As I Am

IRELAND'S **AUTISM** CHARITY

Same Chance

Report 2026









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IRELAND'S
AUTISM
CHARITY

Contents

Foreword

Dear Reader,
I am delighted to present this year's Same Chance Report on behalf of AsIAm, Ireland's Autism Charity. Every year, this "state-of-the-community" report provides a vital insight into the everyday experiences of Autistic people and families across Ireland. It shines a light on the barriers that persist in education, employment, healthcare and disability services, and community life. Most of all, it centres the voices of Autistic people and families and reflects the realities they face in Ireland today.

The testimonies highlighted in this Report echo what we learn from respondents who contact our organisation every day through our Information Line, Community Support Hubs, our national programmes and through our policy and advocacy work. Over the past year, we still see unacceptable breaches in Autistic people's rights - from navigating growing waiting lists for assessments and supports, to the ongoing crises in accessing school places, a failure to adequately meaningfully address the relationship between Autism and poverty. We have also seen the ongoing crisis in accessing mental health services come into sharp focus, and the persistent failure to meet the needs of the Autistic people who need the most support.

Since our last Same Chance Report, the past 12 months have also seen some important and welcome progress. The Government's Autism Innovation Strategy is moving from ambition to implementation, and we are starting to see meaningful change on the ground that is making a difference. The Strategy's cross-departmental approach has helped to put increased focus on policies affecting Autistic people, and this paradigm shift highlights the importance of legislating for a National Autism Strategy to build on this work and keep it going. The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People was launched, along with its first Implementation Plan, and this has provided an important opportunity to put the rights of Autistic peope at the heart of national disability policy. This Strategy focuses on the promoting the principles of dignity, autonomy and inclusion are essential if we want to see Autistic people flourish.

Crucially, this past year has seen a welcome expansion to the supports we deliver ourselves to serve our community. To meet growing demand. The rollout of our first two Community Support Hubs marks a cornerstone in how Autistic people and families can access supports – from seeking information and advice, to finding their community to accessing training and advocacy. These Hubs mark the next step in delivering accessible, community-led supports which centre Autistic experiences. Our ambition is to see this model grow all across Ireland, ensuring that no Autistic person or family feels isolated or unsupported, and over the coming years, AsIAm is even closer to you.

Public attitudes continue to shape the national conversation about Autism. While awareness of autism continues to grow, but we hear from respondents that this has not always translated to increased understanding and acceptance. Alarmingly, misinformation about autism has risen sharply and this has greatly impacted our community's safety and sense belonging. Many Autistic people still have to navigate environments that were not built with them in mind – in classrooms, in workplaces, healthcare and mental health services or out in the community.

Communities across Ireland are becoming more accessible to Autistic people. 1 in 20 people across Ireland are Autistic - Autistic people come from all walks of life, and are our neighbours, classmates, colleagues, friends or partners. So while both society and our community want to see more happen to meet Autistic people "as we are" - more than ever, our systems and services need to catch up. Progress has been made, but there is still more work to do.

This year's *Same Chance Report* serves both as a snapshot into our community's experiences and as a call to action. In 2024, the government identified and committed to tackle specific barriers faced by Autistic people, as the current Autism Innovation Strategy's life cycle draws to a close, our community and the wider public have clearly established that the change which is needed is only beginning. We believe that with implementation of the *Autism Innovation Strategy* and with a *National Autism Strategy* underpinned by legislation, we can build on this progress and make sure that every Autistic person has the same chance – that they can belong, be included as they are and can fully participate in every aspect of Irish society.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh,
Adam Harris
CEO of AsIAm

About AsIAm

AsIAm is Ireland's Autism Charity.

We are dedicated to removing the invisible barriers often faced by Autistic people and families, so that every Autistic person can enjoy the same chance in society. AsIAm is Autistic-led and we are dedicated to transforming society, working for Autistic people and their families.

We advocate for our community by raising awareness of Autism and providing training and accreditation to schools, HEIs, employers and organisations on how to become more Autism-friendly.

Through our policy work we regularly engage directly with the Autistic community and produce reports and policy submissions to government and other state bodies. We run Child and Family support programmes as well as Adult Support and Wellbeing programmes which provide safe and relaxed support spaces for Autistic children and adults. Our community support hubs offer in person autism-specific information sessions. We issue Autism ID Cards which act as a powerful tool for people of all ages to navigate their daily routines. Our dedicated Autism Information Line is available Monday-Thursday from 10am-3pm for Autism specific information and signposting.

About Autism

Autism is a lifelong developmental difference or disability which relates to how a person communicates and interacts with others and how they experience the world around them. In keeping with our community's preferences, AsIAm uses identity-first language ("i.e. Autistic person") throughout this report to reflect that their experience of autism is a core part of their identity and central to their experience of living in Irish society. Further details about Autistic people's language preferences can be found in our Language Guide here.

AsIAm as a Disabled Persons' Organisation

As an Autistic-led organisation, AsIAm is a Disabled Persons' Organisation (DPO), meaning that our work is rooted in and guided by the lived experiences of Autistic people. As a founding member of the **DPO Network**, AsIAm works alongside other Disabled Persons' Organisations to promote a collective approach to disability policy and to advancing disability rights in Ireland. As part of this work, including participating in the structures under the ***National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People***, AsIAm supports the implementation of the ***UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*** and advocates for policies and supports that reflect the Autistic community's lived experiences.

Methodology

This year's *Same Chance Report* is based on findings from a recent survey which AsIAm conducted between Monday 9th February to Tuesday 24th February 2026. As with 2025, Autistic people and family members of an Autistic person were invited to complete the survey. This survey was shared widely across the following platforms:

- Social Media channels [Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X]
- AsIAm Newsletters
- Website
- External organisations and newsletters
- The survey was completed by Autistic adults and by families with one or more Autistic members. The survey included 141 questions. Respondents answered questions about their own experiences and those of their families on Autistic life in Ireland.

Profile of Respondents

1,676 people responded to this year's Same Chance Survey. Respondents were asked to share their views on life in Ireland as an Autistic person or with an Autistic family member.

41% of survey respondents were Autistic adults, while 59% were responding on behalf of an Autistic family member – the highest proportion of Autistic adults who have contributed to the *Same Chance Report* since its introduction in 2021. *(see Figure 1)*

In this section, I am answering as:

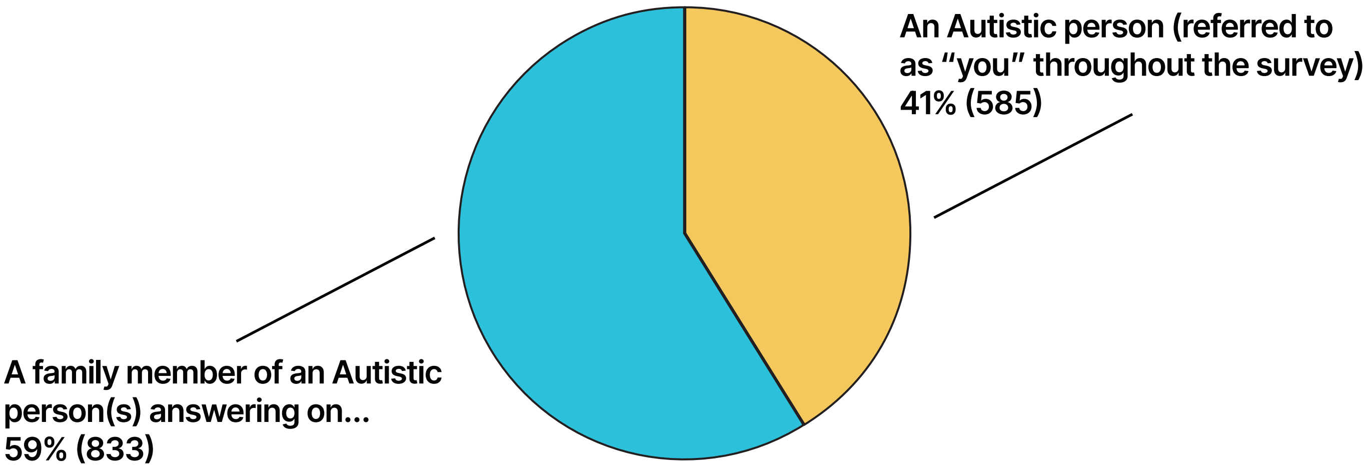


Figure 1

58% of respondents were female, 36% were male, 4% were non-binary and 2% preferred not to say.

We also asked respondents what age they or their Autistic family member was at the time of responding to this report. *(see Figure 2)*

Can you please state your age, or if answering on behalf of an Autistic family member, their age?

