



**SAME  
CHANGE  
REPORT 2022**

## CONTENTS

Foreword	3
<b>Section 1: Autism in Ireland - Autism ID Cardholder Survey</b>	<b>4</b>
Autism ID Cardholder Survey	4
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Executive Summary	5
Profile of Respondents to the 2021 Survey	6
Satisfaction with the Autism ID Card	7
Use of Autism ID Card	7
Cardholder Testimonials of using the ID Card	8
AsIAM Initiatives	9
Life in the Community	10
Protected in the Community	10
Barriers to Inclusion and Participation	11
Education	12
Health	13
Employment	15
Housing	17
Comments from Cardholders on Housing Needs	17
Government supports for Autistic people and Families	18
The next 12 months	18
Conclusion	19
<b>Section 2: Autism in Ireland - Attitudes to Autism Survey</b>	<b>20</b>
Attitudes to Autism Survey	20
The research context	20
The central question	20
Knowledge of Autism	20
Relationship with Autism	24
Attitudes to Autism	26
The Same Chance Roadmap	27

## FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Autism is something which many people can find challenging to understand. It is a complex topic and the Autistic community is as diverse as it is broad. It is not something which lends itself easily to soundbites and stereotypes but unfortunately this is often the extent of what might be described as “awareness”.

We need to move beyond just being aware of the existence of Autistic people towards true understanding and acceptance. Central to this is a recognition of the barriers Autistic people face within society. These barriers are real and persistent, and the consequence is that our community does not enjoy the same chance that Neurotypical people do. Whether it is accessing healthcare and making friends or finding a school place and getting a job, Autistic people face barriers which don't exist for most people within our society.



This World Autism Month, we are challenging Irish society to take steps to give us the same chance – no more, no less. This has never been more important. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a loss of structure and routine, coupled with the closure of vital support services and this presented unprecedented challenges for many Autistic people and our families. The long term impact of which is yet to be known.

We believe we can create a truly inclusive society by both educating society to better understand and meet the needs of our community and by providing timely, meaningful support to Autistic people as and when it is required. This Same Chance Report gives a snapshot of where public knowledge of Autism is at presently and what it is like to stand in the shoes of an Autistic person in Ireland. At times, it highlights the disconnect between what the public think and how the Autism community feels. It shows the progress which has been made, particularly in the attitudes of young Irish people, but it also presents the massive barriers which remain for Autistic people to make friends, go to school or find a job. What both the Irish public and the Autistic community agree on however is that our society does not know enough, and our country must do more to support Autistic people. As an organisation, we are working hard to address these realities. We have seen a 300% increase in demand for our supports since the pandemic began and we have risen to this challenge. We have launched a suite of new programmes aimed at providing targeted support to those who who need it most and we reached more people than ever before with our Training Programmes. There is a real need for us to do so much more and we have the ambition to sustain and grow our work with your support.

Everyone has a role to play in ensuring Autistic people have the same chance. This World Autism Month please take the time to learn, to engage and to support our work in anyway you can.

Every good wish

*Adam Harris*  
Founder-CEO

# SECTION 1: AUTISM IN IRELAND

## AUTISM ID CARDHOLDER SURVEY

### INTRODUCTION

AsIAm is Ireland's National Autism Charity. We work to create a society in which every Autistic person is empowered to reach their own personal potential and to fully participate in society. We believe that, by developing the capacity of the Autism community and addressing the societal barriers to inclusion, we can make Ireland the world's most Autism-friendly country. Our vision is for Ireland to be a country where all Autistic

people are accepted as they are, equal, valued, respected, and included. We work towards this vision by building the capacity of Autistic people and families, through a wide range of programmes and initiatives, and by supporting communities, businesses and public services to become accessible to our community.



AsIAm launched the AsIAm Autism ID Card in August 2019, to support Autistic people and families to access support and increase the public's understanding of people's everyday experience of being Autistic. This Cardholder's survey, which is the second Report since we launched the ID Card in 2019, aims to:

- Identify areas where the AsIAm Autism ID Card has been successful in supporting Autistic people and find out if there are any adjustments needed to further support Autistic people and families when out in the community.
- Examine the issues and identify the societal barriers that Cardholders experience living in Irish society.
- Engage with Autistic people and families and to have the community's views and experiences reflected in our policy and advocacy work, and in our initiatives aimed at supporting the community.

Over the past two years, COVID-19 has had a significant impact among everyone in Irish society, including Autistic people and families, as well as disabled people and those with additional support needs. COVID-19 public health advice and restrictions meant that there were few opportunities for Cardholders to avail of supports when accessing goods and services, or when out in public. As with our 2020 Cardholder Report, this Report will help AsIAm to identify and record the Autism community's experiences and perspectives, which will shape both our advocacy work and our supports and identify areas where we can further support Cardholders in the community. Critically, this year's survey will provide a key insight for our Same Chance Campaign, identifying clearly the barriers which Autistic people encounter and contrasting these experiences with the prevailing public understanding of Autism as documented in our Attitudes to Autism Poll.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted between 26th November and 17th December 2021. Of the Autistic people who had obtained the card between 1st August 2019 and 30th November 2021, 3,970 were contacted over email to participate in this survey. These Cardholders had agreed to participate in an annual survey in their Autism ID Card Application form. 944 respondents completed the survey, and we will present the findings and our analysis below.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**89%** of Cardholders believe that the Irish public does not understand enough about Autism.

**73%** of Cardholders stated they felt safe and protected within their community.

**54%** of Cardholders confirmed they have experienced discrimination because of being a member of the Autism community.

**32%** stated the biggest barrier to inclusion is judgement by society and the lack of understanding of Autism.

**58%** of Cardholders think that public services are not inclusive of Autistic people.

**71%** of Cardholders believe the Government does not take a coordinated approach to supporting Autistic people.

**81%** think Ireland should adopt a National Autism Strategy.

**72%** of Cardholders believed their child had an appropriate school place.

**63%** of Cardholders believe the healthcare system is not inclusive of Autistic people.

Only **10%** of Cardholders think workplaces in Ireland are inclusive of Autistic people.

**72%** of Cardholders felt the AsIAm ID Card was useful during COVID-19 restriction.

Almost **70%** of Cardholders use the AsIAm ID Card for 'family days out'.

**90%** of Cardholders found the Card to be helpful overall to their everyday life.

**45%** of Cardholders reported that they or their child has one or more co-occurring conditions, differences, or disabilities as well as being Autistic.

## PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS TO THE 2021 SURVEY

As with 2020, although not as pronounced, most responses (86%) came from parents, carers or family members of Autistic people who completed the survey on behalf of their Autistic family member. (14%) of respondents were made up of Cardholders themselves (over 18).

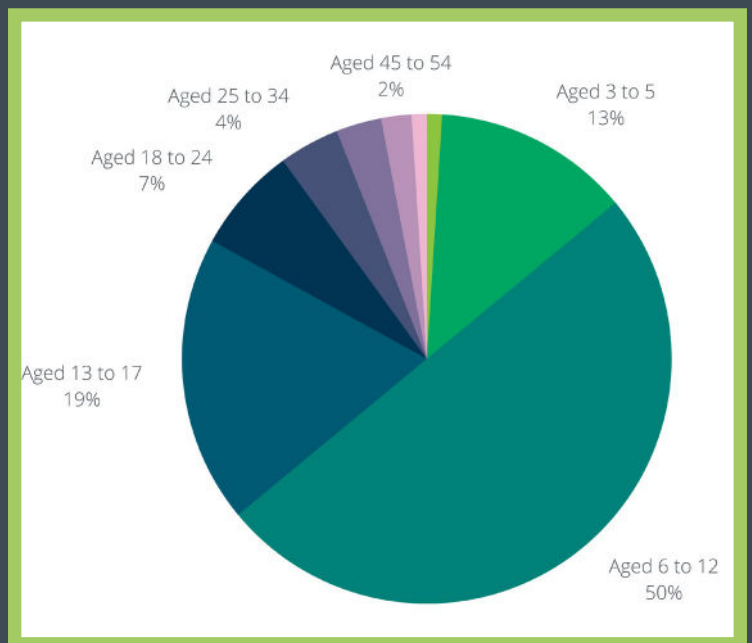
**Please note** the use of the term 'Cardholder' will refer to parents/guardians of Autistic children and those over 18 who are in possession of an AsIAM Autism ID card throughout this Report.

65% of Cardholders identified as male, 33% of Cardholders identified as female, and 2% of responses came from Cardholders who identified as non-binary.

(33%) of Cardholders are based in Dublin, Cork (11%) Meath (5%), Kildare (5%), Wicklow (3%), Limerick (3%). Whilst the remaining 40% of Cardholders came from other counties in the Republic of Ireland.

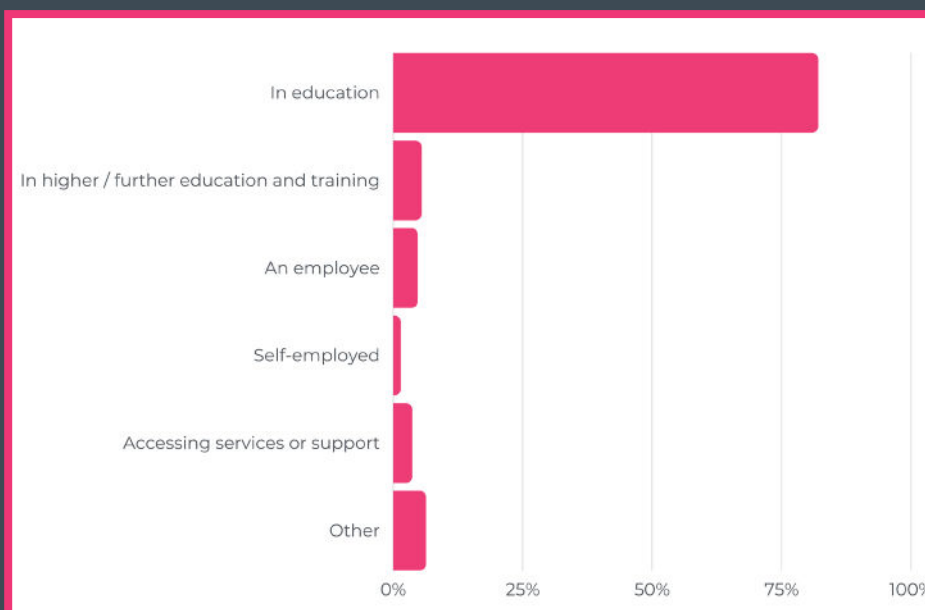
### The following is a makeup of the age profile of Cardholders:

We asked Cardholders if they or their child were diagnosed with, or self-identified as having any other conditions, differences, or disabilities as well as being Autistic. Almost 45% of respondents reported that they or their child has one or more co-occurring conditions, differences, or disabilities.



Cardholders also identified on what stage in their life they or their Autistic child is at.

Most Cardholders are currently based in some form of educational setting, the majority comprising those who are in early years, primary and post-primary settings.



## SATISFACTION WITH THE AUTISM ID CARD

The AsIAm Autism ID Card's main purpose is to support Cardholders in the community. To this end, we wanted to gauge how long Cardholders have had the Card, what Cardholders felt about using the Card and how user-friendly the registration process was for Autistic people and families.

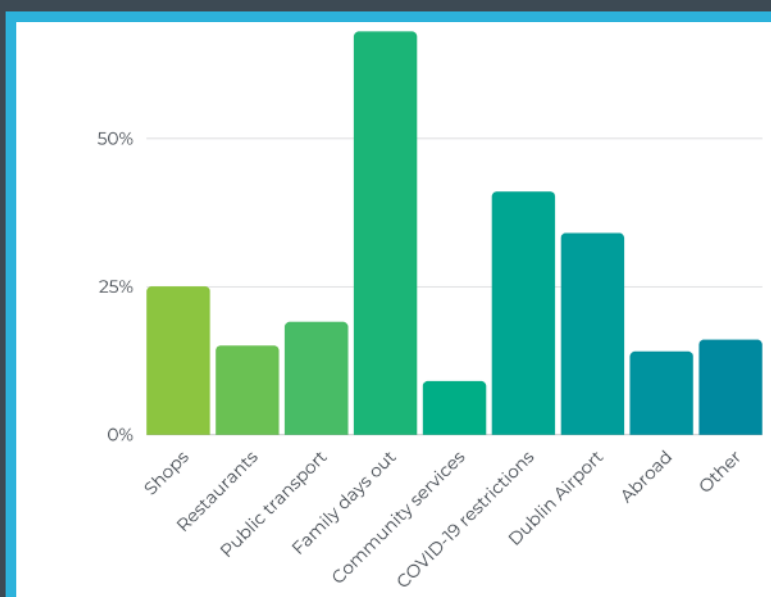
AsIAm welcomes that 99% of respondents found that applying for the Autism ID Card's application was a straightforward process.

