dr. Anagnostou studies the different biologies (from genes to brain structure function, to omics), underlying neurodevelopmental conditions, how such differences predict symptom profiles and strengths and challenges, and how such insights can translate into novel interventions, to improve outcomes and quality of life for autistic children and their families. She is the co-lead of the Autism Research Centre at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and holds the Dr. Stuart D. Sims Chair in Autism and the Canada Research Chair in Translational Therapeutics and Neurodevelopment.

Y1 + Y2

1:30 - 2:45 p.m. – Gabriel T. Blanco Gomez

The art of the 3-minute thesis: Turning research into a story

This interactive workshop is designed to help graduate students discover new ways to explain their research in a clear, compelling, and accessible three-minute presentation. Whether trainees plan to participate in the official Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition or simply want to strengthen their science communication skills, this session offers practical tools, real-world examples and plenty of opportunities to practice.

Trainees will also have the chance to present their work in small groups, receive peer feedback, and push the boundaries of how research is typically communicated. By the end of the workshop, they should feel more confident sharing their research in any setting, whether it's at a conference, during a family gathering, or in casual conversations with friends.

Learning objectives:

1. Use storytelling techniques to engage an audience
2. Create effective analogies and metaphors
3. Maintain scientific accuracy while ensuring clarity
4. How to use vocal tone, pace, and pauses effectively
5. Tips on managing nerves and build stage presence
6. Reflect on their personal communication style
7. Leave with a strong draft or polished 3MT presentation

Gabriel T. Blanco Gomez (he/him) is a PhD candidate in Neuroscience at McGill University and a former CanNRT fellow. Fueled by his passion for learning languages and understanding the human brain, his research focuses on using EEG and eye-tracking to explore language development in children with neurodevelopmental conditions. By exploring the links between genes, brain activity, and language, he strives to develop better clinical tools and uncover insights into the origins of human language.

Link to materials: 2025.08.18_Y1&Y2_G.T. Blanco Gomez_3MT Instructions.pdf

Tuesday, August 19, 2025

Y1

9:30 - 10:30 a.m. – Lonnie Zwaigenbaum

Early identification of autism

There have been significant advances in characterizing the earliest features of autism, in part from longitudinal studies of infants at increased likelihood of the diagnosis, including younger siblings. We have learned about onset and development in autism, both from detailed characterization of behavioural features, and measures of brain structure/function and other biological markers, which have the potential to move detection of autism to even earlier in life. There are also some autistic people for whom diagnosis remains uncertain until school-age or even later in life, emphasizing the importance of ensuring access to diagnostic assessment throughout the lifespan. Finally, there is growing evidence that we can improve access to diagnosis through training and collaboration with community professionals, while maintaining the accuracy and quality of the assessment process. Advances in these areas will be discussed in this presentation, with opportunities for dialogue about clinical and ethical considerations of early detection and practice and policy priorities to improve access to timely diagnosis.

Learning objectives:

1. Critically assess research methodologies used to characterize early features of autism
2. Increase knowledge regarding the earliest features of autism
3. Consider implications for the diagnostic process and how system capacity can be expanded through community partnerships

Lonnie Zwaigenbaum (he/him) is a developmental pediatrician at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, where he directs the Autism Research Centre, supported by the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation Chair in Autism. He is a Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and the Associate Director and lead for Child Health Research for the Women's and Children's Health Research Institute at the University of Alberta. His current research focuses on improving early detection, timely diagnosis and health care related to autism. Lonnie has also supported translating research to practice and supporting evidence-based policy. He co-chaired the Canadian Pediatric Society Task Force that issued practice statements on autism diagnosis and ongoing pediatric care in 2019, and the oversight panel of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences Autism Assessment.

Link to materials: 2025.08.19_Y1_L. Zwaigenbaum_Early Identification of autism.pptx

Y2

9:30 - 10:30 a.m. – Eric Fombonne

Introduction to environmental epidemiology

This lecture introduces key concepts in environmental epidemiology with a focus on autism. Dr. Fombonne will review major findings related to environmental risk factors for autism, highlighting the methodological challenges in studying these associations. The session will also explore the complexities of study design in environmental research and address issues such as residual confounding. Attendees will gain a foundational understanding of how environmental exposures are investigated in relation to neurodevelopmental outcomes.

Learning objectives:

1. Review some substantial findings on environmental risk factors
2. Appreciate the complexity of designing and executing environmental studies of autism
3. Understanding confounding (by indication, by genetic factors, residual confounding, ...) and study designs that may reduce it

Eric Fombonne (he/him) trained in child and adolescent psychiatry in France. He held appointments as clinical scientist at the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM, France), as Senior Lecturer and Reader at the Institute of Psychiatry and Maudsley Hospital, King's College London, UK (1993-2001), as tenured Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University (Canada), Head of the Division of Child Psychiatry and Canada Research Chair in Child Psychiatry (2001-2012). In September 2012, he joined the Department of Psychiatry at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, Oregon (USA) where he is now Professor Emeritus. He has a long experience of clinical work with children with autism and their families, over the lifespan, and has been also directing clinical services for teenagers with depression. His research activities on neurodevelopmental conditions and psychiatric disorders encompass clinical/longitudinal, population-based epidemiological studies in international settings, studies of risk factors and especially of vaccine exposure, clinical trials, and genetic studies. He has published over 380 articles in peer-reviewed journals, 50 chapters in books. He is past Associate Editor of the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders (JADD; 1994-2004); he is currently Joint Editor of Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry (JCPP; 2016-current) and is on the editorial board of several other journals in the field of autism and child psychiatry. (Complete publication list: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/myncbi/eric.fombonne.1/bibliography/48417593/public/?sort=date&direction=ascending).