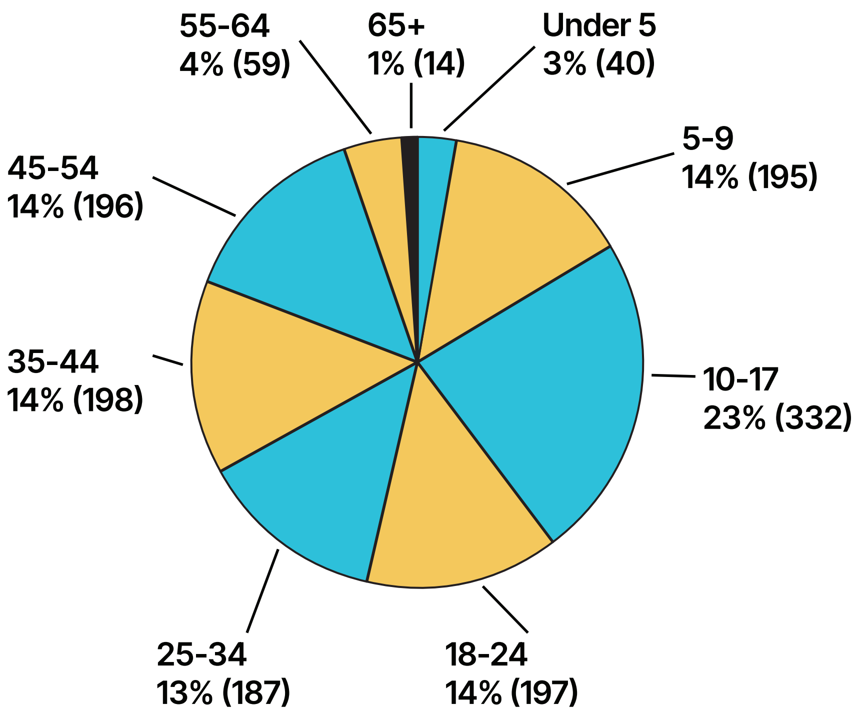


Figure 2

Geographical Location

Can you please state what county you live in, or if answering on behalf of an Autistic family member, the county they live in?

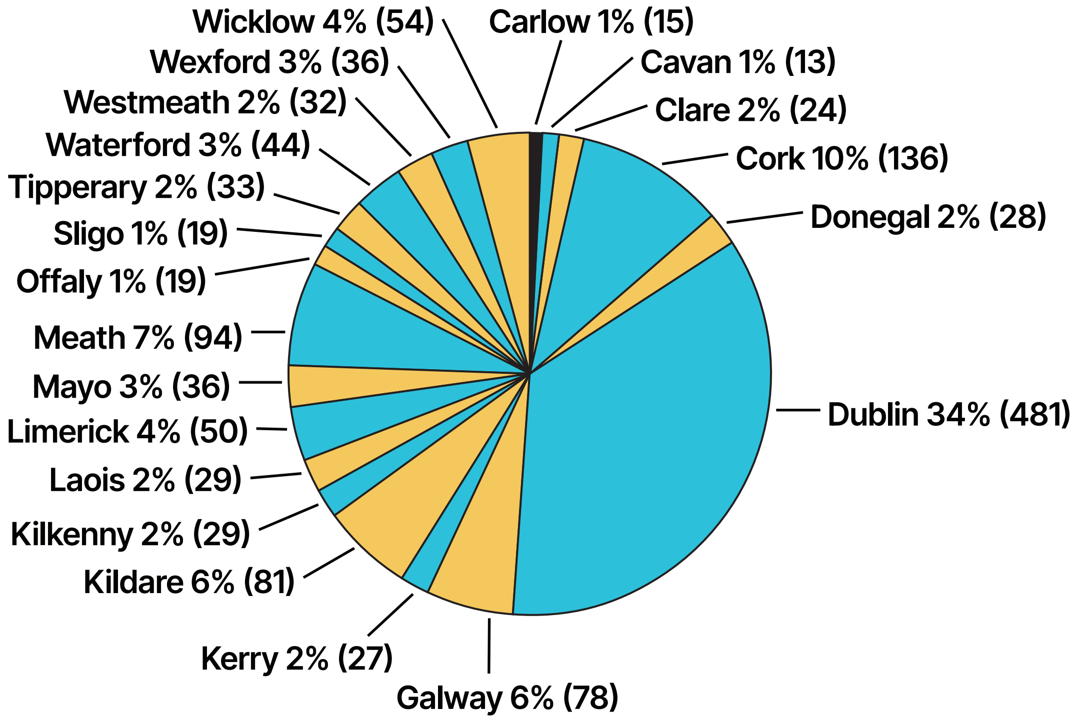


Figure 3

The report found that many Autistic people also had a range of co-occurring differences and disabilities. The most reported co-occurring differences and disabilities included ADHD (51%), Anxiety (29%), Dyspraxia (26%), Hypermobility (21%), Dyslexia (18%) PDA (Persistent/Pervasive Drive for Autonomy) (16%), Chronic illness/pain condition (15%), intellectual disability (13%) and Dyscalculia (10%). In addition, 19% of respondents shared other co-occurring differences and disabilities, including Epilepsy, Dysgraphia, Tourette's Syndrome, ARFID as well as a range of specific mental health conditions, chronic health conditions, and sensory processing and developmental differences.

For this year's report, respondents were asked if they had accessed an autism diagnosis, and when they went through the assessment process. The findings show that many respondents received an autism diagnosis as a child, with a smaller cohort accessing an autism diagnosis in adulthood:

- 39% were diagnosed as a child more than 2 years ago.
- 24% were diagnosed as a child within the last 2 years.
- 16% were diagnosed as an adult within the last 2 years.
- 14% were diagnosed as an adult more than 2 years ago.
- 5% self-identified as Autistic.
- 2% preferred not to say.

Respondents shared their main reasons for seeking an autism assessment, where they had the opportunity to select more than one response to this question. This reflects that many respondents may have more than one reason for seeking an autism diagnosis – for example, Autistic people who may seek to better understand themselves, validate their experiences or connect with the Autistic community. The following reasons were given by respondents:

- 58% were seeking support with their mental health and wellbeing.
- 55% were seeking an autism diagnosis to access supports to meet their Autistic child's needs in school.
- 47% wanted to access health or disability services.
- 44% wanted to help others (family, teachers, employers) understand what they or their family member needed support with.
- 41% wanted to better understand their Autistic family member (i.e. their Autistic child).
- 36% wanted to better understand themselves.
- 35% wanted to validate their or their family member's personal lived experiences
- 28% wanted to find their identity as an Autistic person.
- 23% were seeking an autism diagnosis to access social protection supports to meet the additional costs of disability.
- 22% wanted to connect with the Autistic community.
- 7% of respondents shared a range of other reasons why they wished to access an autism diagnosis, including wanting to access supports at work or in university, or to manage health issues, including chronic stress or burnout.

Mary's Story

Mary is a woman in her late fifties, who adores her job as a bookkeeper. However, she often feels slightly out of step with the people around her, even when she is with friends and family. She sometimes says things she thinks are funny, but no one laughs, and she is not sure why. There are times when others meet up and she is not invited, and this has happened more than once. When Mary mentions it, people tell her she is overthinking things or imagining problems.

But to Mary, it never feels small. She spends a lot of time trying to understand what people mean by watching their faces and body language. This is exhausting, and she often goes home feeling drained and upset. Busy, noisy places make everything worse, and sometimes the world feels overwhelming. Mary does not know why everyday life feels so difficult for her. Mary is considering if going for an autism assessment might help her.

Dr Sarah Cassidy

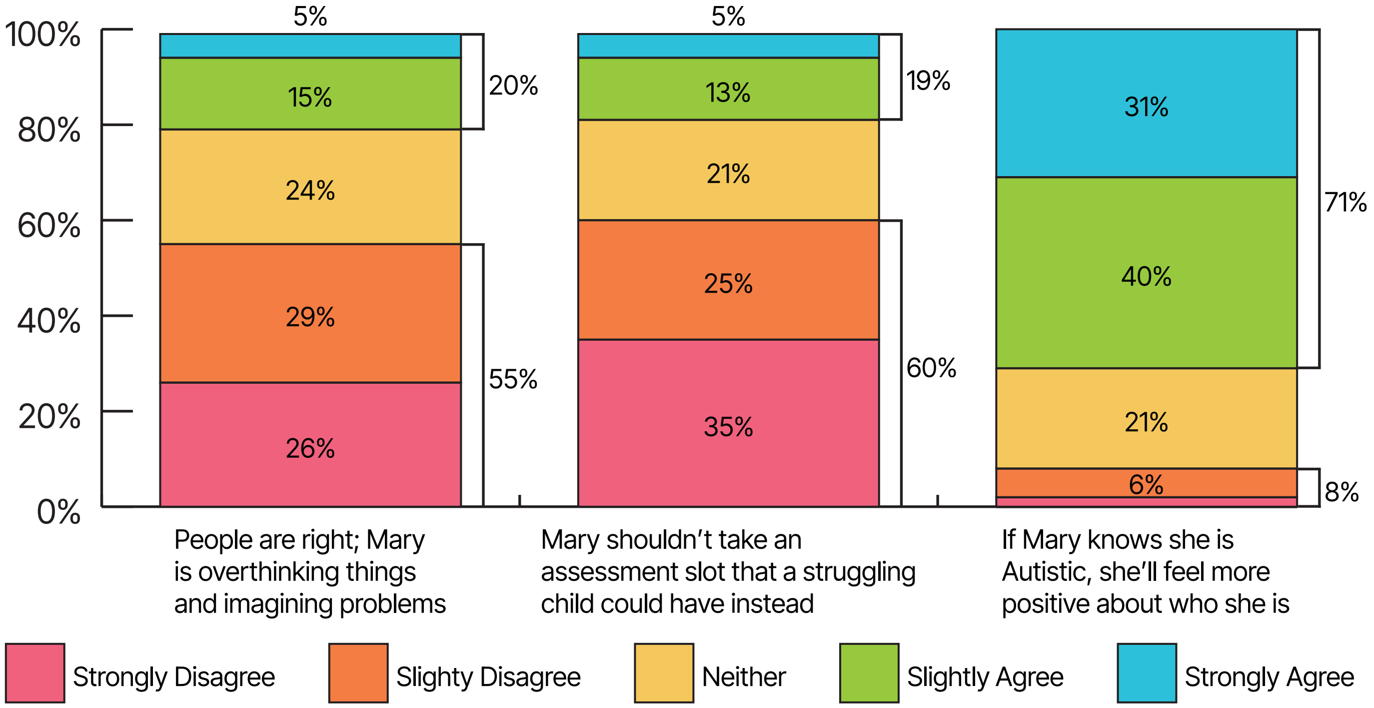
Why did you want to ask the Irish public this question?

