



**NEURODIVERSITY**

1 in 10 people identify as neurodivergent.<sup>1</sup> Neurodiversity refers to the range of differences in people’s brain function and behavioural traits. Autism is included under the umbrella of neurodiversity. Strategies that support neurodiversity often focus on individual strengths.

**POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Following high school, youth typically either plan to continue their education or look for employment. In Alberta, there are three different types of post-secondary schools: universities, colleges and institutes. The expected returns on an investment in education take the form of higher earnings for the individual, increased productivity for business, an increased tax base for government, and an improved standard of living for society as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

**WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT**

The student population at post-secondary institutions across Alberta is increasingly neurodiverse. However, neurodivergent individuals, in particular those on the autism spectrum, are still under-represented in post-secondary. Autistic youth attend post-secondary at a far lower rate than the average population, and less than half of those who attend post-secondary will graduate.

**CHANGING THE ODDS**

Working one-on-one with individuals improves their odds of success within existing systems. **Working at the community and systems levels changes the odds of success for many.** Based on our work, we have identified a number of policy level opportunities that have the potential to change the odds for neurodivergent post-secondary students.

➔ **Prioritize Transition Planning and Readiness**

Planning for life beyond high school should start early. When offered, work experience during high school helps youth refine their interests so they are more focused when identifying career paths.

Consider exploring and offering different entry pathways to post-secondary. One pathway might encourage neurodivergent students to begin post-secondary with a lighter course load. Another pathway might offer flexible on-campus residence options like combining living at home and on-campus in residence.

➔ **Champion Person Centred Approaches**

Many post-secondary institutions offer a wide variety of support services, but it can be overwhelming to navigate these services, particularly for a student who is adapting to a new campus and trying to keep up academically. Offering a single point of entry that helps students navigate available services would make a difference. The added benefit of a single point of entry is that just by walking through the door a student does not have to disclose their disability. Services are available to all students regardless of diagnosis; not only in the office of student disability services.

➔ **Embrace Universal Design Principles**

Moving from a culture of “accommodation” to one of universal design would create environments, products and services that can be accessed, understood and used by all people, regardless of their ability. An example of a universal design policy in education would be allowing all students the option to write tests for the length of time that would traditionally be considered an “accommodation”. Diagnosis and disclosure become non-issues. No one is left behind in a culture of universal design.

<sup>1</sup> Neurodiversity Hub. Web page <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/>  
<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada (2012), <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp319-e.htm>

**ABOUT THE SINNEAVE FAMILY FOUNDATION (Sinneave)**

Sinneave is an operating foundation based in Calgary, Alberta that aims to improve education, employment and housing outcomes for autistic youth and adults. We believe that investing resources in the period of life in which youth transition to adulthood provides significant and lasting returns and that success in education or training beyond high school can be transformative in creating opportunities for autistic people to fulfill their potential and pursue successful careers.

**A note about language:** There are varied preferences in the autism community regarding the use of language. Sinneave appreciates that language is personal and evolving. We aim to be inclusive and use language that represents a variety of perspectives, but principally use identity-first language as this is the preference of the majority of people we serve.