Y1

10:30 - 11:30 a.m. – Jessica Brian

Early intervention programs for toddlers with emerging autism or related social communication challenges: An introduction to naturalistic developmental behavioural interventions (NDBIs)

Naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions (NDBIs; Schriebman, 2015) have gained momentum in autism intervention over the past decade. NDBI approaches prioritize natural learning contexts and developmental science, through which behavioral principles are used to support development. This presentation will discuss the guiding principles of early intervention and supports, within the context of neurodivergent-affirming care. The key elements of NDBI approaches will be discussed and the evidence supporting the efficacy of NDBI models will be covered. The presentation will focus on caregiver-mediated NDBI models, with a deep dive into the Social ABCs, a Canadian-made approach for toddlers.

Learning objectives:

1. Become familiar with the key elements of naturalistic developmental behavioural interventions (NDBIs)
2. Become aware of the research evidence supporting the use of NDBI models for autistic toddlers
3. Understand the application of NDBI approaches for use by caregivers (caregiver-mediated models)
4. Learn to articulate the guiding principles of early intervention and neurodivergent-affirming care
5. Be able to reflect on the above in the context of a Canadian-made example – the Social ABCs

Jessica Brian (she/her) is a Psychologist and Senior Clinician-Scientist at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, where she co-leads the Autism Research Centre. She is also an Associate Professor in Paediatrics at the University of Toronto. Dr. Brian received her Ph.D. from the clinical-developmental program at York University and has been heavily involved in the Canadian Infant Siblings Study (now the Baby Sibs Research Consortium) over the past two decades, examining the early emergence of autism and developmental pathways from infancy to adolescence. She co-developed the Social ABCs parent-mediated intervention for toddlers and has led several clinical trials and community implementation studies related to the program.

Y2

10:30 - 11:30 a.m. – Kara Murias

Neuroimaging (mostly MRI) in autism and ADHD

This session will give an overview of neuroimaging in clinical pediatric populations, different MRI methods as they relate to neurodevelopment and neurodevelopmental conditions, and some examples of things we have learned about diversity of brain development from neuroimaging.

Learning objective: Appreciation of the opportunities and limitations of MRI in neurodevelopmental research

Kara Murias (she/her), MD, PhD, FRCPC, is an Assistant Professor in the Cumming School of Medicine Departments of Pediatrics, Clinical Neuroscience and Psychiatry, and a pediatric neurologist at the Alberta Children's Hospital. She completed her MD, PhD, and Pediatric Neurology residency at the University of Calgary. She is a physician in division of Developmental Pediatrics, and a researcher within the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute - Owerko Centre and the Hotchkiss Brain Institute – Mathison Centre. Her research focuses on the different trajectories of cognitive development in children with neurodevelopmental conditions or neurological disease, what underlies these differences at the biological level, and treatment of symptoms.

Y2

11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. – Mayada Elsabbagh

Understanding the emergency of autism in the early years: Utility of biomarkers

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition with highly variable effects across individuals, shaped by complex interactions between biological and environmental factors. While differences between individuals become more pronounced over time, infancy is a critical period when early signs of autism typically emerge. Recent research has advanced our understanding of the pathways leading to autism, particularly in high-risk groups such as siblings of autistic children. These insights have supported early identification and targeted interventions.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand how biological and environmental factors contribute to variability in autism
2. Recognize infancy as a key period for early signs and diagnosis
3. Understand how biomarkers are used in the context of autism research
4. Identify gaps in knowledge about protective factors and resilience

Mayada Elsabbagh (she/her), PhD, is a Professor in the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at McGill University and a Principal Investigator at The Neuro (Montreal Neurological Institute-Hospital). She is also a Research Scientist at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), where her work is closely integrated with clinical services supporting autistic individuals and people with other neurodevelopmental conditions.

Her research focuses on understanding the root causes of autism and mapping its developmental pathways across the lifespan. Her team studies how risk and protective factors interact to shape diverse outcomes, using developmental models that reflect the complexity of neurodevelopment. Her scientific contributions include the discovery of early brain function markers that precede behavioural signs of autism, as well as the development and scale-up of community-based interventions.

Her research program combines clinical and behavioural assessment with innovative methods such as EEG, eye-tracking, and qualitative approaches that amplify first-person perspectives. The goal is to accelerate the translation of research into tangible improvements in care, inclusion, and quality of life.

Prof. Elsabbagh has played a leading role in launching and directing collaborative research initiatives in Canada and internationally. She is Director of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC), a Quebec-based network supported by the Fonds de recherche du Québec and community partners. She also serves as Program Director of

the Canadian Neurodevelopmental Research Training (CanNRT*)* Platform, a national initiative supporting the next generation of researchers in neurodevelopment.

In addition, Elsabbagh contributes to global efforts aimed at strengthening evidence-based practice and capacity building in underserved communities, in Canada and in low- and middle-income countries. This includes leadership of CST-Canada, a clinical trials platform for the World Health Organization's Caregiver Skills Training (CST) Program, which integrates research, training, and international collaboration to expand access to community-based interventions.