Most strikingly, 90% of Cardholders found the Card to be helpful overall to their everyday life. This was particularly instructive for us as it showed both that many in the Autism community felt that the Card was a necessary support when out in public, and that the community appreciated and valued the Card and its intended purpose. We also asked Cardholders a specific question on how long Cardholders had the card:

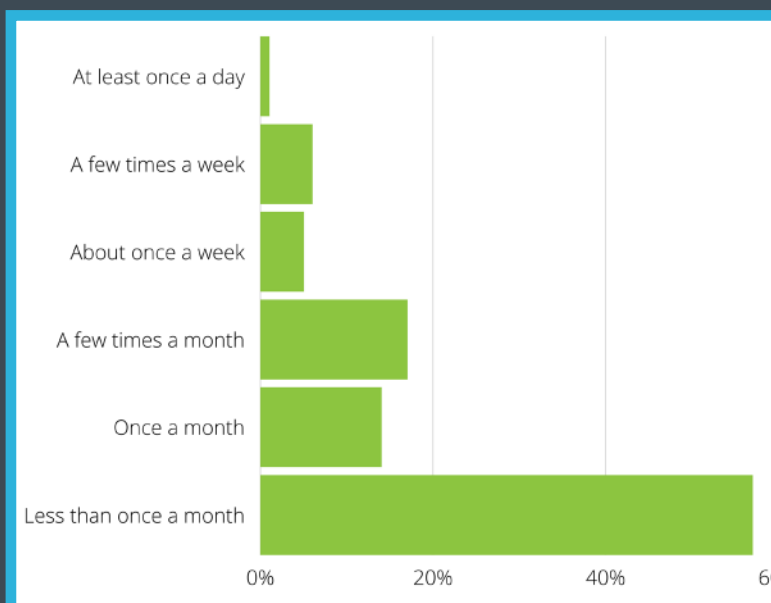
- 21% of Cardholders had the card for less than 6 months
- 28% of the Cardholders had the card between 6 months and 1 year
- 51% of Cardholders had the card for more than one year

## USE OF AUTISM ID CARD

As the Autism ID Card serves primarily as a support for Autistic people when out in the community, we asked a series of questions which related to different situations where the Autism ID Card was used, and which services and business were receptive to community members using the Card. The first question related to where Cardholders used their Card, and a breakdown is as follows:



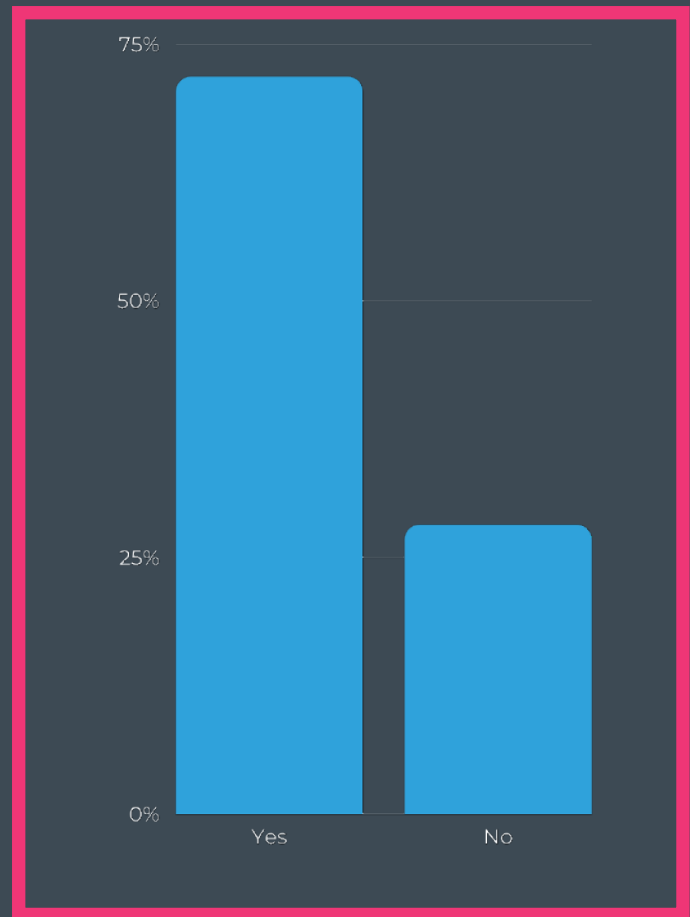
We also asked Cardholders how often they used the Card when they were out in public. It is important to note that how often Cardholders used the Card must also be taken in the context that different levels of COVID-19 restrictions were in place for much of 2021. This included periods where businesses and services were either closed or had to comply with a range of public health guidance and restrictions, such as capacity restrictions, having to wear face coverings or social distancing. These restrictions had a significant impact on businesses and services and on people's ability to enjoy access to these services. We found that:



Cardholders also reported having different experiences when using the Card in Ireland and when travelling abroad.

45% of respondents said that the Card was recognised and accepted in the country that they were visiting, whereas 55% of Cardholders reported that that the Card was not accepted in the country they were visiting. In contrast to this, 85% of Cardholders found that services and business accept the Card when used in Ireland.

Keeping a similar theme to the 2020 Report, we asked Cardholders whether the Card was helpful when navigating COVID-19 public health restrictions, such as mask mandates and travel or social distancing restrictions. We found that 72% of Cardholders found the Card helpful when navigating COVID-19 restrictions.



## CARDHOLDER TESTIMONIALS OF USING THE ID CARD

*"During the COVID-19 restrictions I was struggling terribly with distance restrictions. This Card helped enormously"*

*"I really struggle and go non-verbal in a meltdown so being able to use the Card as my voice when I start stimming my arms and screeching is really helpful."*

*"Card very helpful, especially in relation to the 5km restriction when my Child wanted to go to our usual park, as per his daily routine. We were stopped by the guards many times and they accepted the ID Card."*

*"Very handy for when traveling."*

*"Extremely helpful."*

*"We've felt a confidence having it if need to prove exemption status for something."*

*"I've felt more confident being out with her with the Card."*

*"Getting my son's vaccine, getting around the 5km limits, going to the dentist, or if we go out and especially if we have to queue it's an absolute dream".*

*"Useful to know we had it if a situation arose where we might need it."*



*“Some days I can’t wear mask and I when I show my card I’m not questioned further.”*

*“It was a god send for when meeting both of us at hospital appointments.”*

*“It has been fabulous I could not have gone out into the current covid society without this card it has been a life saver.”*

*“Extremely useful.”*

*“Found people could identify issue with Card on lanyard.”*

*“It was a huge benefit for us as it helped our son go on his long drives during lock down. Guards accepted the Card and where brilliant” (sic)*

## ASIAM INITIATIVES

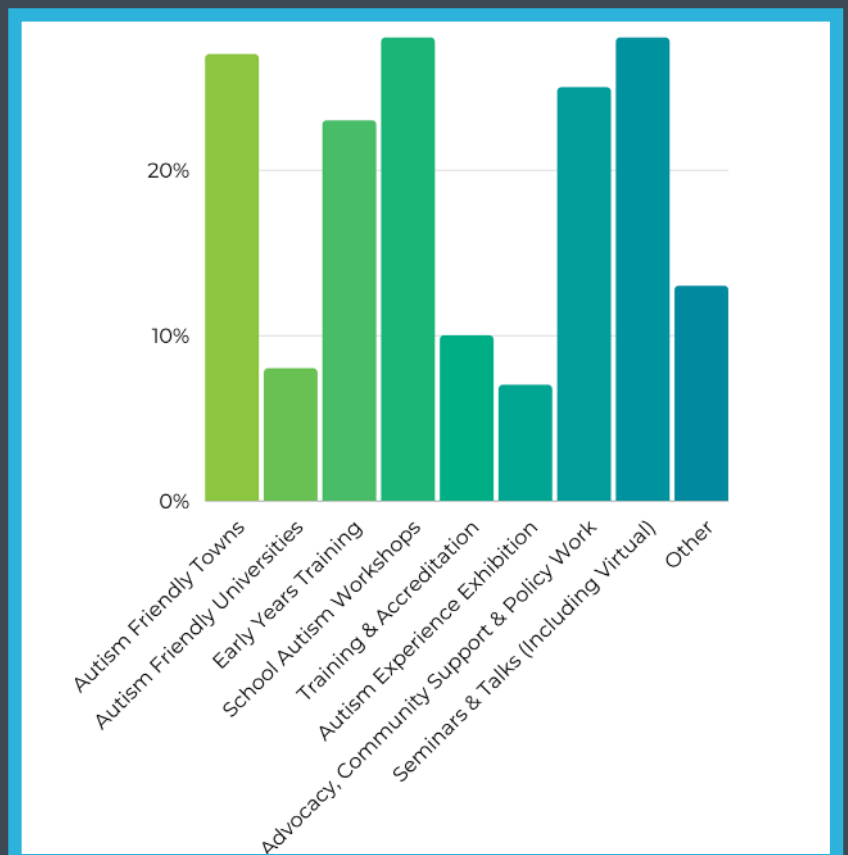
AsIAM runs a range of range of support programmes and initiatives, and these were expanded significantly during 2021 by the introduction of the:

- Autism Information Line;
- Employment and Adult Support Department;
- AutismFriendlyHEI.ie;
- Advice Programmes;
- Bridge Forward programme;

These initiatives aim to empower and support Autistic people and families, by providing them with information they may need to assist on navigating a particular issue or concern. These initiatives also build communities and support Autistic people into employment and higher education opportunities and combat social isolation, exclusion, and marginalisation within the Autism community.

We asked Cardholders if they engaged with any of AsIAM’s initiatives and supports and which programmes they engaged with over the past 12 months. The results were as follows:

We also asked Cardholders what initiatives, events or activities they felt they would benefit from if we put in more resources over the next year. Many Cardholders felt that “Awareness programmes” and “Social programmes” were both areas that they wanted to see AsIAM particularly concentrate on. Others wanted to see more investment in “Adult supports”, “Self-advocacy training”, “Policy campaigns”, “Employment supports” and the “Information Line”.

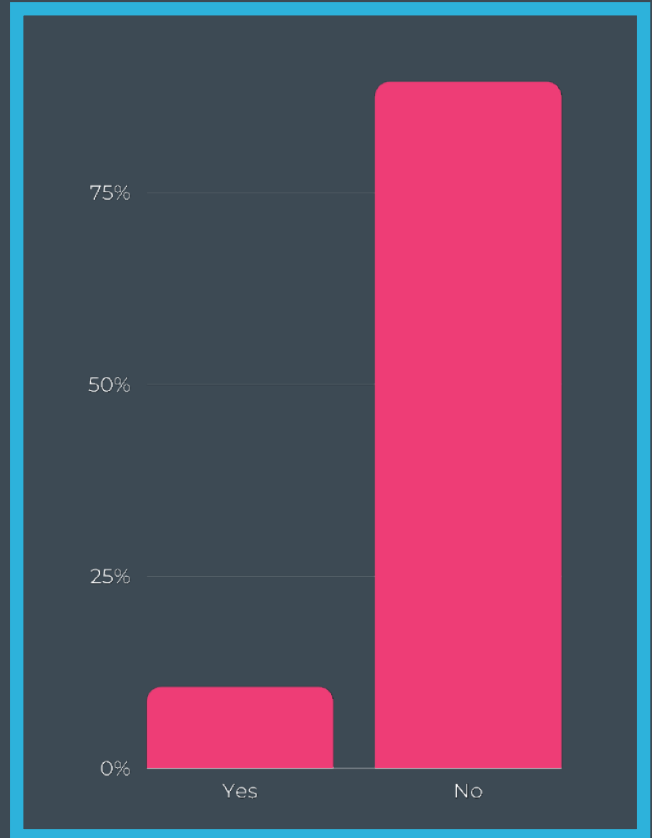


## LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

### Public Understanding of Autism in Ireland

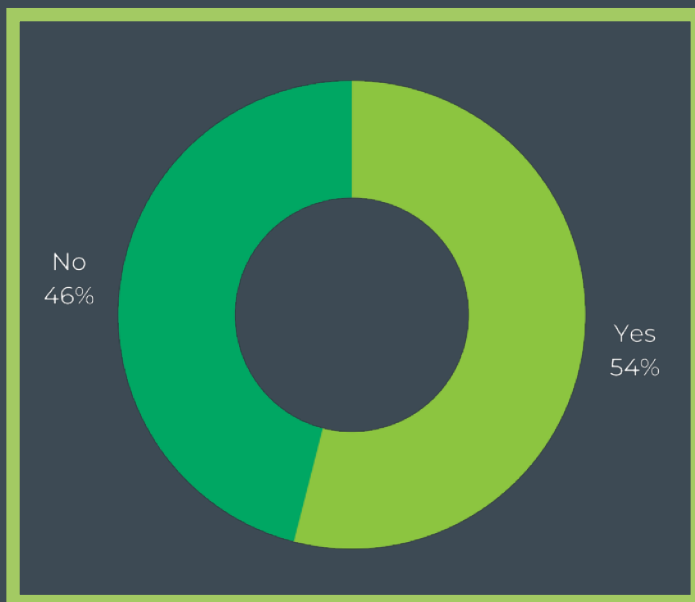
There are at least 1 in 65 people in Ireland who are Autistic. In a recently conducted Attitudes to Autism poll by CORE Research of a representative sample of 1000 adults in Ireland, only 4 out of 10 adults surveyed felt that they had a good understanding of Autism.. This demonstrates the differences in understanding between Autistic people, families and the wider public and is a recurring theme in our Cardholders' survey and is broadly reflected in the community's responses for this years' survey.

