Autism Ontario, a not-for-profit advocacy organization for autistic individuals and their families, offers direct support to caregivers through the Service Navigation Program. The primary goals of the program are to offer families help with understanding the new Ontario Autism Program and to support families in navigating their local autism system.

The aims of the current study are to: (1) identify the demographics of caregivers who register for the program; (2) determine their level of distress and service needs, and (3) investigate the impact of using the program on caregiver feelings of empowerment and well-being after using the program. We hypothesize that parents/caregivers who use the Service Navigator program will report an above average level of distress and require the most help with navigating funding and service provisions for the new Ontario Autism Program. We also hypothesize that parents level of self-reported stress will decrease after using the Service Navigator program, while their levels of empowerment and overall quality of life with increase.

We plan to conduct a secondary analysis of data already collected by Autism Ontario for the purposes of internal program evaluation. Results of the current study may elucidate the usefulness of the program and inform potential enhancements to the program that would better serve caregivers and families of autistic people.