Y1

2:00 - 3:00 p.m. – Eric Fombonne

Epidemiology of autism

A review of 165 prevalence surveys of autism conducted from 1966 to 2024 is presented. Most surveys were conducted in high-income countries, among school aged children and with variable methods, case definitions and case finding techniques. Prevalence significantly increased over time as well as the proportion of participants without intellectual disability. Several factors contributing to the increase in prevalence are evaluated. The average male:female ratio was 4.1:1 with no significant change over time. Surveys of adult samples have been conducted more recently. Surveys of school age youths have incorporated proactive screening methods of general school populations to improve sensitivity of case finding. Worldwide surveys estimated prevalence in the 1% to 2% range, with the variability across countries being accounted for by heterogeneity of methodology across studies. Population surveillance has been implemented in few countries.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the design and execution of prevalence surveys of autism
2. Review results of surveys performed since 1966
3. Evaluate factors associated with prevalence, time trends, and studies conducted worldwide

Eric Fombonne (he/him) trained in child and adolescent psychiatry in France. He held appointments as clinical scientist at the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM, France), as Senior Lecturer and Reader at the Institute of Psychiatry and Maudsley Hospital, King's College London, UK (1993-2001), as tenured Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University (Canada), Head of the Division of Child Psychiatry and Canada Research Chair in Child Psychiatry (2001-2012). In September 2012, he joined the Department of Psychiatry at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, Oregon (USA) where he is now Professor Emeritus. He has a long experience of clinical work with children with autism and their families, over the lifespan, and has been also directing clinical services for teenagers with depression. His research activities on neurodevelopmental conditions and psychiatric disorders encompass clinical/longitudinal, population-based epidemiological studies in international settings, studies of risk factors and especially of vaccine exposure, clinical trials, and genetic studies. He has published over 380 articles in peer-reviewed journals, 50 chapters in books. He is past Associate Editor of the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders (JADD; 1994-2004); he is currently Joint Editor of Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry (JCPP; 2016-current) and is on the editorial board of several other journals in the field of autism and child psychiatry. (Complete publication list: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/myncbi/eric.fombonne.1/bibliography/48417593/public/?sort=date&direction=ascending).

Y2

2:00 - 3:00 p.m. – Yun Li

Introduction to iPSC-based models in autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions

This introductory lecture will explore the use of induced pluripotent stem cell (iPSC) technology to study autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions. Participants will gain foundational knowledge on how iPSCs are generated and used to model brain development and investigate underlying biological processes.

Learning objectives:

1. Define induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) and describe the basic process of reprogramming somatic cells into iPSCs
2. Understand how iPSC-based models are used to study human brain development, with a focus on neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism
3. Identify key applications of iPSC models
4. Recognize the advantages and limitations of iPSC technology in modeling complex neurodevelopmental processes

Yun Li (she/her) is a neurobiologist interested in understanding human brain development and diseases. She attended graduate school at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. Her Ph.D. work, conducted in the lab of Luis Parada, focused on understanding the role of growth factor signaling pathways in brain development and neurological conditions. She completed her postdoctoral training in the lab of Rudolf Jaenisch at the Whitehead Institute and MIT, where she continued her research in neurodevelopment using human pluripotent stem cell-derived 2D and 3D models.

In 2018, Prof. Li established her independent lab in Toronto. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto, a Senior Scientist at the Hospital for Sick Children, and a Medicine by Design Investigator. Her laboratory studies how the human brain forms, what makes it unique from those of other species, and how autism and other conditions impact its development and function. Her group takes the experimental approach of modeling human brain development in the dish, utilizing a combination of pluripotent stem cell technology, CRISPR/Cas9-mediated genome engineering, and 3D brain organoids. Learn more: https://lab.research.sickkids.ca/li/

Y1 + Y2

3:15 - 4:45 p.m. – Keiko Shikako, Yvonne Hung

Situating your research for policy impact

An interactive workshop to introduce participants to the role of research briefs within a policymaking context and the process to structure and organize an effective document that aligns their own research with potential calls to action.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the role of research briefs within a policy context
2. Learn the common structure and organization of an effective brief
3. Identify key elements from your own research that could link to policy action

Keiko Shikako (she/her) is an Associate Professor at McGill University and the Canada Research Chair in Childhood Disability (Participation and Knowledge Translation). Her research focuses on knowledge translation science and the rights of children with disabilities. Her current research includes the Jooay App, a free app that connects children with disabilities and their families to leisure opportunities in their neighborhoods. She also leads the CanNRT KT to Policy Area and co-leads the CHILD-BRIGHT Network Knowledge Mobilization Program and leads the network's Policy Hub.

Yvonne Hung (she/her) directs the McGill Writing Centre, the University's central resource for writing and communication. In this role, she oversees the academic and extracurricular programming for students at all levels and from across the disciplines. Her work is informed by her training in writing pedagogy during her doctoral studies in Environmental Psychology and her previous experience in research, evaluation, training and development in New York City, Berlin, and Los Angeles.

