

Towards a common approach for autism in Europe

European Parliament JAN6Q1, Brussels, 23 April 2025, 15.00 - 17.00

Context

In September 2024, the European Commission President announced a commitment to work towards a [‘common approach’](#) to autism at the European Union (EU) level as indicated in the portfolio of the European Commissioner for Health. It echoes Autism-Europe’s longstanding call for a coordinated and strategic response to address the needs of autistic people at EU, national and regional levels. The European Parliament has also expressed support, with the adoption in 2023 of a resolution to [harmonise the rights of autistic people across Europe](#). In April 2025, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) also issued [concluding observations](#) calling for further action at the EU-level to realise the rights of autistic people.

It is, therefore, a timely opportunity to reflect on the needs of the autism community as well as take stock of major initiatives at the EU level, such as AIMS-2 Trials (the largest autism research grant awarded). [AIMS-2-TRIALS](#) is an ongoing 15-year international collaborative research programme, funded by public private partnership that brings together academic institutions, representatives of the autism community and industry partners from across Europe and beyond. The overall goal of the project is to improve health outcomes and wellbeing for autistic people by matching therapies to individual needs. The project has also surveyed the more general needs of the autism community, notably regarding access to services.

During this high-level conference, co-organised with Autism-Europe and hosted under the auspices of the [Disability Intergroup](#), autism community representatives and researchers will share insights about the priorities and needs of autistic people across Europe. We want to initiate a dialogue between key stakeholders about necessary next strategic steps for investment in policy and research, services and infrastructure to improve the lives of autistic people across the European Union.

Programme

15.00 - Introduction & Opening

Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare (video)

Welcome by Members of the European Parliament Disability Intergroup

MEP Rosa Estaras, European Parliament Disability Intergroup bureau member

MEP Alex Agius Saliba, Co-Chair European Parliament Disability Intergroup

MEP Katrin Langensiepen, Co-Chair European Parliament Disability Intergroup

MEP Chiara Gemma, European Parliament Disability Intergroup bureau member

15.20 - Welcome and introduction by Professor Eva Loth, Deputy Lead of AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium & Harald T. Neerland, President of Autism-Europe

15.30 - Priorities and challenges of the autism communities in Europe, and what actions are needed to address them

Siti Nurnadhirah Binte Mohd Ikhsan (University of Cambridge), Pierre Violland (Professional peer practitioner and AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Representative)

Based on the ACCESS-EU survey, we will describe service access challenges for autistic people across service types and priorities for change for autistic people (including employment, public awareness and understanding of autism, education, public funding for autism related services, and mental healthcare). We will highlight the importance of continued involvement of autism representative organisations to map priorities and plan policy change and implementation.

15.45 - System change for improved service delivery

Autism With and Without Epilepsy: care pathway in Europe. Findings and recommendations

Professor Celso Arango (Head of the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Service at Hospital General Universitario Gregorio Marañón), Pierre Violland (Professional peer practitioner and AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Representative)

We are presenting results from the care pathways studies of autistic people with and without epilepsy. The data shows the need for systemic change to the organisation of services for autistic people, including reducing waiting times and improving access to diagnostic services for both autism and epilepsy. We will discuss recommendations for system change to address these issues.

16.00 - Biomedical progress for autism research: what have we learned and what is next?

Professor Emily Jones, Centre for Brain & Cognitive Development, Birkbeck, University of London

We will discuss the progress made on identifying biological signatures that could help guide treatment decisions for autistic people and the need for further investment in biomedical research on the broader mental and physical health challenges faced by autistic people.

16.15 - Q&A

16.25 - Future policy directions for autism in Europe: need for a strategic approach

Policy discussion: how should the EU common approach on autism and research prioritise the needs of the autistic communities to advance their rights and enhance their quality of life across Europe?

Panel with interventions from:

Adam Harris, CEO AsIAM, Ireland's Autism Charity, member of Autism-Europe's executive committee

Inmaculada Placencia Porrero, Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion at Directorate-General for Justice and Consumer of the European Commission

Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety of the European Commission (tbc)

Reaction from Members of the European Parliament

16.55 - Conclusions