"I asked this question because many Autistic people think about situations long after everyone else has moved on. This isn't always helpful but it's possible that it's because many of our environments are hard for us to navigate and we are trying to problem solve our way through. The research indicates that Autistic people are often excluded and misunderstood so we aren't imagining this."

What do you want the public to know about this issue?

"You can help by meeting us halfway, by not making assumptions that our ways of being are wrong. Instead, let us problem solve together."

AsIAm put Mary's story to the public and found that:



- Over half reject the idea that she is simply overthinking things or that she should give up an assessment slot for a child.
- 7 in 10 agree that knowing she is Autistic would help her feel more positive about who she is.

Language

As with last year's survey, respondents were asked how they or their Autistic child preferred to describe their identity. The findings highlight the diversity of how people understand and express their neurodivergence and illustrate the range of identities and experiences within the Autistic community. Although the prevalence of Autistic people who have more than one identified form of neurodivergence reflects the interconnected and intersectional nature of Autistic people's experiences, this also highlights the need to legislate for a National Autism Strategy. This is important as the experience of being Autistic shapes how Autistic people perceive and experience other differences and disabilities:

- 32% wished to identify as "Autistic" (with no identified Neurodivergence).
- 61% wished to identify as "Multiply Neurodivergent – Autistic and a minimum of one other identified form of neurodivergence".
- 7% shared other aspects that they wished to identify as, including "Neurotypical", "Autism and ADHD (AuDHD)", that they were "Autistic with a PDA Profile" or that they were waiting for an Assessment.

Attitudes to Autism Poll

In addition to our Same Chance Survey, AsIAm commissioned Core Research to conduct a nationwide survey of a representative sample of 1,000 Irish adults on their attitudes to autism, Autistic people and the barriers our community face in day-to-day life.

This year, the questions we posed to the public were co-created with Autistic people, their experiences of day-to-day life in Ireland and priorities for change. These questions included scenario-based vignettes, questions on public policy concerning autism and a broad range of statements on knowledge and understanding of autism. Prior to explicit questions on autism, the public had a chance to respond to questions which presented the barriers encountered by Autistic people in real-life situations, without an explicit reference to autism – seeking to capture prevailing attitudes to invisible differences and barriers.

The questions crafted by community members, including their insights and calls to action, feature throughout the report whilst the full poll is appended at the end of the document.

Executive Summary

Across the areas explored in the Same Chance Report, several findings emerge which reflect how Autistic people and families experience life in Irish society in 2026.
These findings include:

An Autism-affirming Society

- 85% do not think that public understanding of autism reflects the diversity of Autistic experiences.
- 68% believe that misinformation about autism and Autistic people has increased over the past year.
- 91% do not believe that the Government is doing enough to tackle misinformation about autism.
- 96% believe that the Government should legislate for a National Autism Strategy, as committed to in the Programme for Government.
- 99% believe that a future National Autism Strategy should focus on developing post-diagnostic supports for Autistic people.

Equality of Access to Public Services

- 52% believe that their Autistic family member's school place does not meet their needs.
- 58% do not believe teaching approaches used in their Autistic family member's school support their Autistic child's needs and learning style.
- 66% do not believe that the sex education their Autistic family member receives or has received in school is adapted to be accessible to them.
- 88% believe it is important to have autism-specific classes within mainstream schools.
- 77% do not believe that the social protection system is accessible to Autistic people.
- 93% believe that there are additional costs on the grounds of being Autistic or raising an Autistic family member.
- 98% believe that a Cost of Disability payment should be introduced.
- 57% have not had any positive experiences in the workplace or while looking for work in the past 12 months.
- 69% do not believe that employers in Ireland are becoming more autism accessible.
- 66% would benefit from priority parking spaces in the community.

Accessible, Inclusive Communities

- 81% do not believe their local community offers safe, low-pressure social spaces for Autistic people.
- 93% who would benefit from access to priority parking spaces, do not have access to these spaces.
- 73% have, or have sometimes been, excluded from activities or events because their support needs were not considered.

Building Capacity

- 67% do not know where to find clear, accessible information about their rights.
- 72% have not received information or guidance on how to navigate services and supports.
- 95% want to see more dedicated autism-specific groups and spaces in their local community.
- 86% have not had any opportunities to take part in leadership roles in their local community.
- 82% have not had any opportunities to participate in consultation or decision-making processes.
- 72% do not have the supports needed to live independently in the community.

Pillar 1 of the Autism Innovation Strategy - An Autism-Affirming Society

The Executive Summary within this report offers a snapshot into the barriers that Autistic people and families continue to face in Ireland today. These barriers do not persist because of being Autistic but because society has not consistently designed or delivered accessible services or public spaces that meet Autistic people's needs.

These failings are inconsistent with Ireland's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). They reflect a wider implementation gap; while Ireland has developed comprehensive policies and strategies on paper, these commitments do not always translate into meaningful action in practice. At the same time, the prevalence of misinformation around autism can influence public policy and shape public attitudes which can fuel stigma and harmful stereotypes against Autistic people. This can lead to policies and services which are based on misconceptions over evidence or lived experiences, which in turn undermine efforts to developing rights-based supports. Article 9 of the UNCRPD states that Disabled people, including Autistic people, have the right to access a wide range of public services from the built environment, housing, information, transport, schools and healthcare facilities. When Autistic people cannot access these services and supports on an equal basis with others, this shows both how this policy gap presents itself, but more fundamentally, a persistent failure to uphold and vindicate the Autistic community's rights.

Public Understanding of Autism

A key theme highlighted in this year's Same Chance Report is the significant gap between reported public understanding of autism and Autistic people's lived experiences. To explore this, we asked respondents if they felt that public understanding of autism has got better for themselves or their Autistic family member over the past 12 months – 42% reported that it has got better, whereas 58% replied that it has not got better. **This tracks with results found in 2025's *Same Chance Report*, which found that 91% of respondents did not believe that the public understood enough about autism.** In last year's report, 33% identified the public's lack of understanding of communication differences and 32% reported that the judgement and attitude of others as among the biggest barriers to inclusion.

Our respondents highlighted what community campaigns they felt would best improve society's understanding of autism, which is reflected in the graph below *(see Figure 4):*

What types of public education campaigns would best improve Irish society's understanding of autism and Autistic people?

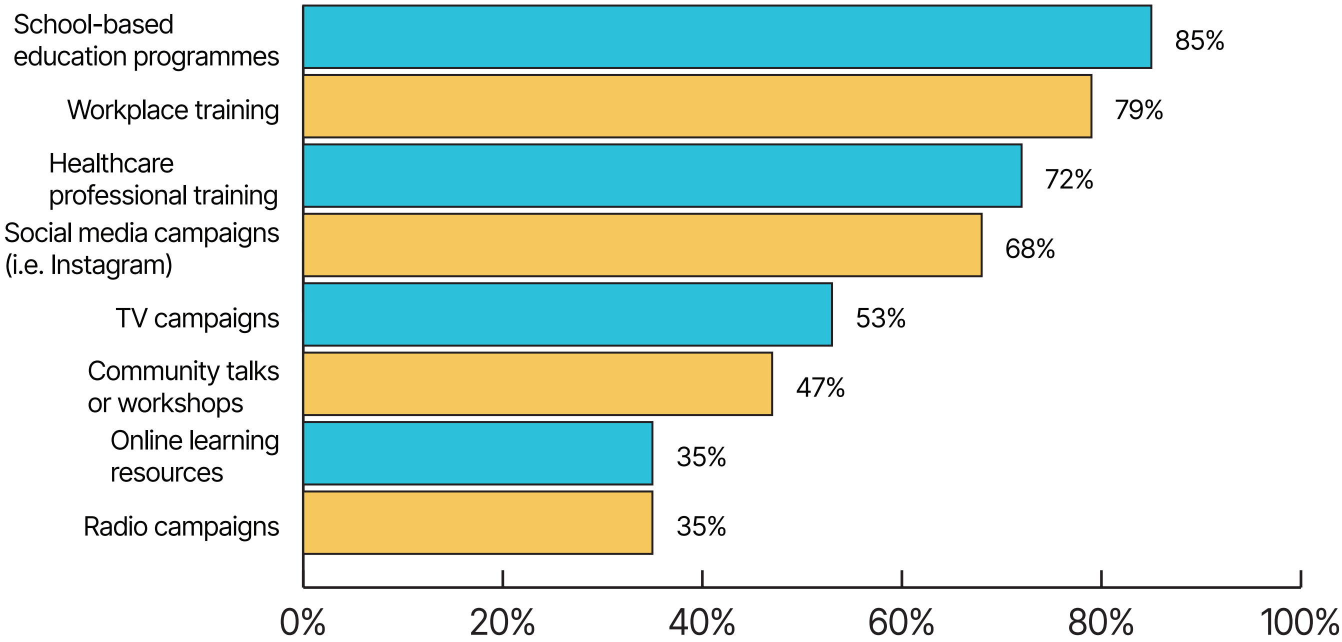


Figure 4

Other ideas suggested from respondents highlighted that they wanted the public to learn about neurodivergence from an early age. Some respondents also recommended peer-led campaigns or training, while others emphasised that awareness initiatives should promote a neuro-affirmative understanding of autism. Many also suggested that autism awareness and understanding should form part of professional training and continuing professional development, particularly if they are working in jobs that involve directly supporting or working with Autistic people. These suggestions were also called for by AsIAm in our 2025 submission to the Department of Rural and Community Development on a ***'New Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector'***.