Wednesday, August 20, 2025

Y1

10:30 - 11:30 a.m. – Ryan Yuen

Introduction to the genetics of neurodevelopmental conditions

This session offers a foundational overview of the genetics underlying neurodevelopmental conditions, with a particular focus on autism. Participants will be introduced to the genetic architecture of complex conditions and learn how researchers identify and interpret genetic variants. The session will also explore the significance of gene discovery in advancing our understanding of these conditions and informing future research and clinical practice.

Learning objectives:

1. Describe the genetic basis of autism and related neurodevelopmental conditions.
2. Understand key approaches used to identify genetic variants associated with complex conditions.
3. Explain the benefits of identifying genes linked to neurodevelopmental conditions.
4. Recognize different types of genetic architecture and their relevance to complex traits and conditions.

Ryan Yuen (he/him) is a Senior Scientist in Genetics & Genome Biology Program at SickKids, and Associate Professor in Department of Molecular Genetics at the University of Toronto. Dr. Yuen is interested in the genomics of brain-related conditions and disorders. His research focuses on understanding how genetic variations contribute to human health, with the goal of developing gene discovery strategies that result in more effective diagnostic approaches and better treatment options. He has developed novel strategies to investigate tandem repeat expansions in complex conditions, such as autism and schizophrenia.

Y2

10:30 - 11:30a.m. – Hiba Zafran

"Indigenizing" or decolonizing neurodevelopmental research?

This session will orient participants to Indigenous health research in the domain of neurodevelopment, will outline research principles with examples, and provide concrete tools for researchers.

Learning objectives:

1. Orient to the history and present landscape of neurodevelopmental research with/for Indigenous groups
2. Identify the epistemological challenges in conducting research with and for Indigenous groups
3. Understand the overarching principles of Indigenous research paradigms
4. Locate specific resources and next steps for culturally safer neurodevelopmental research

Hiba Zafran (she/her) is a multi-migrant and unwilling settler, queer poetess, and introverted nerd of Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian heritage. Her academic and therapeutic work draws on native storytelling traditions with a focus on generational healing. Her scholarship challenges oppressive assumptions in healthcare, advocating for culturally safer, inclusive, and anti-colonial practices. Driven by intersectional, relational, and redistributive approaches, she strives to co-create a liberatory practice—one that imagines and builds spaces for those who have been historically denied them, or where they have yet to exist. Coming from a family with no right or safety to return to their homeland, Hiba is deeply grateful to question, teach, create change, and offer care on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal, Québec).

Link to materials: Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79(3),* 409-428. – Link: 2025.08.20_Y2_H. Zefran_Tuck_Suspending+Damage_HER.pdf

Y1

11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. – Graziella Di Cristo

Introductory lecture on early neuronal development

In this lecture, Dr Di Cristo will provide an overview of early neuronal development in the mammalian cortex, spanning from neuron specification to synapse formation/refinement which plateaus by the end of adolescence.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the fundamental steps underlying the formation of cortical circuits during development
2. Understand the methods used to approach experiments probing neuronal developmental mechanisms

Graziella Di Cristo (she/her) obtained her PhD in Neurosciences at the Scuola Normale Superiore (Pisa, Italy) in 2001. Her graduate work, performed under the supervision of Dr Lamberto Maffei, focussed on the molecular mechanisms modulating critical period plasticity in the visual cortex. She then moved to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (NY, USA) for her postdoctoral training, during which she worked on mechanisms controlling GABAergic circuit development, in the group of Dr. Josh Huang. In 2006, she joined CHU Sainte Justine Research Center, Université de Montréal. Her research work focusses on exploring the mechanisms underlying GABAergic cell development and plasticity during normal development and in neurodevelopmental conditions.

Y2

11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m. – Vanessa Tamburro, Anita Kar, Jacqueline Di Bartolomeo

Media basics: Communicating your research with confidence

This interactive workshop introduces early career researchers to the essentials of media engagement. Participants will learn how to prepare for interviews, communicate key messages clearly, and avoid common pitfalls. The session includes a mock interview exercise to help trainees put their learning into practice and gain confidence in real-time communication scenarios.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the role of media/communications teams in research communication
2. Develop clear, accessible key messages that resonate with non-specialist audiences
3. Build confidence through hands-on experience and receive feedback to strengthen future media and communications interactions

Vanessa Tamburro (she/her) is the Communications and Engagement Lead for the Canadian Neurodevelopmental Research Training Platform (CanNRT) and the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC). With nearly two decades of experience in strategic communications, Vanessa specializes in inclusive, human-centred storytelling that bridges research and community. She has worked across sectors including health, human rights, culture, and education, and is passionate about supporting early career researchers to engage meaningfully with diverse audiences.

Anita Kar (she/her) is a Communications Officer at The Neuro (Montreal Neurological Institute-Hospital) at McGill University, where she leads institutional communications and public engagement. Her work focuses on making neuroscience research accessible and meaningful to diverse audiences. With a background in science communication, Anita brings experience in storytelling, media strategy, and knowledge translation across academic and public platforms. She is committed to inclusive communication that highlights the voices and contributions of underrepresented communities in science.

Jacqueline Di Bartolomeo (she/her) is the Manager of Communications and Marketing at CHILD-BRIGHT, a national research network focused on child health and neurodevelopment. She leads knowledge mobilization and engagement strategies that centre the voices of young people, families, and caregivers. With a background in journalism and communications, Jacqueline brings expertise in plain language writing, inclusive messaging, and co-creating content with people who have lived experience. Her work aims to make research more accessible, relevant, and grounded in the priorities of the communities it serves.

