**FIRST STEP IN SOLVING THE PUZZLE: A SERVICES AND SUPPORTS ASSESSMENT OF ASD IN YORK REGION**

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**Objective:** The purpose of the research was to understand the services and support needs and perceptions of parent/family caregivers of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and professionals working with individuals with ASD in York Region, Toronto, Ontario.

**Method:** The sample consisted of 154 professionals and 202 caregivers who completed the survey, which included questions adapted from *CASDA (2014) Autism in Canada: National Needs Assessment Survey for Families, Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Professionals*. In addition to quantitative survey questions, qualitative questions were focused on revealing the current state of York Region services and supports through the experiences of those that provided or utilized services. Thematic coding was used to analyze the qualitative data.

**Results:** There were three major themes across both caregivers and professionals' narratives.For caregivers, the three major themes were: (1) extremely long waitlists associated with services extended feelings of crisis and created barriers within their journey, (2) a lack of family support offered by the government to navigate the confusing next steps once a child is diagnosed, and (3) government funded programs were labelled as limited and inadequate for the number of individuals looking to utilize its services. For professionals, the three major themes were: (1) too few staff trained in ASD or services personalized to this population relative to the number of individuals in need, (2) lack of support offered to families manoeuvring through their service and treatment options, and (3) an inadequate amount of available government funding.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** The needs identified by caregivers and professionals may impact a high quality of life among individuals with ASD in York Region now and in the future. Incorporating their daily experiences, stakeholders and decision-makers should consider including these findings when restructuring and/or creating services to further help with the intricate needs of this population and their support providers. Additionally, the findings may be used to educate service providers on the struggles faced by these individuals to promote empathy and encourage more informed, circumstance-sensitive professionals.

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