First, we asked Cardholders whether they believed the wider public understands enough about Autism and whether they feel supported in the community. When asked about wider public attitudes towards Autism and Autistic people, a considerable number of Cardholders, almost 9 in 10, believed Irish society did not understand enough about Autism.



These gaps in understanding can have a negative effect in reinforcing misconceptions or stereotypes about Autism. As the data suggests, it is becoming more important that both the State and society is more proactive in not just raising awareness of Autism and neurodiversity, and disability, but placing a greater focus on the nuances that often come with everyday experiences of Autistic people and families.

A greater understanding of Autism, particularly where it is Autistic-led, can lead to greater acceptance, and help to reduce the impact of harmful misconceptions about Autism, which in turn creates for a more inclusive society.



### PROTECTED IN THE COMMUNITY

We all have the right to feel safe and welcome in our communities, and being 'a' community helps us to be our best selves, be it at home, work, school, university, or in any of the clubs and societies that we may be a part of.

AsIAM asked Cardholders whether they felt safe and protected in the community.

73% of Cardholders believed that they felt protected in their community, whereas 27% of Cardholders did not believe that they felt safe in their community.

This 27% represents a significant cohort of the community and demonstrates the need for society to do more, to ensure all members of the Autism community feel safe.

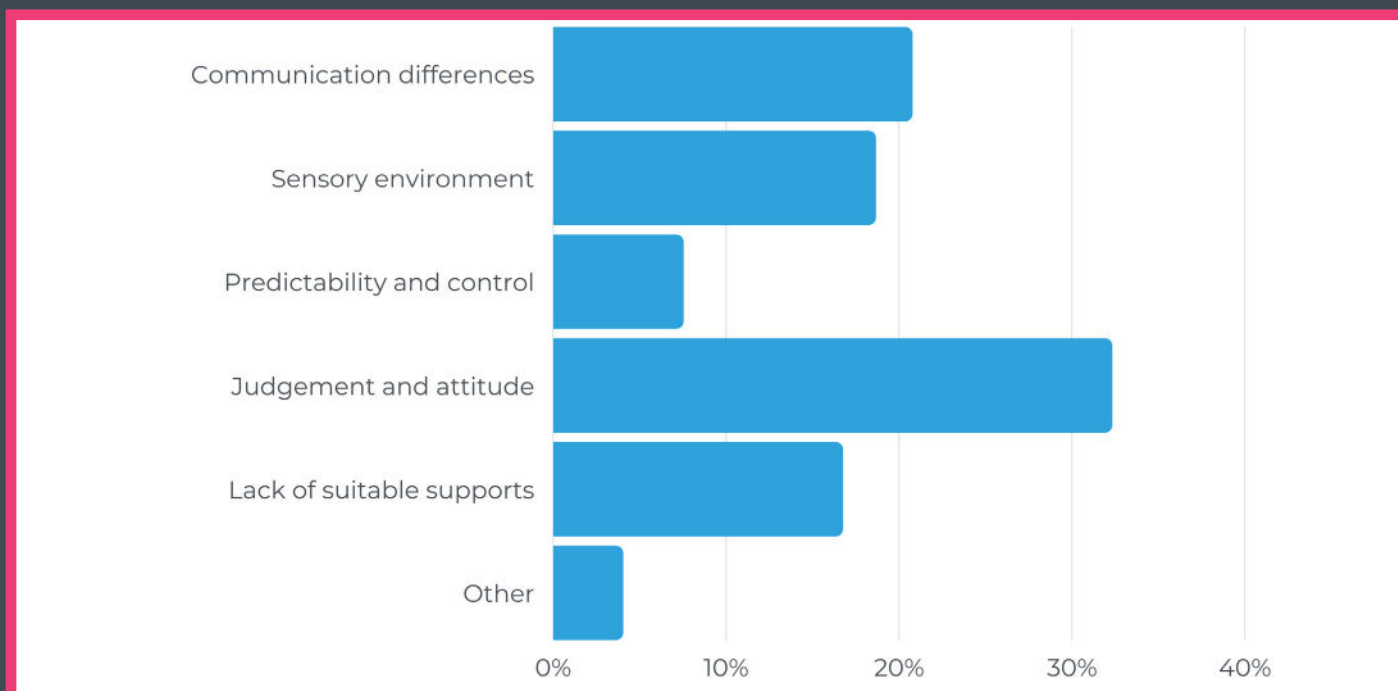
As with other groups who find themselves marginalised or excluded by society, Autistic people are more likely to experience discrimination in their daily lives compared to their non-Autistic peers. We asked Cardholders if they have experienced discrimination because of being Autistic.

The graph shows that over 50% of those surveyed have experienced discrimination because they are Autistic.

## BARRIERS TO INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

The work of AsIAM's Community Support department shines a light on many of the barriers to access, inclusion, and participation that Autistic people and families experience living in Irish society. Beyond the Autism ID Card itself, we wanted to ask Cardholders about the kinds of barriers that they experience and the extent to which they feel valued and supported to participate in society as themselves.

AsIAM asked Cardholders what they felt were the main barriers to participating in society in an inclusive way. The below graph is indicative of the need for society to do more when it comes to understanding Autism. 32% of those surveyed identified society's judgement and lack of understanding as their biggest barrier.



We also asked Cardholders about the extent to which public services are accessible to the Autism community. 58% of Cardholders believed that public services are not inclusive of Autistic people.

71% of Cardholders believed that the Government does not take a co-ordinated approach to supporting Autistic people.

81% of Cardholders expressed the view that Ireland should adopt a National Autism Strategy.

This speaks to significant economic, geographic, and systemic gaps and delays to accessing services and supports that is all too often the reality for many Autistic people and families within the current system. This can be compounded by the barriers that Autistic people and families also experience that can arise because of gender or gender identity, ethnicity, being a member of the LGBTQIAP+ community, socio-economic status, disability, and membership of the Travelling community, among other barriers, and at the intersections of these groups. This signals the need for the State to take a more co-ordinated and holistic approach towards supporting Autistic people and families which reflects both the diversity of the community, and the range and complexity of barriers Autistic people and families experience.

## EDUCATION

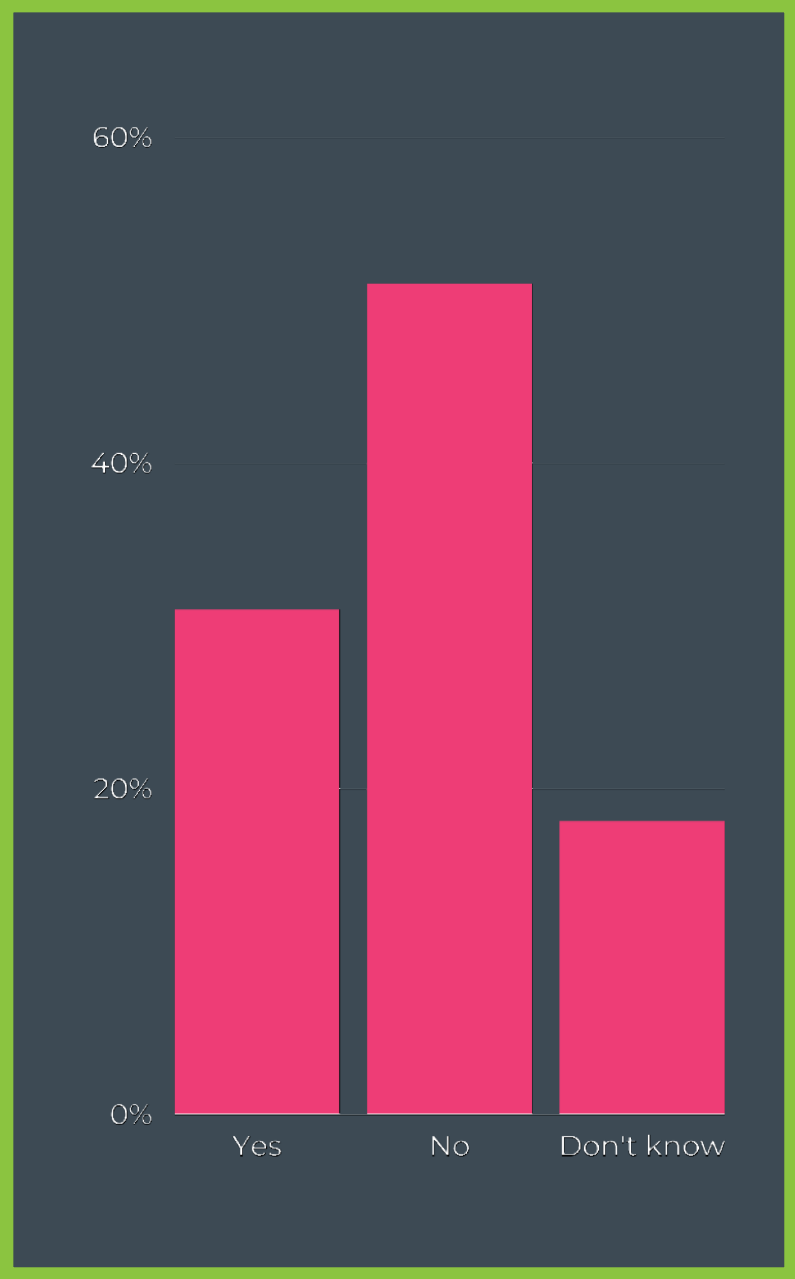
AsIAM receives a considerable number of queries in relation to education, particularly around accessing appropriate supports for Autistic children. Access to appropriate education is a core part of our advocacy and policy work. The right to an education is a fundamental principle enshrined in legislation, the Constitution, and by international legal charters, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In spite of these protections many families with Autistic children have difficulties in accessing suitable school placements and acquiring resources for their Autistic child’s educational provision. Many families have spoken about having to ‘fight’ for additional supports and resources for their children, with the State often acting as ‘gatekeeper,’ impeding families from getting timely access to the supports their children need.

Over 50% of Cardholders believe the Irish education system is not inclusive of Autistic people.

72% of Cardholders believe their child has a suitable school place, whilst 28% believe their child does not have a suitable school place.

The State’s often adversarial approach towards allocating educational supports to disabled people and people with additional needs is often one of the first barriers to inclusion. AsIAM receives a high volume of correspondence from families on issues that their Autistic child may experience at school or in relation lack of school places, many of these include but are not limited to:



Not having a school place

Having an unsuitable school place

Lack of Autism classes in secondary schools

Lack of resources at school to accommodate their child

Allocation of Special Needs Assistance (SNA) hours

Issues when making the transition from Autism class to mainstream class

Issues when making the transition from primary school to secondary school

Exclusionary barriers within their school's culture or ethos

Lack of understanding of Autism by senior management or by boards of management

Inaccessible sensory environment in the classroom or school

Autistic children inappropriately being put on a reduced timetable

Suspensions and expulsions

## HEALTH

Autistic adults and children throughout the lifecycle can experience worse physical and mental health outcomes compared to their Neurotypical peers. There are many reasons which explain these different healthcare outcomes between Autistic people and Neurotypical people.