When asked to identify specific areas where these campaigns should target, respondents shared the following priorities: *(see Figure 5)*

Who should these campaigns primarily target?

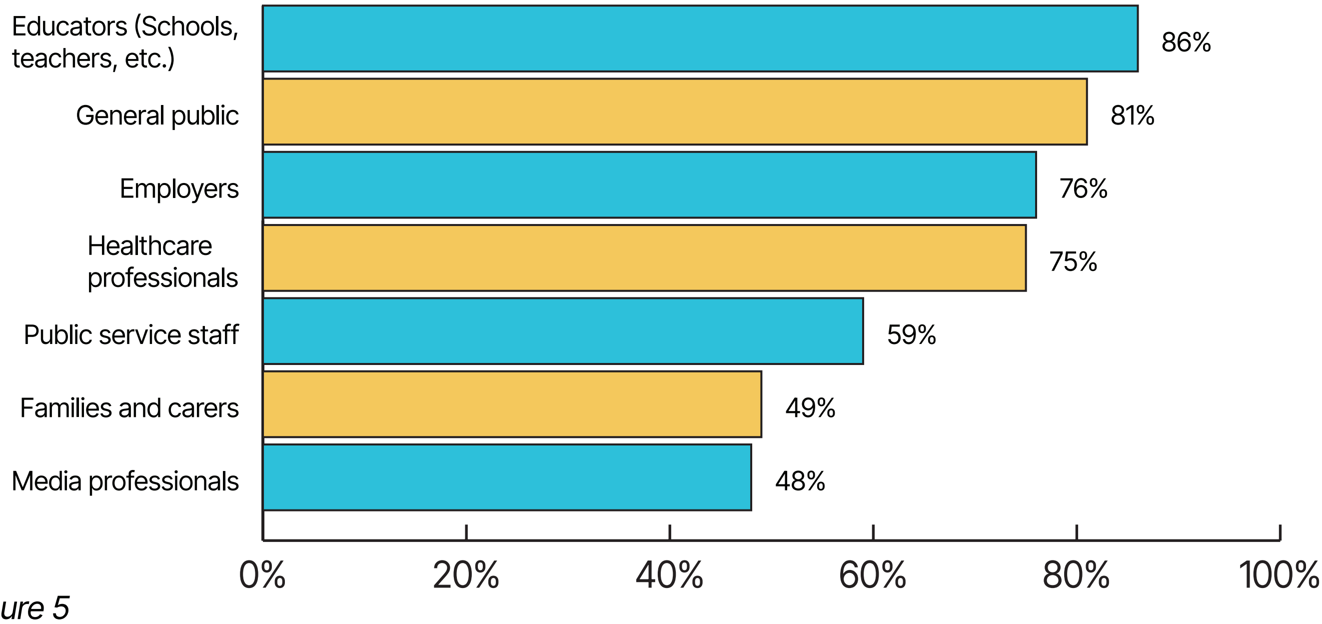


Figure 5

5% of respondents who shared other responses suggested that public awareness campaigns should be broad and reach a wider audience, including politicians and policymakers, students and peers, and people working in specific sectors like the criminal justice system or mental health services. The Department of Children, Disability and Equality should leverage these insights within the Autism Innovation Strategy to deliver a community-led national acceptance and understanding campaign on autism, in line with Actions 1 and 2 of the Strategy and developed in partnership and direct consultation with the Autistic community.

Autism continues to have the highest recognition (89%), followed by ADHD (84%).

The term "neurotype" continues to gain traction in how people describe autism and related conditions.
In 2026, 42% of respondents selected "a neurotype", overtaking "a developmental difference" (37%), a reverse of 2025.

While 7 in 10 report having heard the term "neurodiversity", over half are aware of the term "neurodivergence".

Recognition of the term "neurodiversity" has risen from 53% to 69% since March 2025, with 55% now also recognising the term "neurodivergence". Almost three in four were aware of either term.

Confidence in explaining neurodiversity remains very low and largely unchanged year-on-year. In 2026, 76% are not at all or only slightly confident, similar to 77% in 2025.

Confidence in explaining these terms is generally low, particularly for PDA, where 84% say they are not confident.

Media Coverage and Portrayal of Autistic People

The media has significant power to shape public opinion and depict Autistic people in news stories, film and television programmes, social media, video games, literature or theatrical productions in a particular way. These depictions can directly influence society's attitudes about autism and present narratives that shape society's wider understanding of autism.

Reflecting this, the 69% of respondents felt that the media's portrayal of Autistic people is neither accurate nor respectful. Respondents highlighted that media depictions of autism often did not authentically represent the diversity of Autistic people's experiences, instead focusing on a narrower set of characteristics which reinforce negative stereotypes about autism. In recent years, respondents have also raised growing concerns about the spread of misinformation and disinformation about autism, which can negatively impact the Autistic community's safety and sense of belonging. Many Autistic people reported feeling invalidated, stigmatised or unsafe when encountering misinformation online, and in public debates and discussions. Respondents also described how repeatedly experiencing this misinformation caused them to feel more distressed and anxious, sometimes causing them to withdraw from in-person or online spaces and communities. Building on this, 85% of respondents do not believe the public's understanding around autism reflects the diversity of Autistic experiences.

This emphasises the need for media organisations to ensure that more Autistic people are included in sharing their own stories and shaping narratives about autism and to promote accurate and authentic portrayals of Autistic people's everyday lived experiences.

Our report found that 68% of respondents think that misinformation about autism and Autistic people has increased over the past year, while 32% did not. This suggests that misinformation that has emerged previously continues to persist and is becoming a more entrenched and systemic issue. It also reflects the significant challenges in addressing misinformation once it has taken hold, rather than preventing its spread at the source. This reinforces the need for Government to take more a more proactive approach tackling disinformation and its impact on our community.

We also asked respondents where they found misinformation about autism and Autistic people, and they identified the following sources: *(see Figure 6)*

If you have responded "Yes" to the last question, where have you found misinformation about autism and Autistic people?

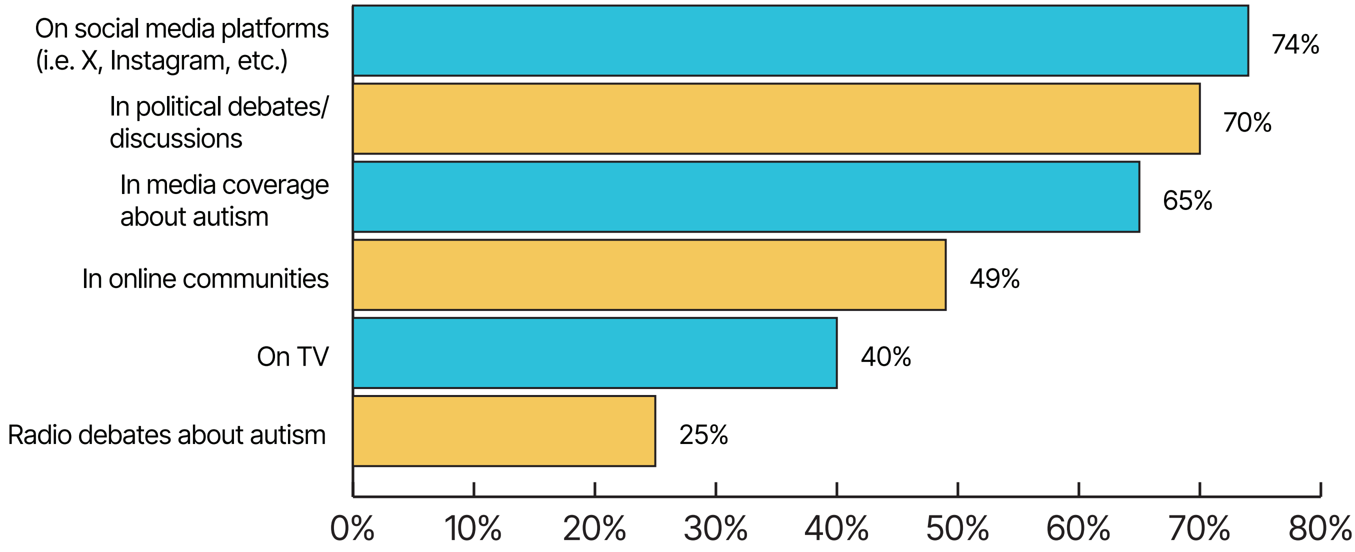


Figure 6

These findings speak to the urgent need to tackle misinformation and disinformation, considering the profound impact that misinformation has on our community. This impact was highlighted within our report, with 91% of respondents feeling that the Government was not doing enough to tackle misinformation on autism.

We also asked respondents to provide examples about where they encountered misinformation over the past year. They shared the following:

"As a female Autistic person, I've been met with the response that I don't fit the typically understood definition of what autism is, and so others have questioned my identifying as Autistic. This is because I heavily rely on masking in social situations, which gives the appearance of someone comfortable in social situations. People's understanding of autism tends to be narrowly defined as someone who is often outwardly distressed/dysregulated."

"When trying to get work, seen as not competent or capable."

"In my community, autism is often misunderstood as an intellectual disability, or as something that makes a person unable to function in society at all. That misunderstanding is painful. My children are not treated differently because of their needs - they are treated differently because of other people's biases. Autism is not a sickness, and it is not a measure of intelligence. With the right support, and with inclusion, understanding and grace, our children can live full, capable and meaningful lives."

"I think there is a focus on cis male Autistic children rather than adults and AFAB [assigned female at birth] Autistic people, and that Autistic trans people are often painted as 'not knowing better' and have their identities disregarded."

