

## Statement from MacART on World Autism Awareness Day 2021

April 2<sup>nd</sup> is World Autism Awareness Day – a day to continue raising awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder and to promote acceptance and inclusion for the 70 million individuals living with Autism Spectrum Disorder around the globe. In Canada, 1 in 66 children are diagnosed with Autism, highlighting the importance of creating a more inclusive world for our next generation.

The McMaster Autism Research Team (MacART; [www.macautism.ca](http://www.macautism.ca)) is excited to celebrate World Autism Awareness Day. MacART is a partnership between McMaster Children's Hospital, Hamilton Health Sciences, and McMaster University that aims to bridge the research-to-practice gap in Autism. MacART is designed to foster collaboration among the families, researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers whose lives and work are touched by Autism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted everyone's lives in different ways, including having serious consequences for employment. It can be difficult for people with Autism to find regular, supportive employment, and these challenges are likely exacerbated by the pandemic. With the theme of this year's World Autism Awareness Day focusing on the importance of workplace inclusivity and inclusive employment programmes, particularly in light of the pandemic, we want to recognize the MacART members who are contributing to such research efforts. Research led by MacART trainee Irene O'Connor and supported by MacART members Drs. Briano Di Rezze and Geoff Hall, and their teams, are building evidence on the importance of specialized support roles, such as job coaches; their work has outlined key characteristics that job coaches provide in supporting youth and adults with Autism in the workplace.

*"This pandemic has challenged us to keep progressing our Autism research in ways that adapt to our new environment,"* says Dr. Di Rezze, Associate Professor in McMaster University's School of Rehabilitation Science, whose research focuses on examining the impact of interventions on participation in everyday life – including employment. *"Keeping our research focus on employment and Autism has been important because finding and maintaining jobs in this pandemic has been especially challenging for people with Autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities."*

MacART is continually forming and strengthening collaborations with our partners to help build frameworks that can better support families and promote an inclusive world for those on the spectrum. These efforts build toward our goal of **advancing Autism care through meaningful research.**

MacART is proud to be supported by our partners:

- McMaster Children's Hospital & McMaster Children's Hospital Research Collaborative
- Hamilton Health Sciences & Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation
- McMaster University