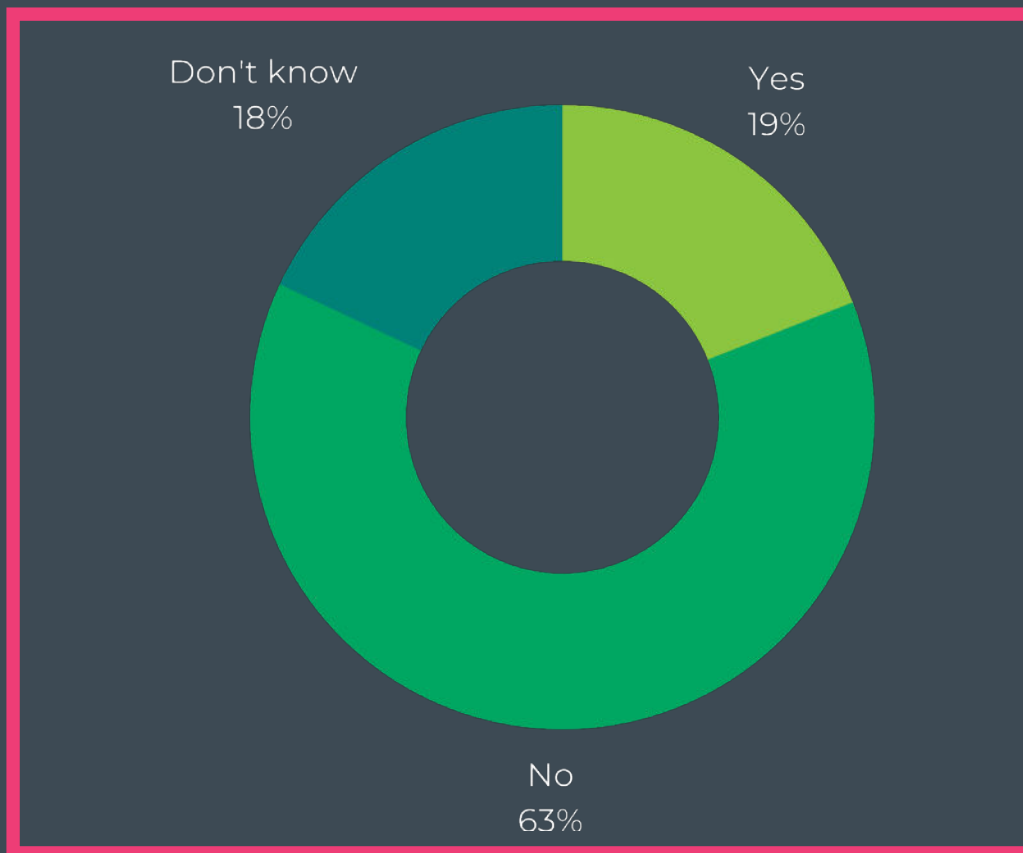
A key barrier to Autistic people accessing healthcare at the point of need is due to a lack of services, supports, accommodations and resources from an early age. AsIAM frequently receives correspondence from Autistic people and families regarding the lack of services and support provision, which includes the following:

- Delays in getting an Assessment of Need (AON)
- Excessively long waiting lists for diagnostic and therapeutic supports
- Inadequate mental health supports for Autistic adults
- Inadequate support from public health services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Failure to identify or support any co-occurring differences, disabilities, or conditions and how they might impact the person's experience of being Autistic.

A significant issue which AsIAM encounters in our work is the lack of access to appropriate healthcare supports, and this is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue within the Autism community.

A recent report called *"Barriers to healthcare for Autistic adults: Consequences & policy implications. A cross-sectional study,"* by Dr Mary Doherty and a team of Autistic medical professionals, found that healthcare providers can play a key role in reducing barriers to accessing healthcare by being understanding and willing to accommodate Autistic perspectives and ways of communication.

In our Cardholder survey, 63% of respondents believed that the healthcare service in Ireland is not inclusive of Autistic people. This figure is representative of the fact that a significant part of the Autism community feel that they have been let down by the HSE (Health Service Executive). The graph below identifies this divide:



To reduce the barriers to healthcare faced by our community, our health service should implement a joint strategy which covers the diversity of support needs that Autistic people and families experience across the lifecycle, from primary care to maternity care. Timely access to speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychological and mental health supports, as well as public diagnostic and support pathways for adults and dedicated supports for Autistic women and girls and for Autistic LGBTQIAP+ people, and other Autistic people from marginalised communities, are all necessary and essential supports for some Autistic people, and should be included in such a strategy.

The barriers to accessing healthcare are often exacerbated by the fact that there is a disconnect between our Government bodies, such as the HSE (Health Service Executive), the Department of Health, Primary Care Services, Mental Health Teams, and the new Community Disability Network Teams. The lengthy delays borne out by waiting lists creates a system whereby young children are not receiving appropriate early intervention supports at the point of need. This delayed system puts those who need to avail of this vital support at a disadvantage from the get go. The recent High Court judgment [No.2021/405JR] reflects this disadvantage.

To help assist with the excessive waiting list times for these critical services, AsIAM is calling for an urgent expansion of Government investment in this area. We welcome the establishment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Autism and the consultation process on Ireland's first Autism Innovation Strategy, both long term advocacy goals of our organisation. Both processes must place an emphasis on systematically addressing the barriers to accessing vital supports which families experience.

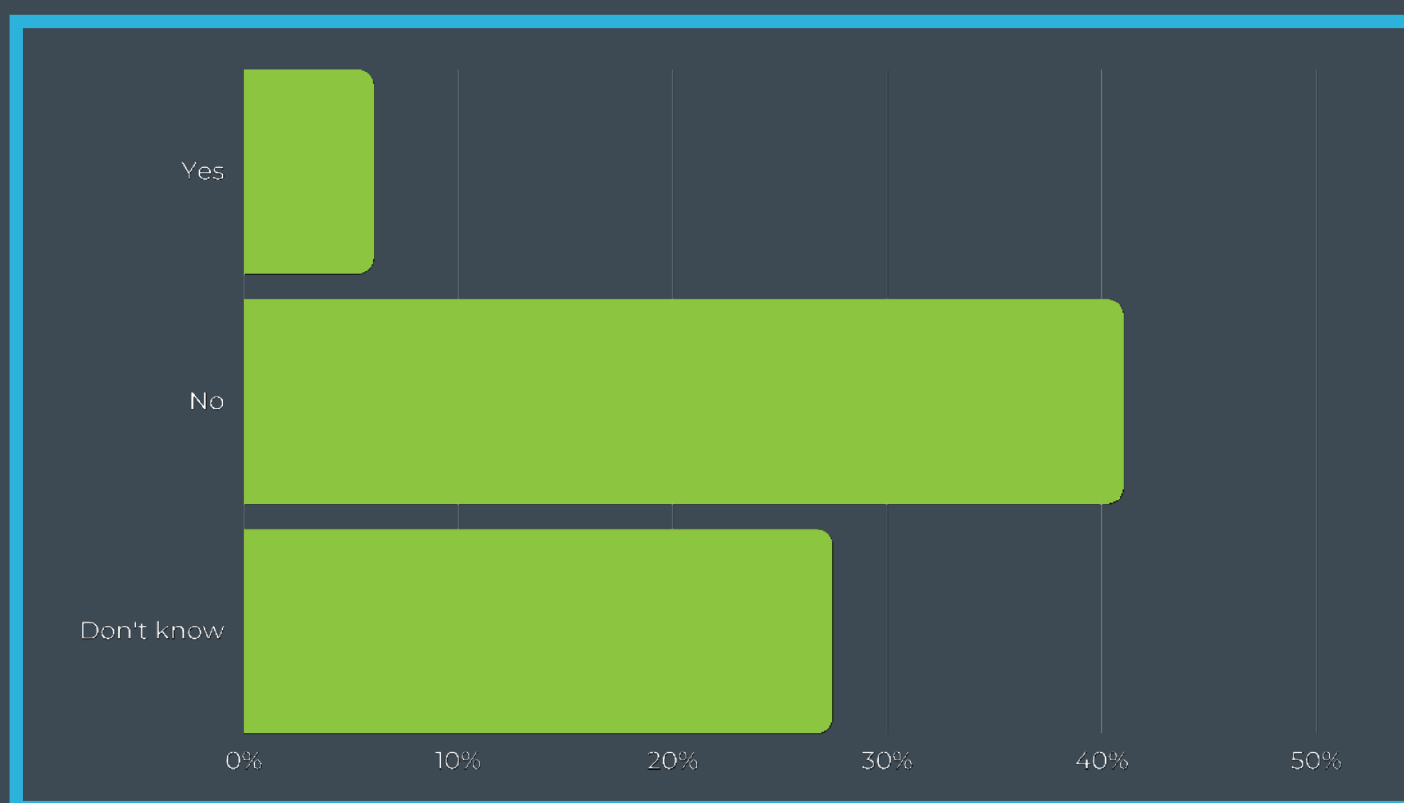
## EMPLOYMENT

As we are rebuilding our ways of working in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to incorporate different and more flexible ways of working which can help our workplaces to embrace diversity and inclusion. This new direction will allow more marginalised groups of people in our society to participate in employment. Autistic adults are among the most disadvantaged and underserved group in the labour market, and the employment statistics around Autism and disability in Ireland bear this out. Recent EUROSTAT statistics showed that just 32% of disabled people were in employment in 2017, when compared to the EU (European Union) average (51%), and as many as 80% of Autistic people are unemployed or underemployed.

Many Autistic people believe that there are not sufficient resources to support Autistic people to secure work in the open labour market, and to be supported to remain in employment once hired. Whilst Autistic people have skills or qualities that many employers require, such as advanced educational qualifications, skills, or expertise in particular areas, many of the recruitment processes employers use, such as interviews and testing methods, often pose barriers to finding work for many Autistic adults.

Many Autistic people, including those with high or additional support needs, wish to find work, and feel that finding work gives them more autonomy and independence, as well as a greater sense of dignity and purpose. AsIAM, through our Training and Accreditation Department and our Adult Support and Employment Department are working towards addressing these barriers to employment by supporting employers to attract and recruit Autistic candidates, through the AsIAM-IrishJobs Communities of Practice initiative, and by training organisations on best practices in supporting and including Autistic employees.

For this survey, we asked Cardholders whether they believed workplaces in Ireland are inclusive of Autistic people.

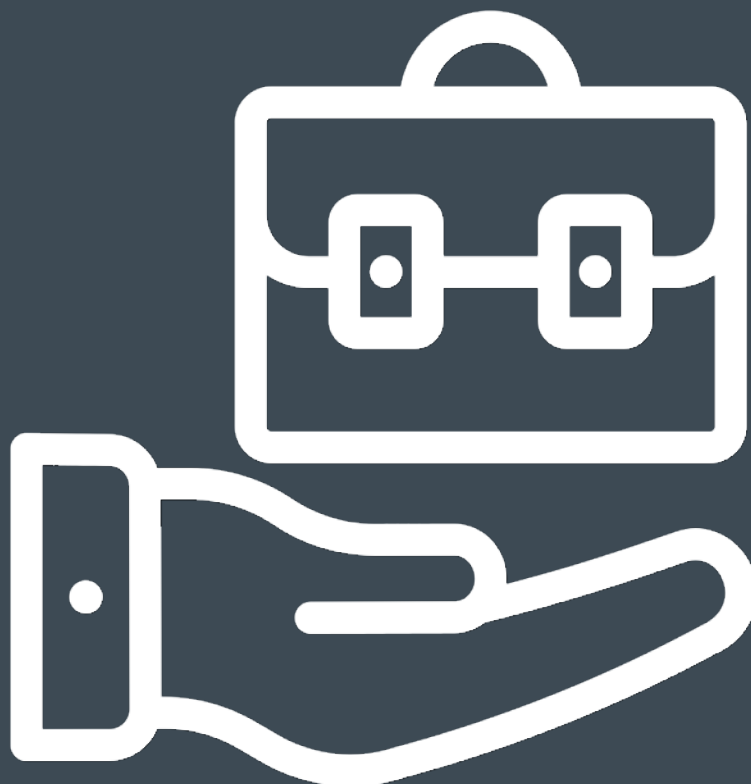


Over 55% of Cardholders believed workplaces in Ireland were not inclusive of Autistic people. Under 10% stated workplaces were inclusive, whilst over 35% stated they 'don't know'.

It is important to note some progress which has been made with respect to the rights of Autistic people and disabled people to work. Supports such as the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, increases to employer supports like the Wage Subsidy Scheme and through workplace specific Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are steps in the right direction. However, the figure suggests that there is a real need for both workplaces to investigate their own practices, to re-examine their own attitudes and biases, and mainstream more flexible ways of working, such as remote working and hybrid working, job carving or shorter working weeks.