Materials: Participants will rely on their 3MT pitches for mock interviews

Y1 + Y2

A different look at career paths: Social innovation in action

This unique panel session brings together leading voices in social innovation to explore how new ideas, practices, and systems can address complex challenges in neurodevelopment, neurodiversity, and disability. From inclusive housing models to community-driven autism research, panelists will share how their work is reshaping traditional boundaries between research, practice, and policy—creating meaningful social change beyond the academic sphere.

Learning objectives:

1. Expose trainees to non-academic career paths related to neurodevelopment and disability
2. Highlight social innovation as a driver of inclusive, sustainable change
3. Provide background on their career paths and to share professional development experiences
4. Foster networking and mentorship through meaningful, structured engagement with change-makers in the field

Moderators:

- **Martine Habra** (she/her) is the Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization Lead at the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC)
- **Kelly D'Souza** (she/her) is an MEd Student in Educational Psychology at McGill University and TACC Trainee Co-leadership Awardee (Training)

Panelists:

Marguerite Mendell (she/her) is a Distinguished Professor Emerita, Concordia University. She received her PhD in Economics from McGill University in 1983. Her work has followed in the tradition of political economy. She is also Director of the Karl Polanyi Institute of Political Economy at Concordia University. Polanyi has had and continues to have a great influence on her research as an academic and on her engagement with and involvement in the social and solidarity economy in Quebec and internationally. In particular, she focuses on processes of economic democratization that are inherent in the social and solidarity economy. She continues to greatly value her collaboration with practitioners and with policy makers open to rethinking policy design and implementation. The importance of transdisciplinarity dominates her intellectual journey and public engagement.

Nancy Neamtam (she/her) is a Strategic Advisor at the Chantier de l'Économie Sociale. She is known internationally as an expert in the field of the social and solidarity economy, social finance and local development. She was a founder and CEO of the Chantier de l'économie sociale, an organisation devoted to the promotion and development of the

social economy in Québec, from 1996 to 2015, after having led RESO, a southwest Montreal community economic development corporation, from 1989 to 1996. Co-founder and former president of RISQ (Quebec Social Investment Network), the Chantier de l'économie Trust and TIESS, a knowledge transfer center in social innovation, she continues her engagement through collaboration with several organisations in the social economy movement. Internationally, she is actively involved in the development of CITIES, an international knowledge transfer center and in the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF).

Thomas Henderson (he/him) is the Director of Research and Innovation at Giant Steps, a Montreal-based organization that supports autistic individuals through specialized education, community inclusion, and evidence-informed design. With over 30 years of experience in education and inclusion, Thomas Henderson is a seasoned educator and administrator who has led programs for children, adolescents, and adults - both with and without disabilities - with a particular focus on autism. His leadership at Giant Steps has been instrumental in shaping inclusive environments that are grounded in research, responsive to lived experience, and co-created with the community.

Widely recognized as a forward-thinking leader in autism research and inclusive design, Thomas Henderson's work bridges academic research, lived experience, innovation, pedagogy, and design. He advocates for neuro-inclusive public spaces, such as nature-based playgrounds, and has played a central role in advancing community-driven approaches to accessibility. Prior to his current role, he served as Director General at Giant Steps and was previously the Director at CRISPESH, a research center focused on inclusive employment. His leadership has been instrumental in shaping Giant Steps' innovative outreach and training programs, as well as the development of the Giant Steps Autism Centre. His international experience, including teaching and management roles in Japan, and his contemplative practice as a Rinzai Zen lay monk, further inform his holistic and inclusive approach to education and community engagement.

Sarah Huxley (she/her) has over 15 years of experience working across community, academic, and philanthropic sectors. She currently serves as Head of Research & Development at the Véro & Louis Foundation, where she leads the design, implementation, and evaluation of socially innovative residential and community-based programs for autistic adults and their caregivers.

Sarah holds a Bachelor of Psychology (BSc) from Concordia University, a graduate diploma in autism intervention (DESS) from Université du Québec à Montréal, and a Master of Social Work (MSW) from McGill University. Her academic and professional trajectory reflects a deep commitment to inclusive research, systems change, and collaborative practice in the fields of neurodevelopment and social innovation.

At the Véro & Louis Foundation, she works to align evidence-informed approaches with lived experience and community needs, advancing scalable models that bridge service, research, and social impact.

Béatrice Alain (she/her) is the Executive Director of the Chantier de l'économie sociale, an organisation that brings together actors and partners in the field of social economy to promote and develop collective entrepreneurship. Ms Alain has a background in economics and political science, and she is particularly interested in enabling collective action in order to accelerate the development of the social economy. From 2011 to 2020, Ms Alain held different functions in national and international organisations. At the Chantier since 2010, she was Director of Partnerships and Development from 2016 to 2018 before becoming Executive Director. During this time, she contributed to positioning the Chantier as a social economy development hub. Amongst other things, she took part in the organisation of the International Forum on Social and Solidarity Economy (2011) and directed the Global Social Economy Forum –GSEF2016, co-organised with the City of Montreal. In addition to her functions at the Chantier, she is also Copresident of the TIESS, an organisation for the liaison and transfer of innovations in social economy, President of the Fiducie du Chantier de l'économie sociale, a patient capital fund dedicated to collective enterprises, a member of the Conseil de l'innovation du Québec and she is involved in different international networks of exchange and promotion in the field of social and solidarity economy.