"I work as an SNA in a mainstream secondary school, and I frequently encounter teaching staff with a complete lack of awareness, never mind acceptance, on how Autistic kids need to be accommodated. Meltdowns and shutdowns are often viewed as tantrums or refusals. Situational mutism is similarly massively mischaracterised as a choice. Staff often come to me as the "expert" on all things autism, as I am open about who I am, which is a heavy burden to bear."

"I just never feel seen, understood or represented."

Other responses linked this spread of misinformation to wider social and political factors including the resurgence of conspiracy theories about autism. These included claims made by politicians that attribute autism to vaccines or paracetamol, and suggestions that there is an *"explosion"* or *"overdiagnosis"* of autism, despite there being no evidence supporting these claims. This was recently highlighted by the National Disability Authority's report ***"Estimating Autism Prevalence in Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities"***. Others cited recent court cases and high-profile celebrities claiming that being Autistic excused or justified their alleged misconduct, wrongdoing or harmful behaviour.

Others expressed concerns that misinformation would be used to justify removing supports, while many shared personal experiences where their own or their Autistic child's support needs were questioned or dismissed. Respondents reported being told that they *"do not look"* Autistic, that Autistic people *"lack empathy"*, *"have no emotions"* or that they would *"age out"* of their support needs. Several also pointed to an increase in social media advertisements and online content claiming to *"treat"* or *"cure"* autism, which many felt contributed to harmful misconceptions which framed autism as a condition or a disorder that needs to be fixed.

88% of respondents felt that Autistic people were not appropriately represented in news media, compared to 12% who did. Furthermore, 84% of respondents were not appropriately represented in popular culture, such as in film & TV, literature, video games or literature.

Rebecca's Story

Rebecca approaches you at the school gate to invite your child to a playdate with her daughter. She says she will drive your daughter there and back. She asks you very directly and doesn't smile when she asks. You have heard Rebecca says that she is Autistic and were surprised by this. You have since noticed at school concerts she begun to rock and flap her hands during the music. You decide to avoid the playdate, as you are not sure if your child will be safe.

Rebecca Connor Wood

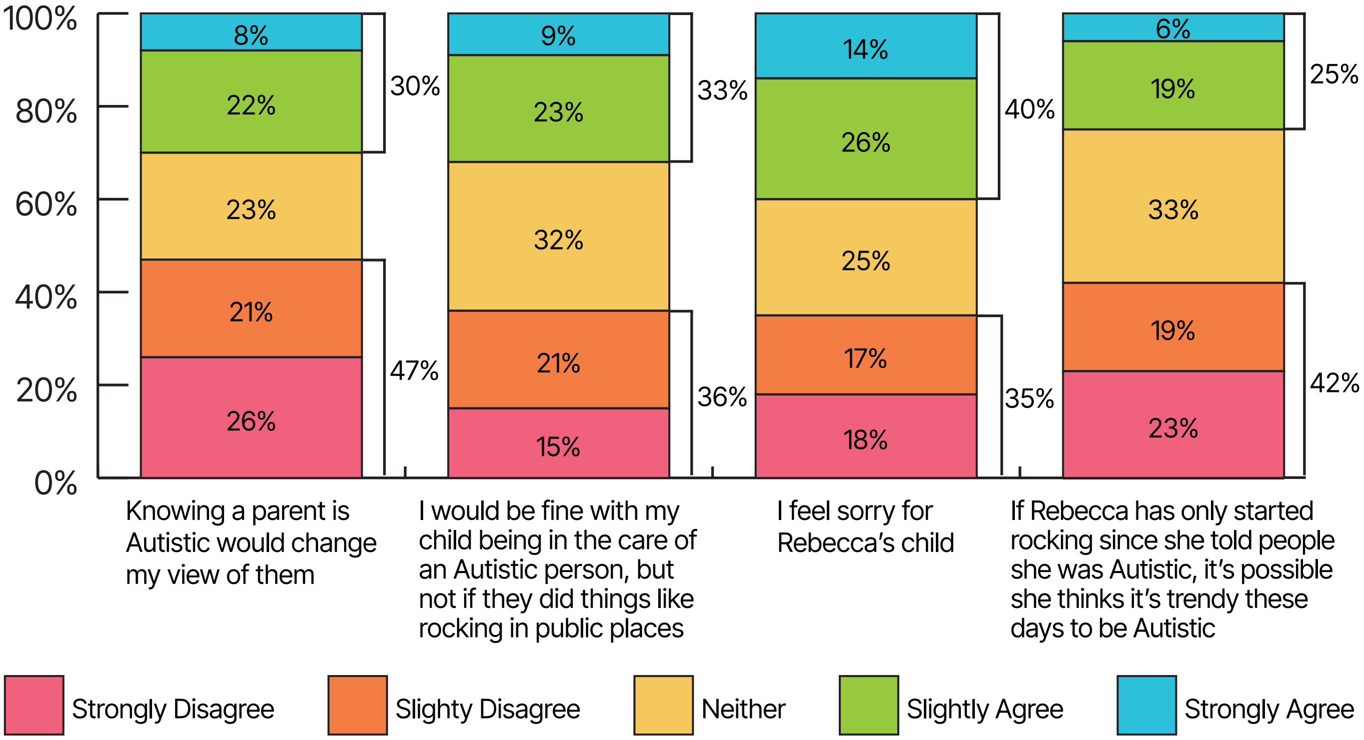
Why did you want to ask the Irish public this question?

"As an Autistic mother myself I've faced judgement when disclosing my diagnosis to other parents."

What do you want the public to know about this issue?

"That there are Autistic parents out there and being Autistic doesn't inherently limit a persons ability to parent. There are plenty of brilliant, empathetic and compassionate Autistic parents who deserve to be included and whose children deserve to be included too."

AsIAm put Rebecca's story to the public and found that:



- Neutral responses are high across statements, suggesting many people are unsure how to interpret Autistic behaviours in a parenting context.
- This hesitation is most evident where autism becomes more visible, with around a third unsure whether rocking in public would affect trust in caregiving (32%) or whether Rebecca's behaviour is genuine or performative (33%).
- At the same time, 2 in 5 say they feel sorry for Rebecca's child, indicating that this uncertainty can translate into concern when parenting and care are involved.

Progress under the Autism Innovation Strategy

A key aspect of this year's report examines the impact of the autism Innovation Strategy across its four pillars since its inception in August 2024. The findings provide insights into both the advancements achieved since the Strategy was published, and the structural and cultural barriers that remain, including the role of public attitudes, harmful stereotypes, and media portrayals in shaping the Autistic community's experiences.

First, we asked respondents about the areas in which the Autism Innovation Strategy delivered progress for our community, the responses were as follows: *(see Figure 7)*

In August 2024, the Government introduced the Autism Innovation Strategy. The Strategy is built on four pillars which guide Ireland's approach to making supports better and to improve the lives of Autistic people and families in communities across Ireland. Since August 2024, to what extent do you or your Autistic family member think there has been progress in the following areas:

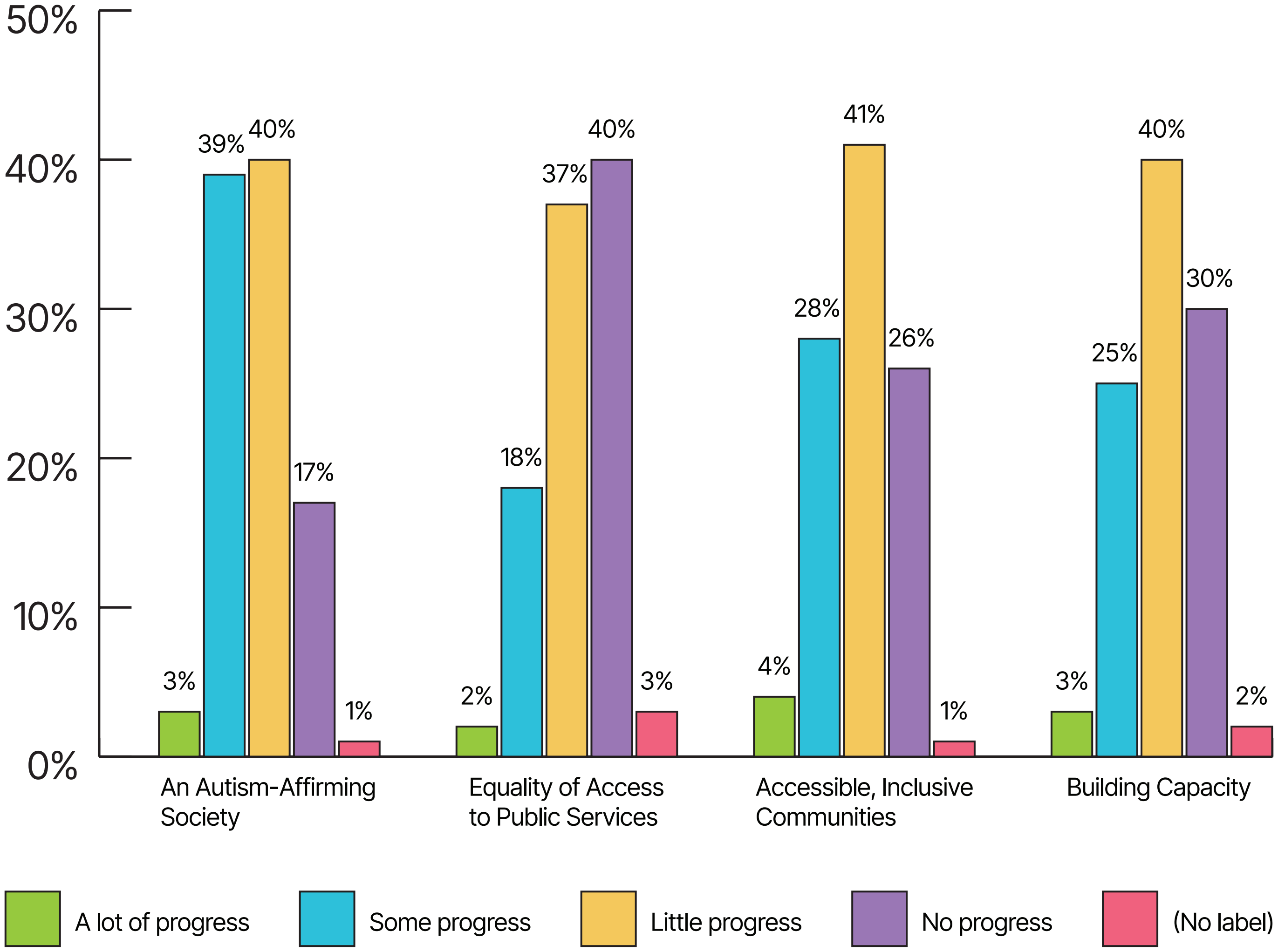


Figure 6

We also asked respondents to what extent they felt the following factors prevent the public from being more supportive of Autistic people:

	Very much	Somewhat	About the same	Not much	Not at all
Lack of understanding of autism	64%	22%	10%	3%	1%
Harmful stereotypes	63%	24%	9%	3%	1%
Stigma	58%	28%	10%	3%	1%
Media portrayals or narratives	33%	43%	17%	6%	1%
Limited access to reliable information or training	51%	31%	11%	6%	1%
Lack of Autistic voices in policy or decision-making	70%	18%	7%	3%	2%
Lack of funding for autism specific initiatives	65%	21%	9%	3%	1%

Respondents were asked who they would feel comfortable sharing that they are Autistic with. Respondents could choose more than one category in relation to this question, which provides an opportunity to examine in more detail the differences of choice in responses: *(see Figure 8)*

As an Autistic person, who would you feel comfortable sharing that you are Autistic with?

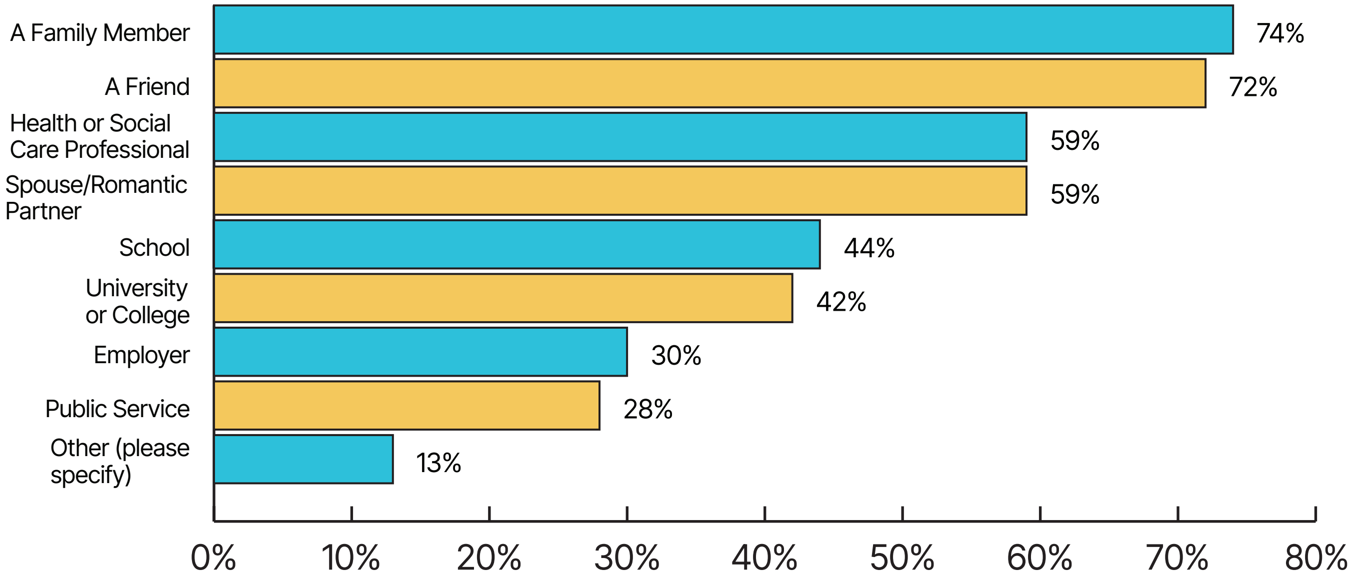


Figure 8

13% shared other responses reflecting a wide range of experiences, including feeling comfortable to be open with everyone, disclosing to other Autistic or Neurodivergent people, or feeling compelled to disclose depending on their circumstances.

Participation in Public Spaces

An inclusive society is measured both by policy commitments by Government, and whether Autistic people feel safe to be able to fully participate in community life. Accessible public spaces are vital to ensuring that Autistic people belong and feel connected with their community. Reflecting these experiences, we asked Autistic people and family members about their experiences in public spaces in their communities. *(see Figure 9)*

Do you as an Autistic person or your Autistic family member enjoy spending time in public spaces in your community?

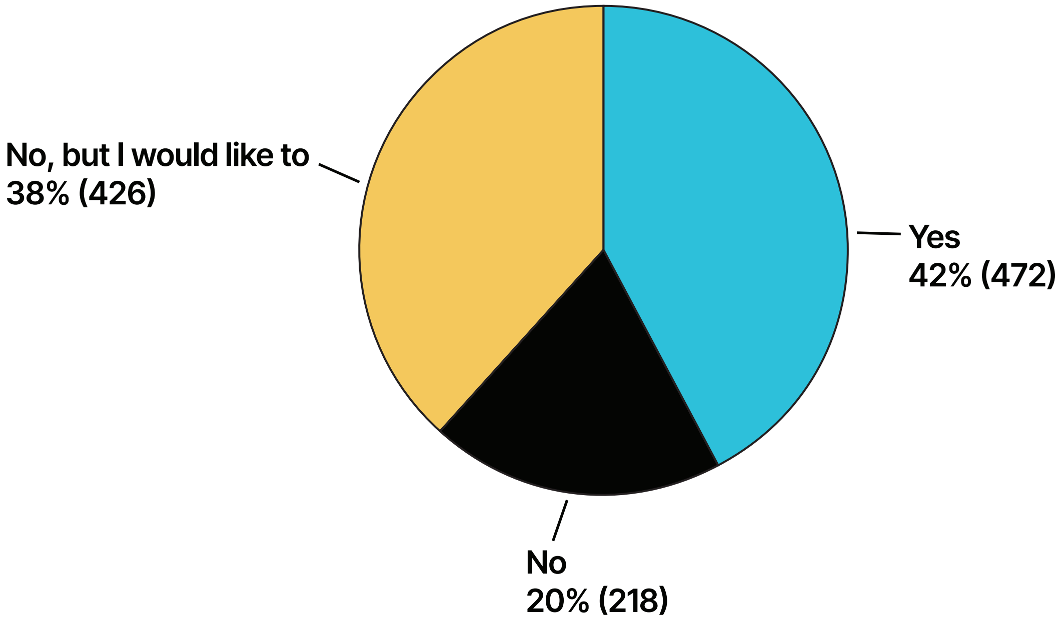


Figure 9

The findings in this year's report reveal a significant gap between Autistic people wanting to engage in public spaces and feeling safe and supported to do so. This indicates that while more Autistic people would like to play a greater part in their community, some are impeded from being fully included.

These experiences were further revealed by exploring the unique experiences of respondents in public spaces. 6% felt very comfortable spending time in public spaces, 21% felt comfortable, 28% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 35% felt uncomfortable and 10% felt very uncomfortable spending time in public spaces in the community.

We asked Autistic people and family members about any recent experiences where they felt uncomfortable spending time in public spaces:

"Most places are very loud... The gym is very loud and bright. I like exercising but it can be very stressful there."

"I wear my lanyard to try improve people's understanding of my situation, but this in turn also leads to stigma and isolation."

"I spend most of my time scanning for exits and quiet corners rather than actually enjoying being there."

"It's not just the noise - it's the fear of having a meltdown in front of strangers and being judged."

"Even places that were fine before can suddenly change - new lighting, new layout, louder music - and that unpredictability makes it hard to cope."

"If there was clear signage, visual guides and a quiet space, we would go more places."

Philip's Story

Philip, aged 30, is at a social gathering. He came with a friend but doesn't know the place or people. When he's relaxed, he finds meeting people much easier. His friend mentioned to the hosts and some other guests to give him a chance to adapt to his surroundings, and to choose quieter moments to introduce themselves.

Most of the people don't take the advice seriously. They ask him to join a party game right away, and make banter with him, with the hosts asking him to choose what food he wants at the same time. Philip becomes overwhelmed. He says to the host that what she's asking is irrelevant as he's already eaten. The host and her husband are upset by this. Philip decides to go home.