The findings also suggests that the Government should take a more proactive approach to supporting the employment of Autistic people and disabled people, through the expansion of public sector hiring quotas and other measures. Such measures, including offering further supports to employers seeking to recruit from marginalised communities, expanding access to assistive technology and reasonable accommodations, spearheading more flexible ways of working and implementing policies such as the Comprehensive Employment Strategy will go a long way in supporting the Autistic adults and parents/carers seeking to remain at work or return to work.

Of the respondents who confirm that they are in employment, 22% believe that their current role aligns with their skills and academic qualifications, whilst 77% stated that they were underemployed. This figure represents the perception that a massive portion of Autistic adults often work in roles that do not match their skills, and that they often do not get the same chance for career progression or to work in their chosen field as Neurotypical colleagues. It also suggests that many Autistic people in employment are more likely to experience low pay, or experience harassment, exploitation or discrimination at work or be subjected to precarious working conditions. These perceptions need to change to ensure that Autistic people are treated with dignity and respect at work, and are valued for their contributions.



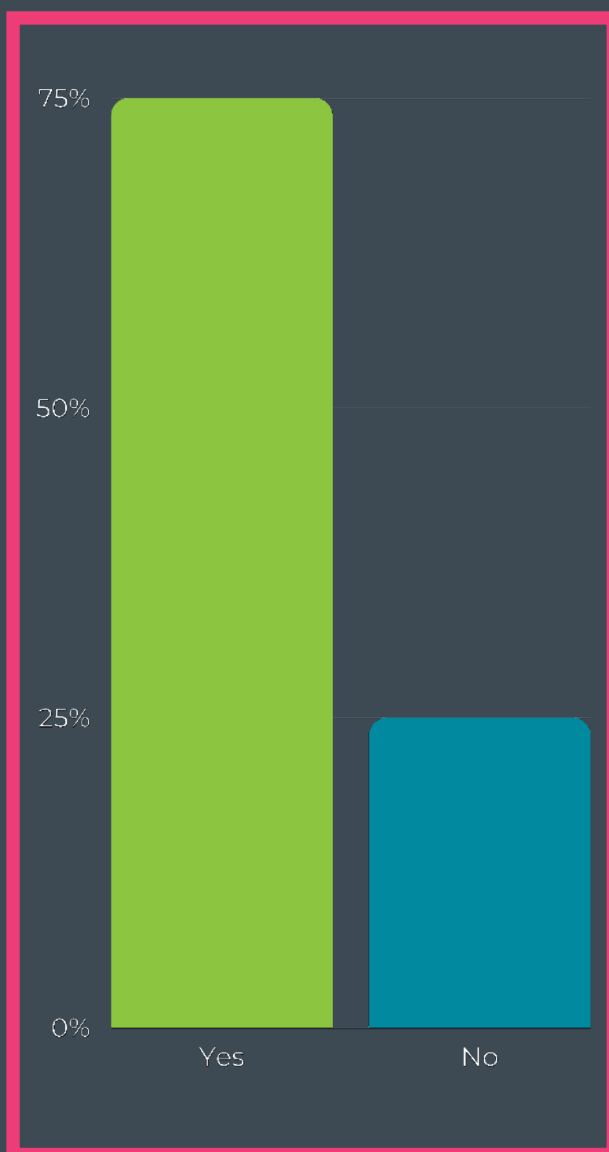


## HOUSING

AsIAm has experienced a significant increase in the number of queries from families and Autistic adults contacting our office in relation to housing supports. These issues range from homelessness, accessing social and affordable housing, and accessing supports like the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme.

Restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have also brought into focus the built environment, and the role that adapting the sensory environment, such as installing sensory rooms or hubs, can have on an Autistic person's quality of life at home. All agencies should ensure those with sensory processing differences and/or disabilities or additional needs are provided with the appropriate level of housing to meet those needs. For this survey, we asked whether the Cardholders' housing needs were being met. 75% confirmed their current housing support is meeting their needs.

We asked Cardholders a further question, if they had any engagement with their local authority, such as their City or County Council, with regards to their housing needs. 15% stated they had, 43% stated 'no', whilst 42% stated the 'not applicable'. Of those who had engagement with their local authority, 62% stated this experience was negative, whilst 38% stated their experience was



### COMMENTS FROM CARDHOLDERS ON HOUSING NEEDS

*"Endlessly waiting like everyone else"*

*"I had to apply for the housing list twice because I had to prove that I was Autistic and it still wasn't good enough"*

*"Application for social housing has been very stressful to apply and to get help"*

*"Took a long time to re-house our family to meet the needs of our children with additional needs"*

*"Not straightforward, would have loved to speak to someone directly responsible for disability within the local authority"*

*"Homeless for approx 6 months now and no help"*

*"We did not receive any help. Just told we are on a list. I am on a housing list since 2010, my son was then born in 2013 and we are still renting and trying to find more suitable accommodation".*

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

We asked Cardholders whether they believed that the Government takes a coordinated approach to supporting the Autism community. The figures below demonstrate that there is a real need to introduce a National Autism Strategy, in which Government Departments and State agencies co-ordinate their practices and policies to better support the Autism community.

This should allow a more coordinated, user-friendly approach to providing services which Autistic people and families can feel more confident. In our correspondence, we see examples of the 'fight' that families experience in securing basic supports for their Autistic family member.



71% of respondents stated that the Government does not take a co-ordinated approach in supporting the Autistic community.

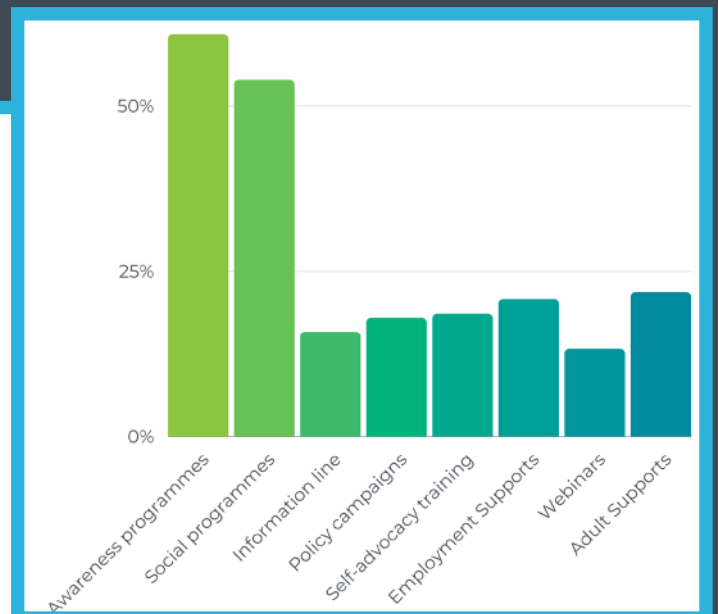
6% believed that the Government takes a coordinated approach, whilst 23% stated that they 'did not know'.

These results show that the Government needs to take a more concerted approach to supporting the Autistic community, and coordinate its services across Departments and agencies to support individuals and families at the point of need and in a timely manner. Until this happens, Autistic people will still face barriers to access and participation, and will remain marginalised and excluded in Irish society.

## THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

AsIAM knows as a national organisation, it represents the diversity of the Autistic community, and people who have a diverse range of experiences and support needs. For this survey, AsIAM wanted to find out from the community what areas they would like us to concentrate on over the next 12 months and what current AsIAM programmes they would like to see more investment in.

The results are weighted in order of preference:



## CONCLUSION

This Cardholders Survey, the second of its kind from AsIAM, highlights the many barriers and concerns Autistic people and families experience throughout life. It highlights the urgent need for Government and stakeholders to establish a concerted, coordinated response to how it engages with the Autism community at every stage of an individual's life. The importance of every individual Autistic person having the 'same chance' to receive an education, to work, to pursue their passions and interests, to have dignity and independence over their lives and to feel accepted and included cannot be reduced to a catchphrase or tagline.

Autistic people and families must see real and meaningful structural and systemic change so that every Autistic person, regardless of their strengths and support needs, has the 'same chance' to take part in and be accepted and included in all aspects of Irish society. The above findings were an important listening exercise that will feed into AsIAM's policy and advocacy work over the course of the next 12 months and beyond. It is anticipated that come next year, when AsIAM engages again with Cardholders that we will see some progress from Government and stakeholders on addressing the barriers to inclusion and participation which Cardholders experience every day and which particularly impact the Autism community.



# SECTION 2: AUTISM IN IRELAND

## ATTITUDES TO AUTISM SURVEY

### THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Awareness of some developmental differences, conditions and disabilities, such as autism, have increased over the recent years. This increase may be as a result of media noise and attention, better diagnosis and a more open conversation.

Should be “Despite this welcome shift changed circumstance, the opportunity for Autistic people to be fully included as equal in society may still be hindered by the attitudes of the non-Autistic community, attitudes that may be as a result of a lack of understanding or pre-conceived notions..

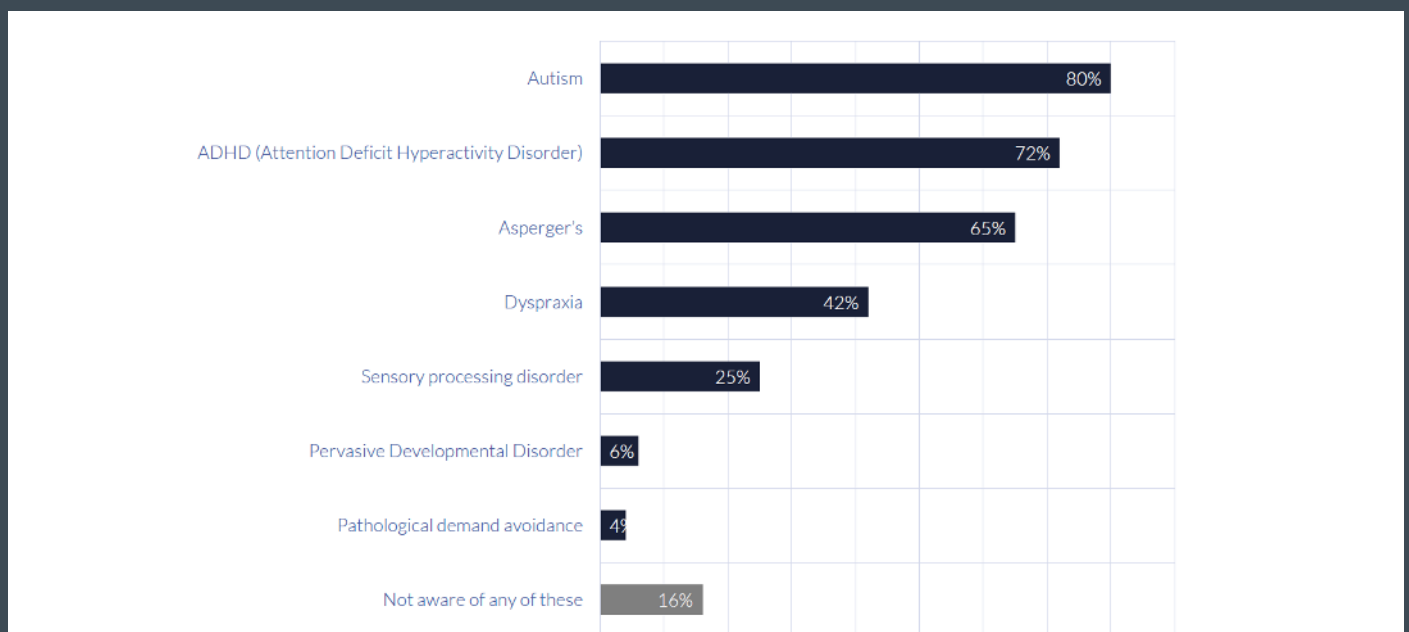
To understand and then address these attitudes, they must first be identified and sized. This is the research remit.