Thursday, August 21, 2025

Y1

9:30 - 10:30 a.m.– Julie Scorah

The diagnosis of neurodevelopmental conditions: Understanding the use of diagnostic tools

This session will cover the process of diagnostic evaluation, common tools used, their scores, and other considerations and adaptations for inclusive evaluation. Following this session, trainees will be familiar with the diagnostic process and common tools to evaluate autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions. Trainees will understand the strengths and limitations of these tools and how they could be used in a research context.

Learning objectives:

1. Describe the key steps in the diagnostic evaluation process for neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism.
2. Identify commonly used diagnostic tools (e.g., ADOS, ADI-R, etc.) and interpret their scoring frameworks.
3. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of standard diagnostic tools in both clinical and research contexts.
4. Recognize the importance of adapting diagnostic practices to ensure inclusivity across diverse populations.
5. Apply knowledge of diagnostic tools to assess their relevance and utility in neurodevelopmental research settings.

Dr. Julie Scorah (she/her) is a licensed neuropsychologist specializing in neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism, ADHD, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Since joining McGill University in 2019 as an Assistant Professor (Professional) in the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, she has been actively involved in advancing neurodevelopmental research and care. Julie Scorah is a research member of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC) and leads the Neurodevelopment Learning Community initiative. She is also responsible for introducing ECHO-Autism to Quebec. Additionally, she serves as a co-investigator for the Quebec 1,000 (Q1K) Families initiative, fostering collaboration across six institutions to make groundbreaking discoveries in autism research. Her research interests focus on identifying and addressing barriers to healthcare for neurodivergent individuals. Scorah is a research member of the Azrieli Centre for Autism Research (ACAR), where she served as Associate Director of the ACAR Clinic from 2019 to 2023.

Y2

9:30 - 11:30 a.m. – Rachel (Rae) Martens

Are you ready for inclusive research?

This interactive 2-hour session explores what it means to be truly ready for inclusive, justice-informed research partnerships with people with lived experience. Through storytelling, practical metaphors (like a toolbox), and group discussion, participants are invited to reflect on their own preparedness to engage ethically, equitably, and relationally in research.

Learning objectives and activities:

1. Defining Readiness: Readiness is not perfection—it's a combination of knowledge, mindset, skills, and resources for respectful collaboration.
2. Ethical Framing: Preparedness is a justice practice, rooted in avoiding harm, building trust, and being accountable to broader movements.
3. The Inclusive Research Toolbox: Ten metaphorical "tools" are introduced:
    - Adjustable Wrench (flexibility)
    - Measuring Tape (clear expectations)
    - Screwdriver (trust building)
    - Magnifying Glass (self-reflection)
    - Manual (honouring lived experience)
    - Magnet (intentional inclusion)
    - First Aid Kit (relational safety)
    - Level (power-sharing and equity)
    - Battery Pack (time and resources)
4. Hands-on Activities: Participants build an action plan to strengthen their own readiness and apply their learning in a design scenario involving newcomer youth and mental health research.
5. The session emphasizes the importance of humility, adaptability, and ongoing reflection in inclusive research practice—and ends with a challenge to move from theoretical readiness to meaningful action.

Rachel (Rae) Martens (she/her) is a knowledge broker, science communicator, and engagement specialist with over a decade of experience as a lived experience partner in research. She is a disabled advocate and a bereaved parent to a disabled youth, which deeply informs her advocacy and partnership work. Rachel supports the Family Engagement in Research (FER) Training Program as a Knowledge Broker, guiding both researchers and families in building meaningful research partnerships. She also works with the University of Calgary's Azrieli Accelerator developing their engagement strategy. She is passionate about disability rights, public health, and inclusive knowledge mobilization, and is actively involved in advancing community-led strategies that centre disabled people and families in research, policy, and practice.

Y1

10:30 - 11:30 a.m. – Melanie Penner

Community-based care for autistic children and youth

This session will explore strategies for supporting and evaluating community-based autism care.

Learning objectives:

- Understand the rationale for community-based autism diagnosis
- Explore community pediatrician and family needs for autism assessment
- Evaluate the accuracy of general pediatrician autism diagnosis, and which children might be best suited for these assessments
- How to get help and get started

Dr. Melanie Penner (she/her) is a developmental paediatrician and senior clinician scientist at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and an associate professor in the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Toronto. She holds the Bloorview Children's Hospital Foundation Chair in Developmental Paediatrics. Her research seeks to improve service delivery for autistic children and their families, including evaluating the impact of new care models. As the lead physician in the ECHO Ontario Autism Program, she works to expand Ontario's diagnostic capacity for autism in the community setting, decreasing wait times and facilitating earlier access to appropriate supports. Dr. Penner is also dedicated to including the voices of autistic individuals in many aspects of her work to improve our understanding of their experiences and to provide better care.

Y1

12:15 - 1:45 p.m.– ECHO-Autism

ECHO-Autism | Diagnostic assessment: Screening, history, and clinical observation

This session will provide an overview of key elements in the assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Participants will explore important considerations in screening for autism, learn about the core components of a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation, and review essential aspects of history taking and clinical observation to support accurate diagnosis and understanding of the individual's profile.