Philip Anthony Kenny

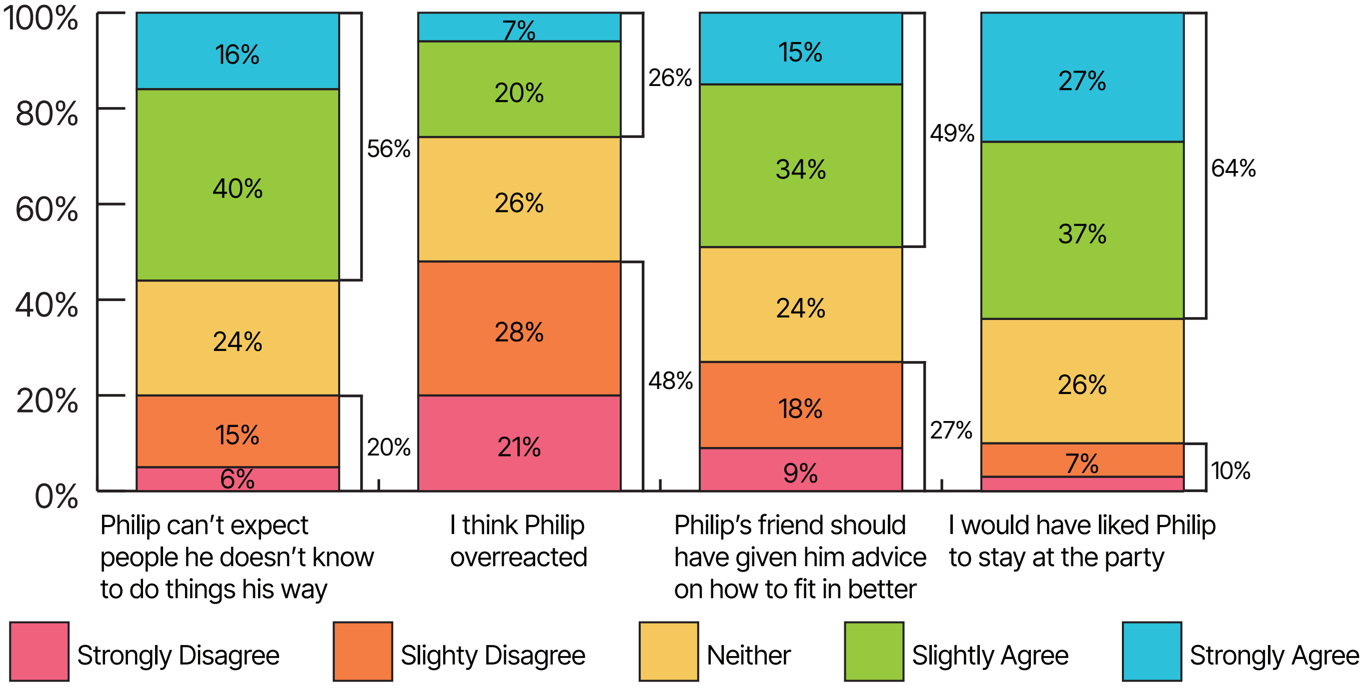
Why did you want to ask the Irish public this question?

"I want this question to be selected as I believe society has an important role to play in supporting deep meaningful friendships for Autistic people"

What do you want the public to know about this issue?

"Autistic people desire friendship just like everybody else. We live in a world where it is increasingly difficult to assess peoples true intentions towards us. For Autistic people it can be very difficult to tell who wants to genuinely strike up a friendship with us and who does not. Learning to trust people takes time and negative experiences in this area can greatly impact our self confidence to try. Having genuine connections is such an important part of living that without it we find ourselves limited in our opportunities to live fully realised lives, this extends to our work and our ambitions in life including career advancement and relationships."

AsIAm put Philip's story to the public and found that:



- More than half believe Philip cannot expect strangers to do things his way, and just about half disagree that he overreacted, with a further 26% unsure, indicating considerable uncertainty in how people judge his reaction.
- Overall, the clearest consensus is around inclusion, with 64% saying they would have liked Philip to stay at the party.

For the next National Autism Strategy

Respondents were asked what they want to see in a future *National Autism Strategy* that would make spending time in public spaces a more comfortable experience for them or the Autistic community. The following are the insights to this question:

- 79% want to see improved staff education and training
- 72% want to see reduced noise and lighting in designated areas
- 71% want to see more accessible facilities or environments
- 55% want to see structured or scheduled "autism friendly" hours
- 54% want to see clear signage, information or preparation material

Among the 13% of respondents who sent other replies, some suggested having better support with engaging with public bodies, offering more opportunities to socialise involving activities, and adjusting environmental factors such as crowds to make settings more accessible.

96% of respondents believe that the Government should legislate for a *National Autism Strategy*, as committed to in the Programme for Government.

How a new National Autism Strategy would promote an autism-affirming society

AsIAm believes that the Government should now legislate for a *National Autism Strategy* for Ireland to build on the current *Autism Innovation Strategy* and provide a longer-term framework to more comprehensively support the Autistic community. While the *Autism Innovation Strategy* represented an important first step in coordinating actions across Government, its time-bound nature means that many supports and initiatives risk losing momentum once the Strategy ends. To avoid a cliff edge and ensure that the Government continues to support the Autistic community into the future, we believe that the current Strategy should be extended, whilst a new *National Autism Strategy* is developed and legislated for.

Legislating for a *National Autism Strategy* would place policies supporting Autistic people on a statutory footing and ensure that Government Departments and State agencies have clear responsibilities for delivering support and are more accountable to the Autistic community. It would also ensure that any progress under the *Autism Innovation Strategy* is strengthened and sustained over time. Crucially, many of the priorities identified by respondents reflect on calls for Government to expand commitments within the current *Autism Innovation Strategy*, highlighting that the current Strategy must not be a one-off programme of work, but an ongoing process that needs sustained and consistent resourcing, monitoring and implementation. The current *Autism Innovation Strategy* also sits within the overarching framework of disability policy under the *National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People*, where its actions are aligned under the first two years of the National Human Rights Strategy. Future National Autism Strategies would continue this work over the lifetime of the *National Human Rights Strategy*. Both strategies are complementary and essential to meeting the support needs of Autistic people.

Respondents highlighted several priorities for what a future *National Autism Strategy* should include to build a more autism-affirming society. These include:

- Deliver national public information and education campaigns that reflect the diversity of Autistic experiences and challenge outdated assumptions and negative stereotypes about autism.
- Develop a coordinated Government response to address misinformation and disinformation about autism seen online, in public debate and in media coverage, particularly claims that reinforce harmful narratives or stereotypes about autism.
- Work in partnership with media organisations and with Coimisiún na Meán to ensure that portrayals of Autistic people reflect the diversity of Autistic people's experiences.
- Develop approaches for meaningful participation of Autistic people in public conversations about autism, including media engagement, public campaigns and greater engagement in national policy development.
- Mandate the use of neuro-affirmative language across public services, education and media, so that autism is understood as part of neurodiversity and as a key part of policies supporting Disabled people.
- Introduce autism and neurodiversity education in schools and strengthen training for professionals across healthcare, education, employment services and the wider public sector.

Pillar 2 of the Autism Innovation Strategy – Equality of Access to Public Services

Access to Public Services

Equal access to public services is a core human rights issue and a vital part of ensuring that Autistic people feel included. In providing accessible and accommodating public services, Autistic people can be empowered to participate, advocate and lead in every sector of Irish society. This should be our aim as a society in providing the same chance for every Autistic person. Pillar 2 of the *Autism Innovation Strategy* commits to ensuring that Autistic people can access public services on an equal basis with others. However, the findings from this year's report indicate that significant barriers persist.

First, we asked respondents if they experienced barriers to accessing public services, including the court services, healthcare, or housing etc.

Do you or your Autistic family member experience barriers to accessing public services identified above (i.e. courts, general healthcare, housing, etc.)?

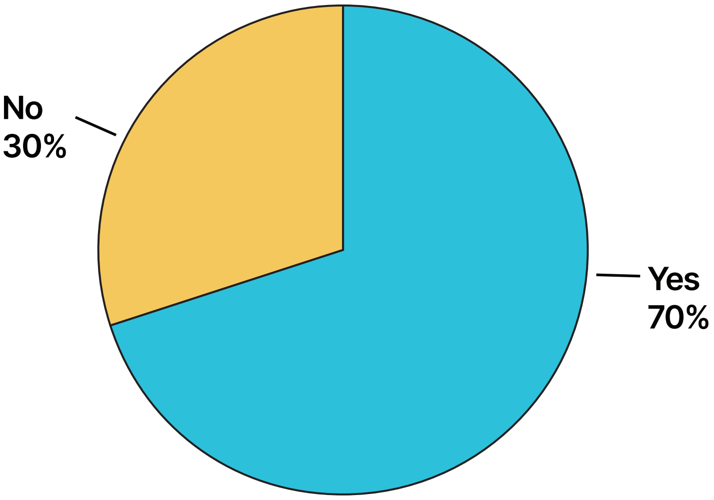


Figure 10

Respondents also shared insights about the barriers that have made it difficult for them or their Autistic family member to navigate these public services, and they shared the following barriers:

If you responded "Yes" to the last question, which of the following barriers have made it difficult for you or your Autistic family member to navigate these public services identified above?