### THE CENTRAL QUESTION

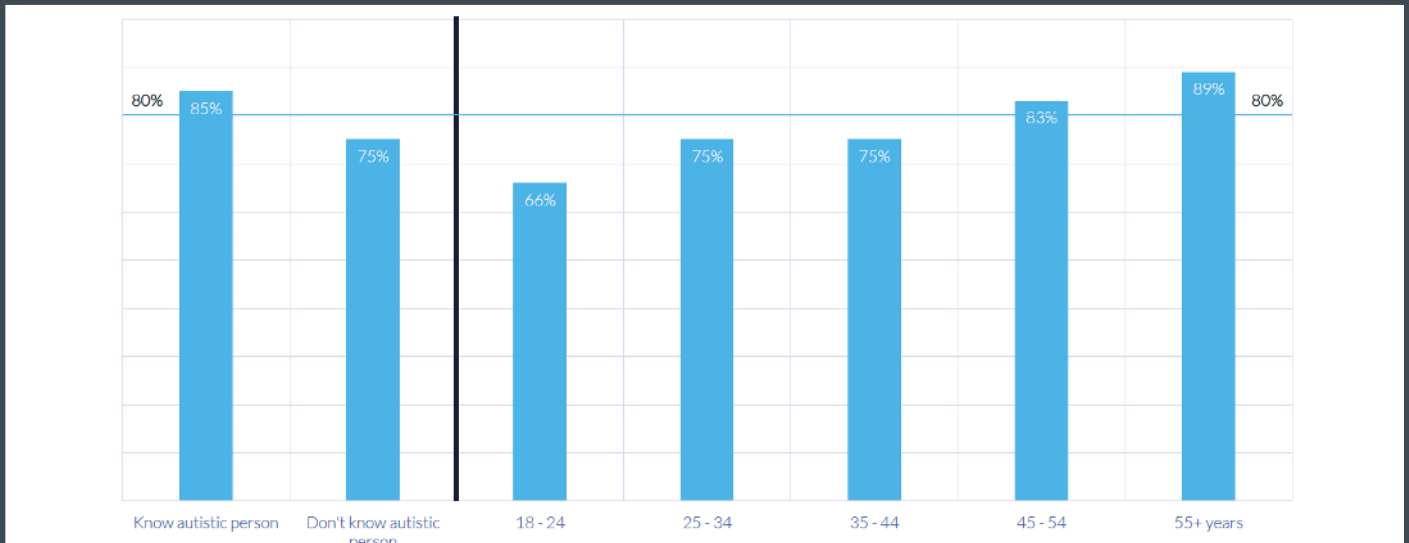
*What are the attitudes held by the non-Autistic population toward to Autistic population that could be challenged by communication strategy?*

### KNOWLEDGE OF AUTISM

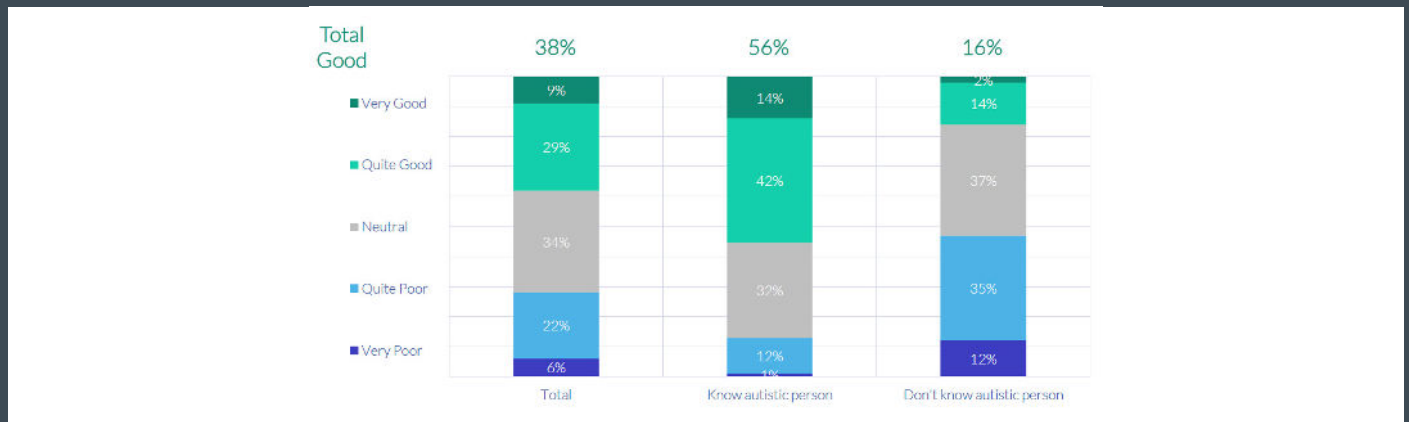
4 in 5 are aware of Autism as a diagnosis. Awareness of Autism is significantly higher than all the other conditions and is very much part of the public’s consciousness, albeit likely on a prompted basis.



Younger age groups tend to have significantly lower understanding. Of course, not knowing an Autistic person means that people are not as likely to understand autism.

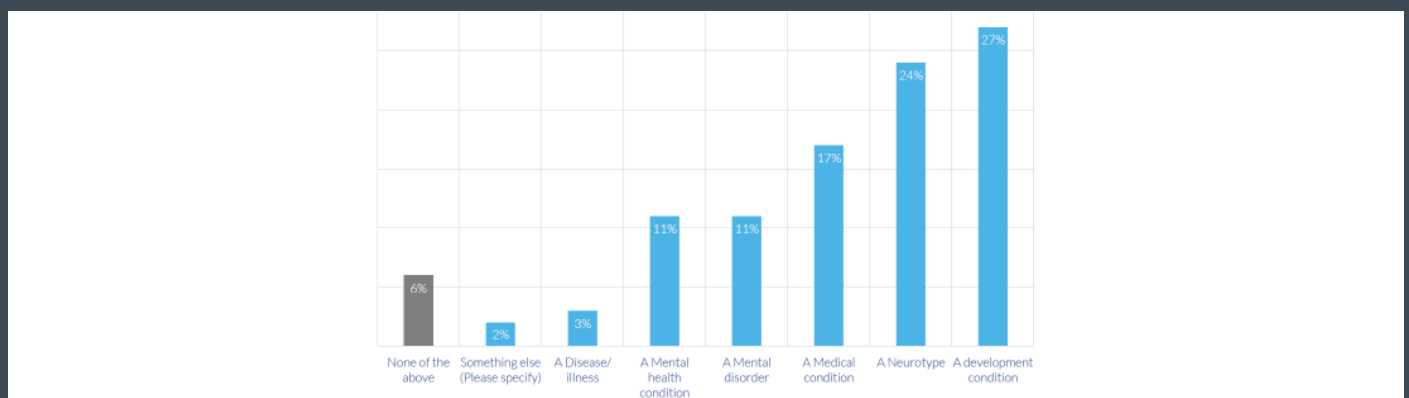


4 in 10 claim to have a 'good' understanding of Autism. This knowledge and understanding could be incorrect. But those who know an Autistic person have significantly stronger claims.



While the tendency is for older cohorts to be more aware of Autism, it is the younger cohorts that claim better knowledge and understanding.

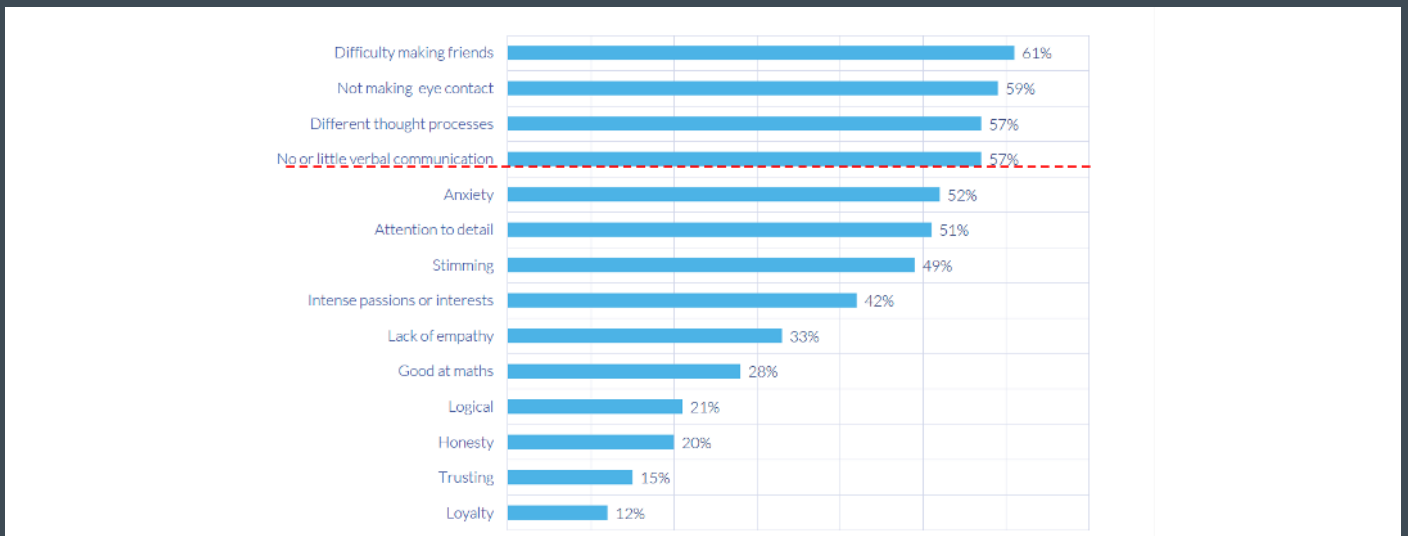
1 in 4 see Autism as a Developmental Condition, and close to 1 in 4 see Autism as a Neurotype. Positively, there is minimal association amongst the public of Autism as a disease or as a mental health condition. There is some evidence that claimed knowledge has truth as those who claim a bad knowledge level are more likely to identify it as a mental health condition. Just 6% can't attribute Autism to a condition type.



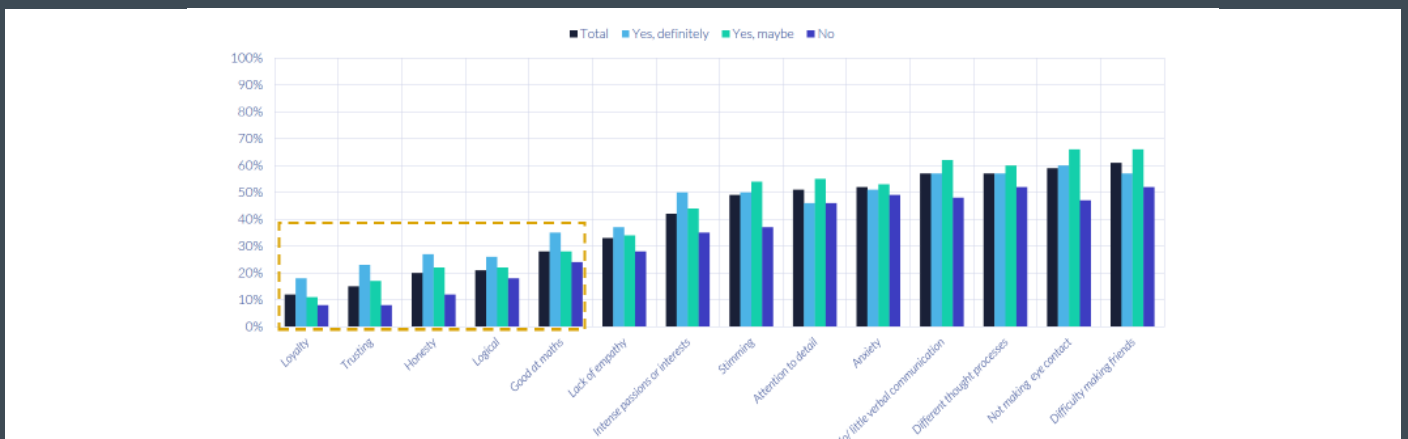
Young children have the strongest association with Autism amongst the public. But there is recognition that all groups can be associated so that it is not only young children. Yet there is room for education of Autism not something to be “grown out of”.



Difficulty making friends most closely associated with Autism. While roughly 6 in 10 of the public also associate a lack of eye contact, a different thought process and little or no verbal communication with Autism. Yet the positive characteristics are far less known. Just 4% are unable to associate any characteristic.