About the series: The ECHO (Extension for Community Health Outcomes) is a free, virtual learning workshop series designed to enhance healthcare professionals' understanding and skills in neurodevelopmental diagnoses and care.

Learning objectives:

1. Summarize key steps in the diagnostic process, from screening to recommendations
2. Explore best practices in diagnostic evaluation
3. Consider important factors in diagnostic care

Learn more: https://rtsa-tacc.com/echo-autism-the-diagnostic-process/

Y1 + Y2

2:30 - 4:00 p.m. – Michelle Phoenix and the CanNRT Curriculum Co-Design Committee

Inclusive co-creation with CanNRT: Progress, outcomes, and next steps

This session will introduce the principles of inclusive co-creation and share how CanNRT co-created their curriculum recommendations. We will share updates on our progress, process, and outcomes. There will be embedded opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Learning objectives:

1. Explore principles of inclusive co-creation and discuss how they were applied
2. Review the process and outcomes of CanNRT's curriculum co-creation process
3. Reflect on how co-creation was used to create curriculum recommendations and link methods and principles to your own area of work

Michelle Phoenix (she/her) is an Associate Professor in the School of Rehabilitation Science at McMaster University and a CanChild Scientist. She has practiced clinically as a speech-language pathologist and holds an adjunct scientist position with KidsAbility. Her research focusses on improving access and equity in children's rehabilitation services. This includes topics of family-centred care, cultural responsivity and trauma informed care, parent well-being, and innovative models of service delivery. She works with a variety of community partners and studies ways that we can include often excluded populations in service design, delivery, and evaluation.

Noémie Cusson (she/her) is a doctoral student in psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal and QART Fellow. Her studies focus on the influence of alexithymia on empathy and on theory of mind in autism.

Gunjan Seth (she/her) is a dedicated parent of an individual with autism and ADHD, and a proud immigrant to Canada. With nearly a decade of experience as a Family Leader at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, she also serves as a Family Mentor, Family as Faculty, and former co-chair of the Family Advisory Committee. Gunjan actively contributes to multiple hospital committees focused on equity, food experiences, complex care, research, and family engagement.

Beyond Holland Bloorview, Gunjan is a Parent Partner with Autism Speaks, a Family Advisor with ECHO Autism Ontario, a Family Mentor with IMPaCTrials, and a person with lived experience with the CHILD-BRIGHT Network. She collaborates widely with various research networks across North America.

Passionate about fostering a just and inclusive world, Gunjan is committed to ensuring care that is agile, culturally sensitive, and grounded in research, education, and lived experience.

Clarice Ribeiro Soares Araujo (she/her) is an occupational therapist from Brazil with a PhD in Rehabilitation Sciences. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the School of Physical and Occupational Therapy at McGill University, based at the Shriners Hospital for Children – Canada. Her fellowship is supported by the Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Child Health Research Excellence at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC), and she is also a Fellow of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) in Brazil. Clarice conducts clinical research with and for children and youth with developmental disabilities and their families, with a focus on promoting participation and improving care practices.

Link to materials: Moll S, Wyndham-West M, Mulvale G, Park S, Buettgen A, Phoenix M, Fleisig R, Bruce E. Are you really doing 'codesign'? Critical reflections when working with vulnerable populations. BMJ Open. 2020 Nov 3;10(11):e038339. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-038339. PMID: 33148733; PMCID: PMC7640510. (Optional – can serve as an orientation to the presentation topics)

Friday, August 22, 2025

Y1

9:30 - 10:30 a.m. – Jonathan Weiss

Introduction to autistic mental health

This introductory lecture will explore the intersection of autism and mental health, highlighting the elevated prevalence of co-occurring mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and emotion dysregulation. Drawing on an ecological systems perspective, the session will examine how individual, family, school, and community-level factors contribute to risk and resilience. The lecture will also review evidence-based psychological interventions tailored for autistic youth and discuss emerging strategies to build capacity in mental health services, including workforce development. Attendees will gain a foundational understanding of the complexities and opportunities in conducting research on mental health for neurodivergent populations.

Learning objectives:

- Understand the prevalence and presentation of co-occurring mental health conditions in autistic children and youth
- Identify key ecological and systemic factors that influence mental health outcomes in autistic youth
- Explore evidence-based approaches and service models that support mental health for the autistic community, with a focus on building capacity

Jonathan Weiss (he/him), Ph.D., C.Psych. is a Professor of Psychology at York University and holds the York Research Chair in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. A registered psychologist, his research focuses on improving mental health outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities. He is also an Adjunct Scientist at the Azrieli Centre for Neurodevelopmental Research at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and is widely recognized for his leadership in community-based mental health research and advocacy. His work explores psychological interventions, the ecological correlates of mental health, and strategies to build capacity for developmental disability mental health services.

Y2

9:30 - 10:30 a.m. – Myriam Beauchamp

Speech and language in autism: Understanding variability, complex needs, and bilingualism

This session will explore the diverse profiles of speech and language development among individuals on the autism spectrum. Trainees will examine how communication abilities can vary widely, including in those with complex communication needs (CCNs). The session will also delve into the impact of bilingualism on language and cognitive development in autistic individuals, challenging common assumptions and highlighting key considerations for clinical and research contexts.

