



**IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY**

## **AsI Am's Submission to the National Strategy for Community Safety**

### **Introduction**

AsI Am, Ireland's Autism Charity, welcomes the opportunity to engage with the National Office for Community Safety (NOCS) on strengthening safety and inclusion for Autistic people across Irish communities. This submission draws on the findings of our Same Chance Report and our broader inclusive community's programme. We aim to highlight key barriers, articulate the lived experiences of Autistic people, and provide policy recommendations that ensure national community safety frameworks meaningfully include Autistic people.

We will do this by:

1. Defining Community Safety for the Autistic Community.
2. Emphasising the importance of community grounded knowledge.
3. Highlighting key statistic from our Same Chance report.
4. Showing the importance of collaboration, measurement and policy and governance.
5. Making recommendations for the National Community Safety strategy.

### **Defining Community Safety**

Community safety must extend beyond protection from crime—it must encompass the ability for all people to participate fully, confidently and without judgement in their communities.

AsI Am's Autism Friendly Towns Programme seeks to build environments where Autistic people can navigate public spaces free from stigma, inappropriate judgement or misunderstanding of their communication and sensory needs.

For Autistic people, safety includes:

- Feeling understood and accepted in public settings.
- Being able to access supports without delay.
- Moving through spaces without fear of discrimination or exclusion.
- Trusting that services and organisations will respond respectfully and appropriately.

Understanding safety in this broader sense is vital if Ireland is to achieve a community safety system that truly reflects and protects the diversity of its population.

### **Community-Grounded Knowledge**

Autistic peoples lived experience must guide safety policy. This includes the very real risks created by misinformation and misunderstanding. As highlighted by our CEO recently, misinformation leads to tangible harm within communities and can fuel exclusion, stigma and misinformed policy decisions.

Findings from our 2025 *Attitudes to Autism* research reinforce this risk:

- 39% of respondents reported a rise in misinformation about autism.
- 32% believed voluntary organisations should be permitted to exclude Autistic people.

These figures highlight an urgent need for public education, stronger accountability for misinformation, and structures that ensure community safety responses are grounded in evidence, lived experience and respect for neurodiversity.

### **Key Statistics Relevant to Community Safety**

Findings from the 2025 *Same Chance* report (1,450 respondents) show significant inequities affecting Autistic people's safety, wellbeing and community participation:

- 86% do not feel they have the *same chance* as non-Autistic people in Irish society.
- 71% say public healthcare does not meet their needs.
- 70% report that the education system is not inclusive (a 14% increase from 2024).
- 44% experienced discrimination in the past year.
- Public misunderstanding of common autistic traits persists: 48% of people report discomfort witnessing stimming in public settings.

These findings illustrate not only exclusion but also vulnerabilities that directly affect community safety, including increased risk of conflict, misunderstanding, exploitation, or isolation.

### **Collaboration**

Safety can only be achieved through coordinated, cross-sector collaboration. Effective approaches must include:

- Co-design with Autistic people and families.
- Collaboration between local authorities, policing, education, health, transport and community organisations.
- Integration of inclusive design practices across public-facing services.

AsIAM welcomes stronger structured partnerships with NOCS and its stakeholders to ensure Autistic voices shape national and local safety initiatives.

### **Measurement**

Visibility and measurement of progress are essential. AsIAM's annual *Same Chance* report provides an evidence base that can be used to track community safety outcomes for Autistic people. Key measures should include:

- Changes in public attitudes toward autism.
- Experiences of discrimination, harassment or exclusion.
- Accessibility of reporting systems and victim support services.
- Trends in participation across community, educational and social settings.

Embedding these measures within national monitoring frameworks will support accountability and build a clearer picture of progress toward safe, inclusive communities.

### **Policy and Governance**

Ireland's policy landscape presents opportunities to embed autism inclusion within community safety structures. Strong alignment can be made with:

- The Autism Innovation Strategy (AIS) — with its focus on awareness, inclusion, education, community supports and cross-departmental coordination.
- The National Disability Strategy / National Human Rights & Equality Framework — emphasising equal access, non-discrimination and the right to participate in community life.

### **NOCS can strengthen governance by:**

- Ensuring community safety plans explicitly reference AIS priorities.
- Embedding universal design and reasonable accommodations across public safety services.
- Requiring disability-inclusive approaches in local community safety partnerships.
- Supporting data-sharing and coordinated responses across departments.

From the evidence and lived experience, the following considerations must shape community safety policy:

- Delays in accessing health, education and social supports increase vulnerability.
- Misunderstanding of autistic communication or sensory traits can lead to conflict.
- Discrimination and isolation heighten the risk of harm, exploitation or exclusion.
- Economic pressures contribute to reduced safety and reduced community participation.

Community safety agencies must recognise these intersecting risks and respond accordingly.

### **Recommendations to NOCS**

To strengthen inclusion and safety for Autistic people, AsIAM recommends:

- Developing national guidance for public services on autism-inclusive practice.

- Providing mandatory training for frontline staff across policing, local authorities, transport, and community organisations.
- Ensuring accessible, sensory-friendly mechanisms for reporting harm or discrimination.
- Equipping victim support services to meet Autistic communication and sensory needs.
- Investing in inclusive public space design.
- Embedding lived-experience consultation in all community safety planning.
- Using *Same Chance* findings as a baseline for measuring progress.
- Aligning community safety strategies with *AIS* and national disability rights commitments.

## **Conclusion**

Autistic people continue to face persistent barriers that directly affect their safety, wellbeing and ability to participate fully in Irish community life. Community safety must be understood in a way that reflects these realities. Through collaborative design, evidence-based policy and a firm commitment to inclusion, NOCS can help deliver a safer Ireland for everyone.

AsIAM looks forward to continuing our partnership with NOCS and supporting the co-delivery of inclusive, autism-informed community safety frameworks.