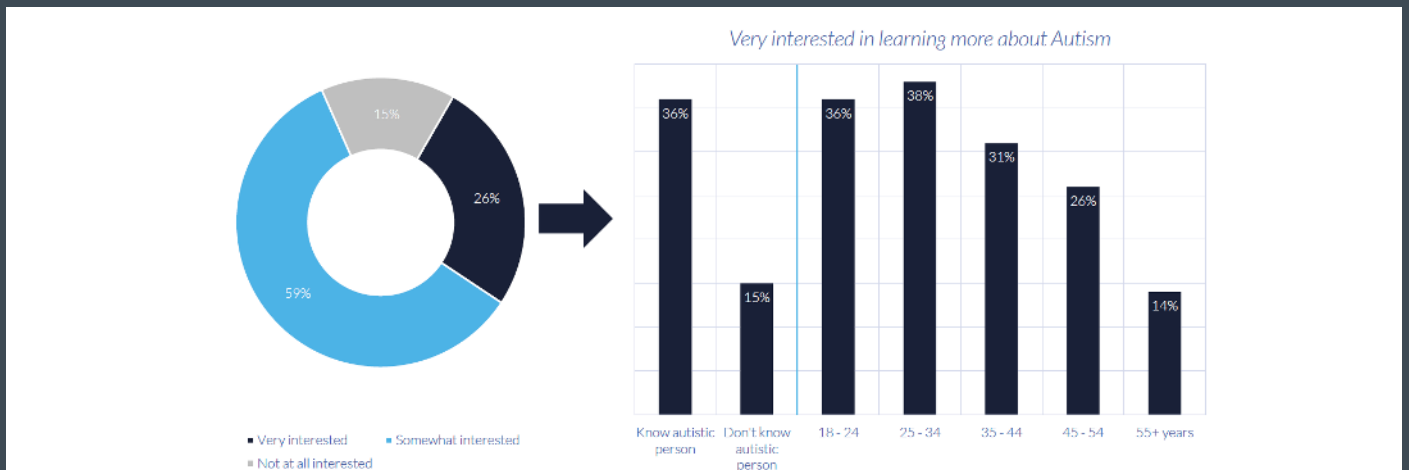
Those who feel they would know if a person was Autistic are more likely to associate Autism with positive descriptors like honesty, trusting and loyalty



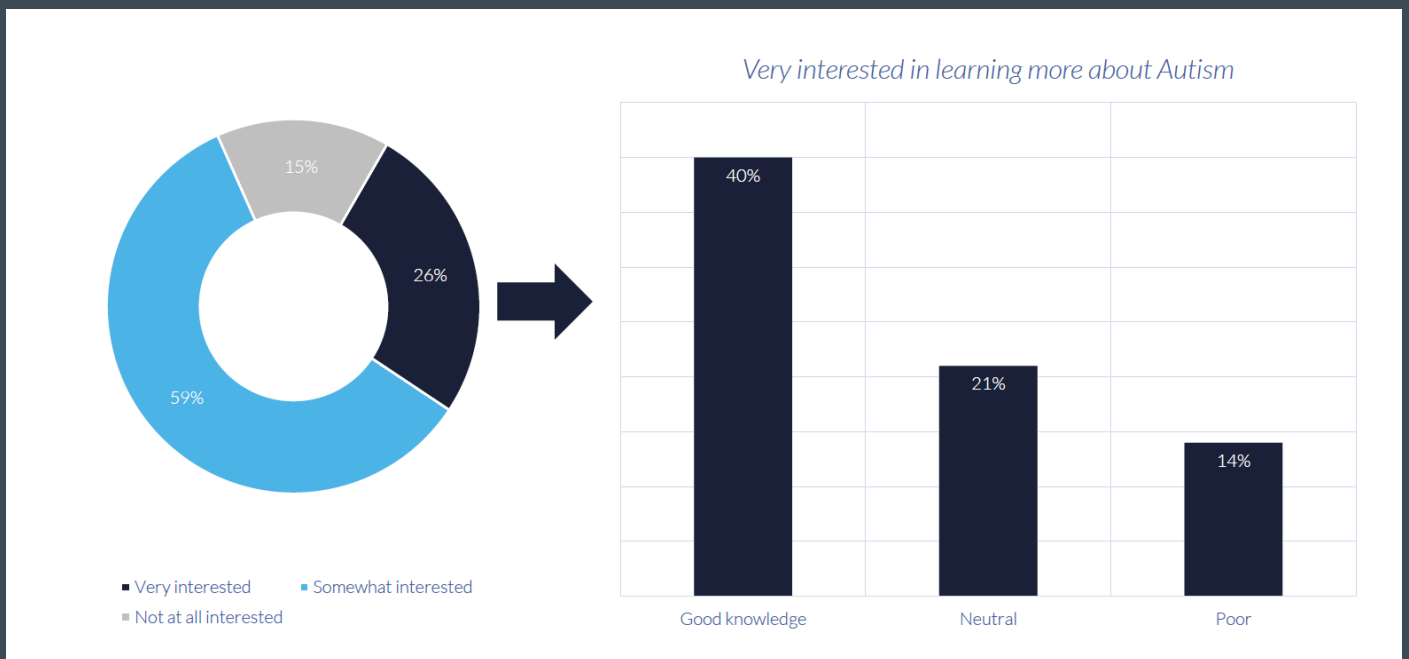
1 in 9 people are definite they would know if a person was Autistic, with the younger age cohorts significantly stronger in their claim.



Younger age groups are significantly more interested in learning more, as are those who know an Autistic person.



Strong evidence that there is a sense of staying removed, particularly among those that are less engaged.

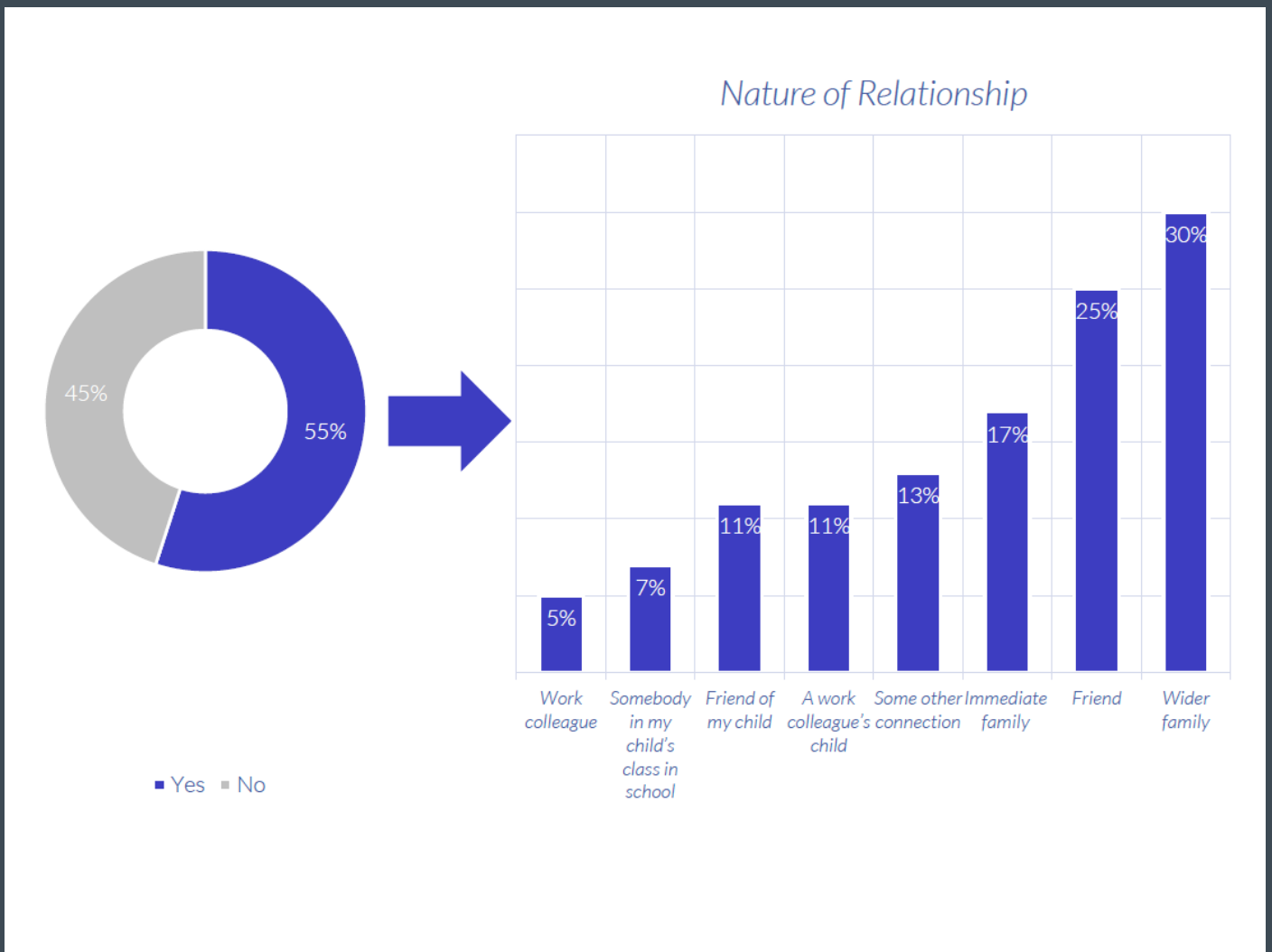


Autism charities are the key source for reliable information, thus presenting AsIAM with a positive opportunity and making it “less medical”.



## RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTISM

Over half say they know an Autistic person. Wider family and a friend are the most common forms of connection. Those aged under 25 are far more likely to know somebody, perhaps explaining the better engagement they have. 8 in 10 say knowing an Autistic person influences how they behave if they meet another Autistic person.

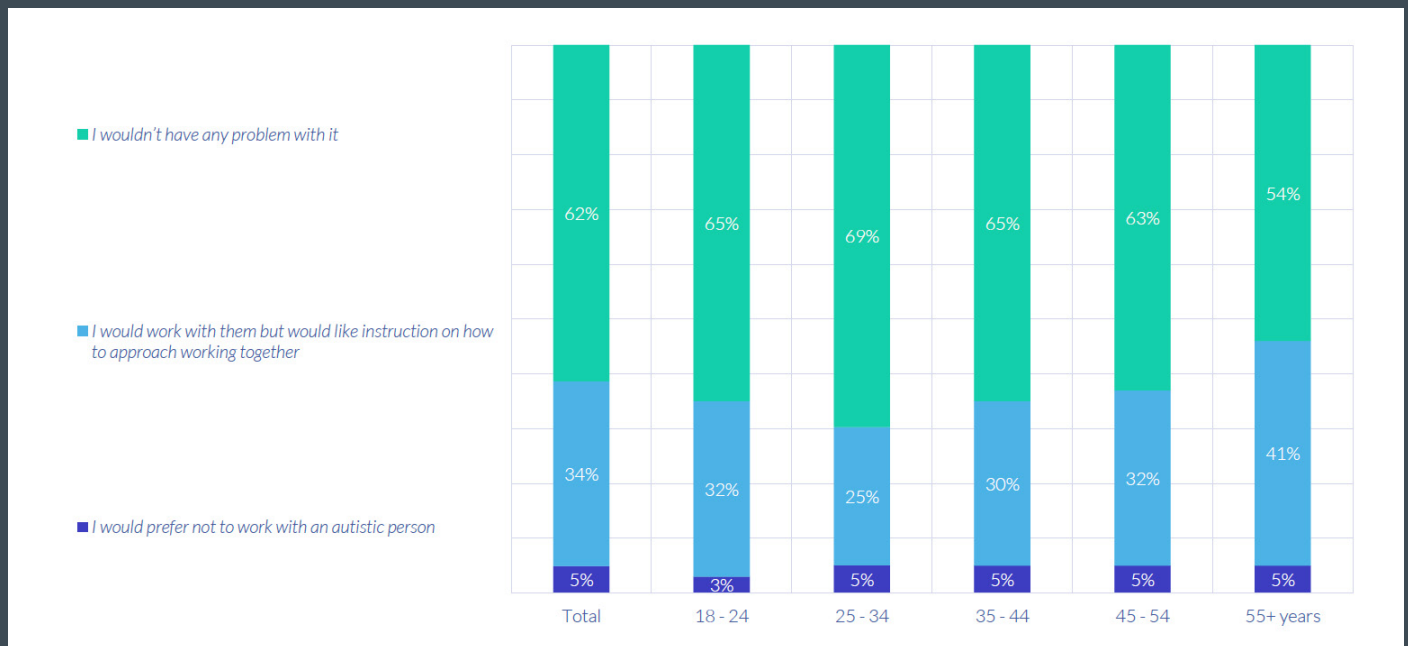




Most would feel comfortable being friends with someone who is Autistic. But while 8 in 10 18-24 year olds say they would be ‘very comfortable’, this falls to 6 in 10 amongst those aged 35+. Positively, those who would feel “not at all comfortable” are in a small minority.



Most would have no problem working with an Autistic person, but older age groups most likely to want ‘instruction’.