Learning objectives:

1. Describe the range and variability of speech and language abilities in autistic individuals
2. Identify the characteristics and challenges associated with complex communication needs (CCNs)
3. Understand the influence of bilingualism on the language and cognitive skills of autistic people

Myriam Beauchamp (she/her) holds an honours BA in linguistics from Concordia University (2008), an MS in speech, language and hearing sciences from Purdue University (2011) and a PhD in biomedical sciences (speech-language pathology) from the Université de Montréal. She also completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at McGill University (Elsabbagh lab) and was a member of the RI-MUHC equity, diversity and inclusion committee (2023–2024). She is also a licensed speech-language pathologist (SLP) with over a decade of clinical experience specializing in neurodevelopmental conditions, with expertise in assessing and supporting bilingual speakers. Her clinical experience includes working on multidisciplinary diagnostic teams, offering speech-language assessment and intervention services, and facilitating social skills groups for young adults on the autism spectrum.

Y1

10:30 - 11:30a.m. – Yona Lunsky

Understanding and promoting brain health of older adults with developmental disabilities

This session will provide an overview of health needs of older adults with developmental disabilities using population level data. Through this session, we will explore why we need to pay greater attention to the needs of older adults and their families and illustrate the value of research partnerships and important considerations when working together with people with lived experience.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand population level data on health needs of older adults with developmental disabilities
2. Explain concept of brain health as it applies to older adults with developmental disabilities and older caregivers
3. Describe and reflect on a co-designed capacity building intervention to promote brain health in both groups

Yona Lunsky (she/her) is the Scientific Director of the Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at University of Toronto. She has a PhD in Clinical Psychology and focuses her work on the mental and physical health of adults with developmental disabilities, and their families.

Y2

10:30 - 11:30 a.m. – Emily Kirby

Introduction to Open Science

This session will provide an overview of the concepts underlying Open Science and how it applies in different stages of the research ecosystem.

Learning objectives:

1. Gain an understanding of the overall Open Science ecosystem
2. Discuss examples of Open Science implementation and understand relevance to researchers/trainees
3. Examine how infrastructure research intersects with Open Science

Emily Kirby (she/her) is a lawyer specializing in research ethics and governance. She holds a degree in civil law (LL.B.), as well as a bachelor's degree in biology (B.Sc.) and a master's degree in environmental studies (M. Env.). She has also been a member of the Quebec Bar since 2011.

Emily has worked as an Academic Associate at the Centre of Genomics and Policy (CGP, McGill University) and as an ethics and governance specialist with the Network for Transforming Autism Care (RTSA, Montreal Neurological Institute-Hospital). For over a decade, she has collaborated with several research consortia and projects, in Canada and internationally, to develop ethical and legal tools for the conduct of biomedical research. Through this work, Emily has developed a particular expertise in the areas of data governance, privacy and consent (including biomedical, clinical, medico-administrative data, etc.).

Y1

11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. – Mackenzie Salt

Social inclusion needs in adults

This session will discuss social inclusion in general, including its relationship to mental health especially in people with neurodevelopmental conditions. Specific needs of adults with a variety of neurodevelopmental conditions will be discussed. In addition, recent work done looking at the social inclusion needs of Autistic adults will be highlighted and discussed.

Learning objectives:

1. Participants will learn about the relationship between social inclusion and mental health, and how this relationship can impact adults with neurodevelopmental conditions
2. Participants will gain an understanding of the specific needs of adults with neurodevelopmental conditions, as well as the various barriers that may hinder meeting those needs

Mackenzie Salt (he/him), PhD, is an Autistic autism researcher and a part-time assistant professor in the department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster University. He is also a research associate with the National Centre for Autism Collaboration. He has a background in qualitative research and research engagement, and his research focus is Autistic adults and their experiences. He is also currently the Editor-in-Chief of the all-Autistic editorial board of the Canadian Journal of Autism Equity.

Y2

11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. – Gabriel Pelletier

From principles to practice: Embedding Open Science in your research workflow

This interactive session will guide participants in applying Open Science throughout the research lifecycle. Using real-world test cases inspired by participants' own projects, we'll explore practical strategies, tools, and best practices that promote transparency, reproducibility, collaboration, and efficiency. Along the way, we'll address key considerations around ethics, privacy, and data security to ensure responsible and impactful Open Science implementation.

Learning objectives:

1. Identify appropriate Open Science tools and workflows to apply at different stages of the research lifecycle
2. Recognize common challenges and opportunities for implementing Open Science practices across diverse research contexts
3. Apply practical strategies to make your research more open, transparent, and reproducible, regardless of career stage or research domain

Gabriel Pelletier (he/him) is the Open Science Alliance Officer at the Tanenbaum Open Science Institute (TOSI) at The Neuro (Montreal Neurological Institute-Hospital), McGill University. In this role, he leads the development and coordination of a national network of neuroscience and mental health research institutes committed to advancing Open Science. His work focuses on fostering a culture shift in research by promoting collaboration, transparency, and data sharing across institutions. Gabriel joined TOSI in 2022 as the Open Science Data Manager, where he worked closely with research teams at The Neuro to assess data management needs, implement best practices, and support the adoption of tools that enhance openness and reproducibility. He holds a PhD in Neuroscience from McGill University and previously worked as a Research Associate in the Cognitive Neuroscience Unit at The Neuro.