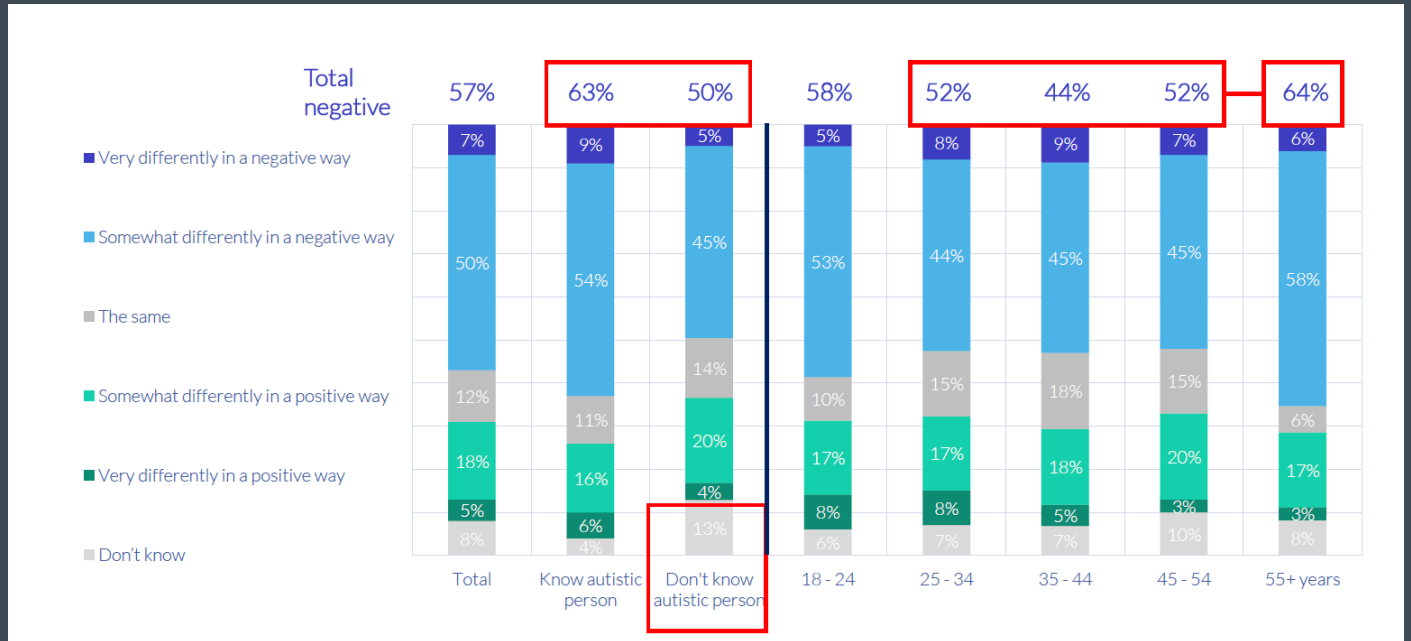
One third of the public ‘very confident’ an Autistic person could do their job. However, the older age groups have some reservation. While half of 18-24 year olds are ‘very confident’ an Autistic person could do their job, this is just in 1 in 5 amongst the 55+ age group.

Those in employment who know an Autistic person are unsurprisingly more likely to have confidence in an Autistic person executing their role (36%).

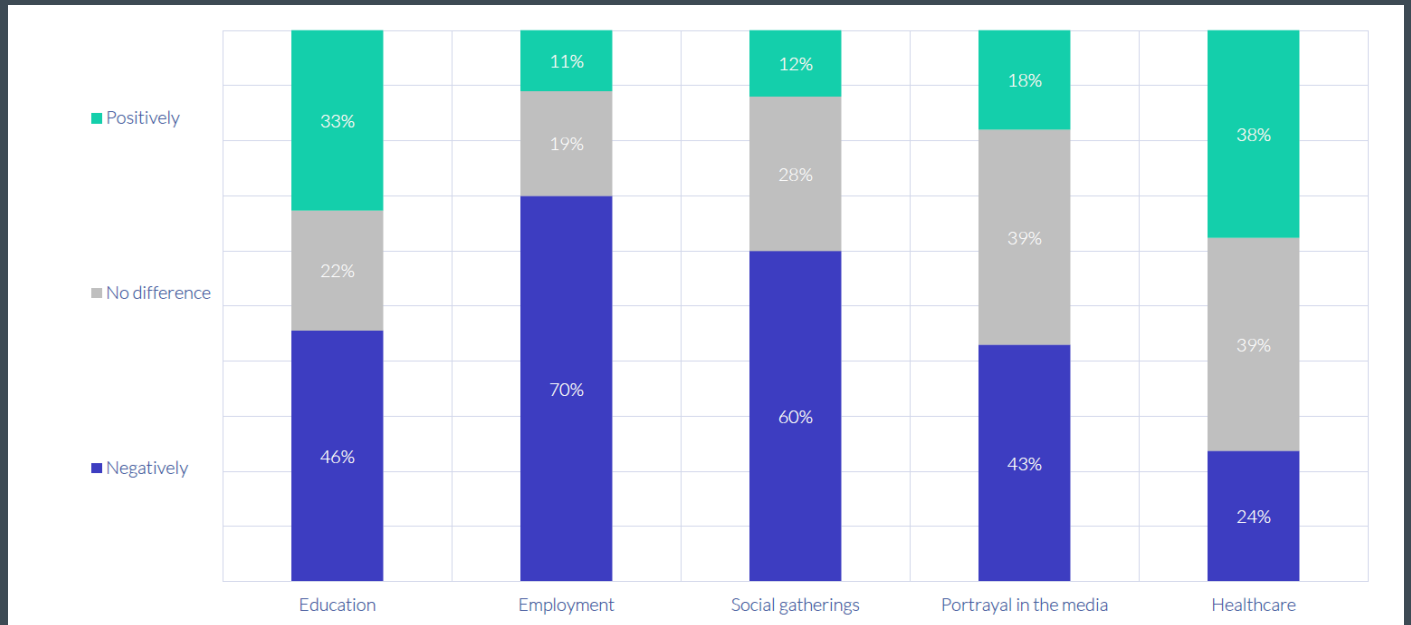
Males (28%) are more likely to say ‘not at all confident’ compared to females (18%).

# ATTITUDES TO AUTISM

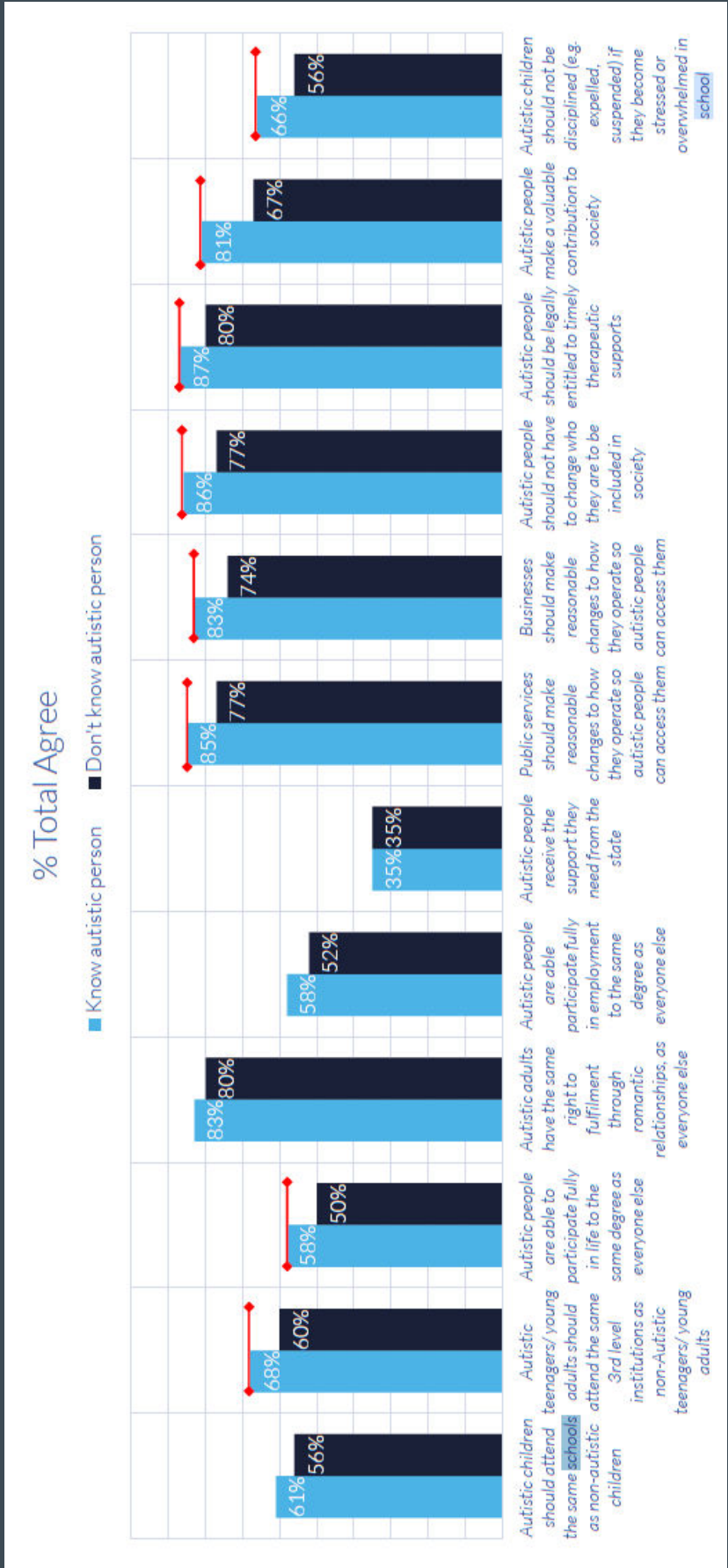
Well over half of the public feel Autistic people are treated differently in society, in a negative way. This perspective is significantly more prevalent amongst those who know an Autistic person.



Employment and social gatherings are areas where Autistic people are seen to be treated most negatively, compared to non-Autistic people.



There was strong support for timely therapeutic supports, but only one third agree the State fully supports Autistic people. Knowing an Autistic person has a significant impact on the perspective on how Autistic people should be treated and their entitlements.



## THE SAME CHANCE ROADMAP

The two data sets which make up this report bring to life the dual challenge which we must overcome in order for Autistic people to enjoy the same chance within Irish society – we must first build the capacity of the Autism community to fully engage and participate but equally we must build the capacity of society to better understand, accept and empower the at least 1 in 65 people in Ireland who are Autistic.

This World Autism Month we believe everyone has a part to play on the journey towards creating an Autism-Friendly Ireland. This April we ask that...

**Government** gives Autistic people the same chance by taking urgent action to end waiting lists for critical support services and break down bureaucratic barriers for families accessing the support they need. Key to this is the timely delivery, and appropriate resourcing, of a National Autism Strategy and the updating and commencement of legislation which protects the rights of disabled people.

**Employers** give Autistic people the same chance to contribute our talents and abilities in the workplace by opening up inclusive, accessible jobs across all sectors and communities. Employers can take the first step in achieving this by engaging with our recently established Adult Support and Employment Department to create inclusive employment opportunities.

**Public Services** including education and healthcare services give the same chance to Autistic people to access supports and services by moving the understanding of inclusion beyond permission to enter and towards fully equitable, accessible environments, practices and procedures. Key to achieving this is for Government to introduce mandatory training requirements for public services, as is already in place in several countries, which recognise the need for Autism informed approaches. Public services can begin this journey today by engaging with our Training & Accreditation Department to access a suite of training opportunities.

**Businesses** give Autistic people the same chance to become customers and enjoy their products and services. This can be achieved by making small changes to the business environment and ensuring staff have the required understanding and empathy to engage with Autistic people and families who together make up a market of some 387,000 people. Businesses can go on this journey by accessing Autism-Friendly Accreditation from our organisation.

**Communities** give Autistic people the same chance by creating an affirming, safe and supportive environment for Autistic people to live, work and play. This can be achieved by creating social opportunities across community groups and sporting organisations and engaging in joint up approaches to address loneliness and isolation in the community.

**Media** give Autistic people the same chance to live longer, healthier and happier lives by challenging stereotypes, using appropriate language and better representing the diversity and intersectionality of the Autism community.

**You** give Autistic people in Ireland the same chances that you enjoy. This World Autism Month take the time to learn a little bit more about the steps you can take to include Autistic people in your own life. You can ensure Autistic people have access to the information, advocacy and supports we need by making a donation at [asiam.ie](http://asiam.ie) to support the work of our charity.

**#SAME  
CHANCE**



AsIAM is registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority. Our Registered Charity Number is (RCN): 20144838 and our CHY number is 21201.