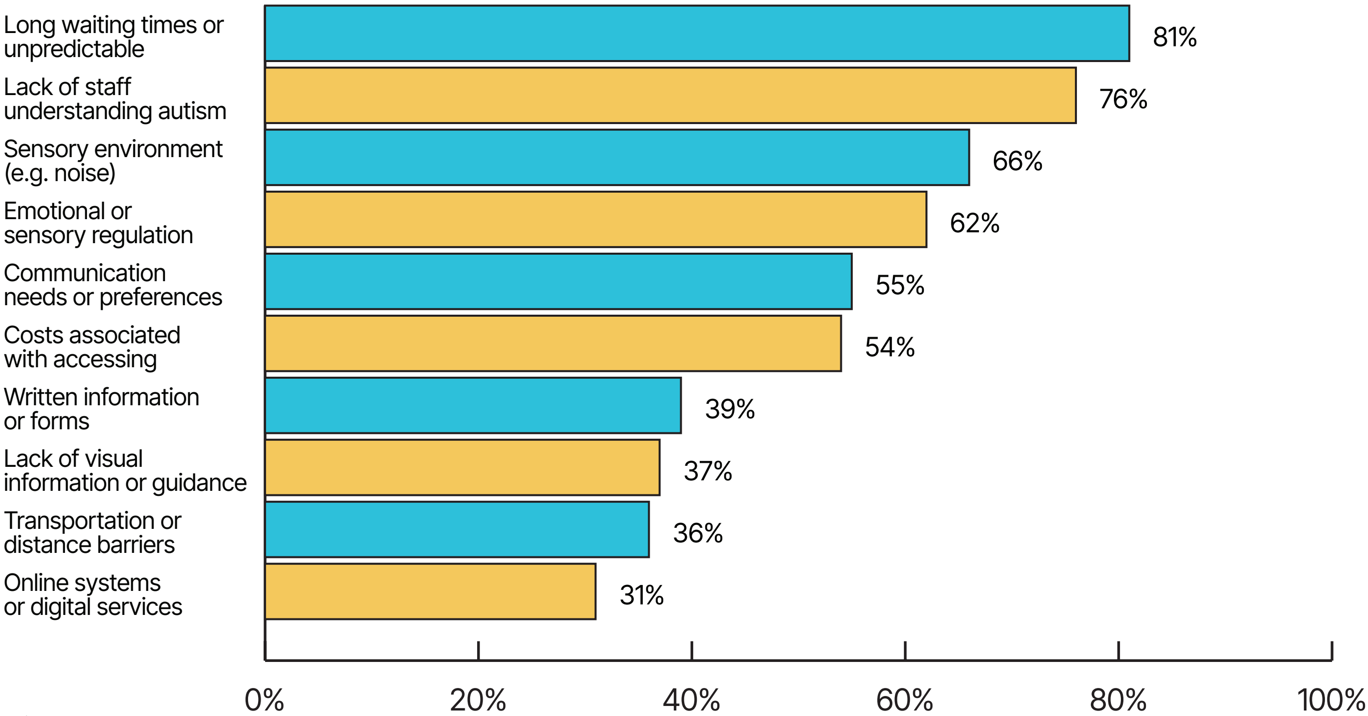


Figure 11

Other barriers identified by respondents include Autistic needs were not understood or acted on, with needing to make phone calls to book appointments to access services, with the paperwork involved in accessing services and dismissive attitudes from healthcare professionals.

We also asked if any Autistic people or their family members had any difficulty with accessing the following public services:

Public Service	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not applicable
Arts & Cultural Institutions	25%	20%	23%	9%	5%	18%
Courts Services	20%	4%	3%	2%	2%	69%
Education	12%	10%	29%	23%	18%	8%
Emergency Services	24%	9%	14%	7%	4%	42%
Employment Services	11%	5%	12%	12%	10%	50%
Gardaí	22%	6%	7%	2%	2%	61%
General Practice (GP)	25%	19%	27%	16%	7%	6%
Hospital	23%	13%	23%	14%	11%	16%
Housing	14%	3%	7%	5%	12%	59%
Libraries	45%	17%	13%	4%	2%	19%
Mental Health Services	8%	6%	19%	22%	25%	20%
Primary Care	13%	8%	19%	18%	19%	23%
Social Protection	15%	7%	13%	11%	11%	43%
Sports Clubs and Facilities	14%	9%	20%	18%	16%	23%

Respondents highlighted the main contributing factors which make accessing public services more difficult for Autistic people or their family member:

Barrier	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not applicable
Sensory environment	3%	6%	31%	34%	23%	3%
Communication barriers	6%	10%	32%	32%	16%	4%
Staff understanding of Autistic needs	3%	7%	27%	38%	23%	2%
Other customers	5%	9%	30%	30%	20%	6%
Websites	21%	22%	26%	10%	4%	17%
Online systems or forms	16%	17%	28%	15%	8%	16%
Costs	8%	9%	27%	25%	21%	10%
Distance (travel)	9%	11%	27%	27%	15%	11%
Preparation materials	10%	11%	32%	19%	8%	20%

We also asked respondents if they accessed any autism-specific supports when accessing public services within the past 12 months, including quiet spaces, sensory packs or supports, visual guides or accessible information – 70% of respondents said that they did not access any autism-specific supports, whilst 30% said that they have accessed supports within the past year.

In the past 12 months, have you or your Autistic family member accessed any autism-specific supports when accessing public services (i.e. quiet spaces, sensory packs/supports, visual guides, accessible information guides, etc)?

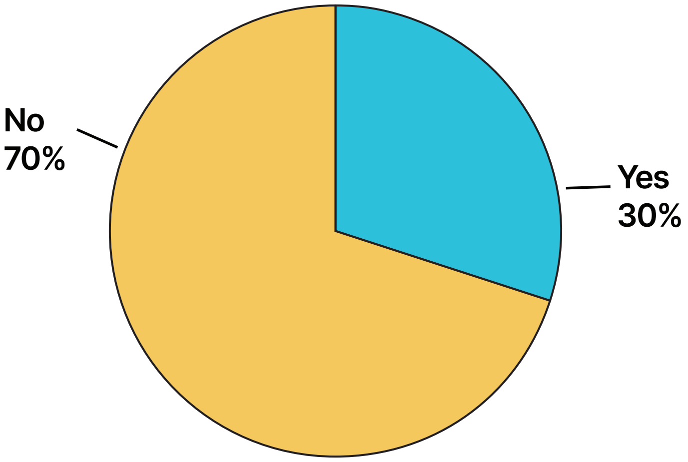


Figure 12

In asking the above question, respondents provided additional information on what supports they have received or engaged with when accessing public services:

"A quiet room in the 3Arena. Saved our night. I was able to escape sensory overload and prevent a meltdown, while my husband could continue to enjoy the gig we went to see."

"Visual guide and social story - it helps me to feel prepared and more confident in what I'm doing. I feel less anxiety knowing exactly what's going to happen."

"A queue assist pass has been a game changer for accessibility. Queuing causes so much stress and anxiety, we simply cannot go somewhere if there will be queues."

"The thing that made the biggest difference was honestly the neuro-affirmative approach which made her feel like she belonged!"

"The guide provided by AsIAm for what to expect when attending a support group."

Across the remaining responses, participants consistently highlighted that sensory accommodations, accessible information, and autism-informed staff approaches significantly improve experiences of public services, and when accessing concert venues, airports and libraries. **However, respondents also shared details where they had more negative experiences, including:**

"Sensory room was provided but was not very good. Seemed like it was created with only children in mind, and maybe not in consultation with any Autistic people."

"I never feel safe declaring my diagnosis with healthcare staff – I only do so when I absolutely need to... I find I experience huge discrimination once I disclose."

"I wasn't even aware of such supports to be honest."

Reflecting some of these experiences, **89% of respondents felt that their Local Authority do not consult the Autistic community enough when planning community spaces.** We also asked respondents if they felt that public services were *"getting better"*, *"the same"* or *"getting worse"* in supporting Autistic people:

Do you or your Autistic family member feel that public services are getting better, worse, or staying the same in supporting Autistic people?

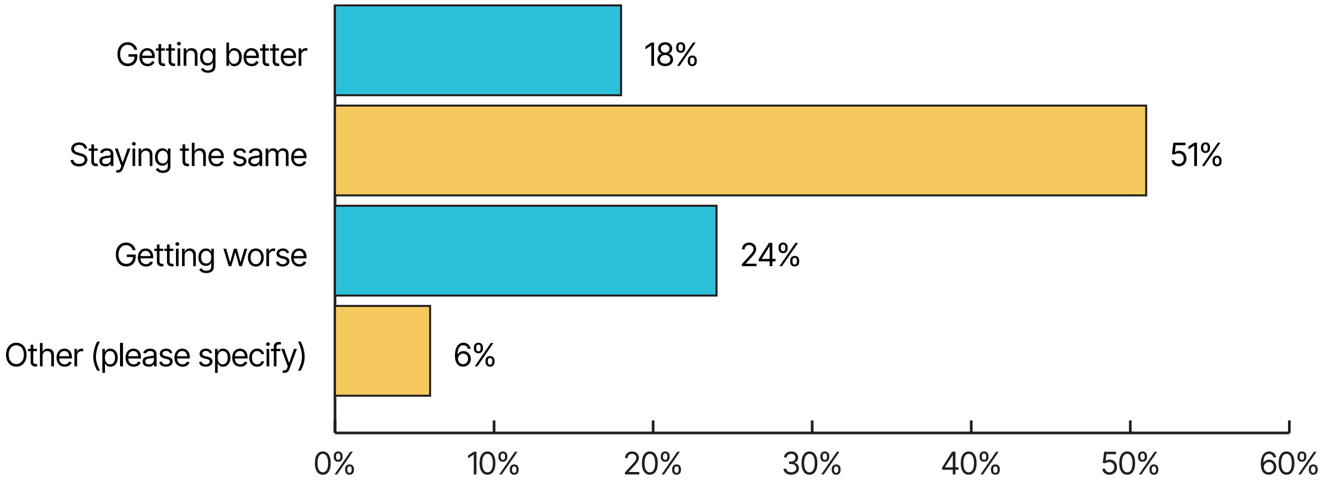


Figure 13

6% of respondents also shared their experiences, identifying specific issues with the banking system, dealing with stigma when accessing services and concerns that services are not meeting the needs for Autistic adults, LGBTQIA+ Autistic people, and Autistic people with a PDA profile.

Reflecting this, respondents were asked which areas public sector staff most need training or professional development in, to better support Autistic people.

Which area do you or your Autistic family member think public sector staff most need training or professional development to better support Autistic people?

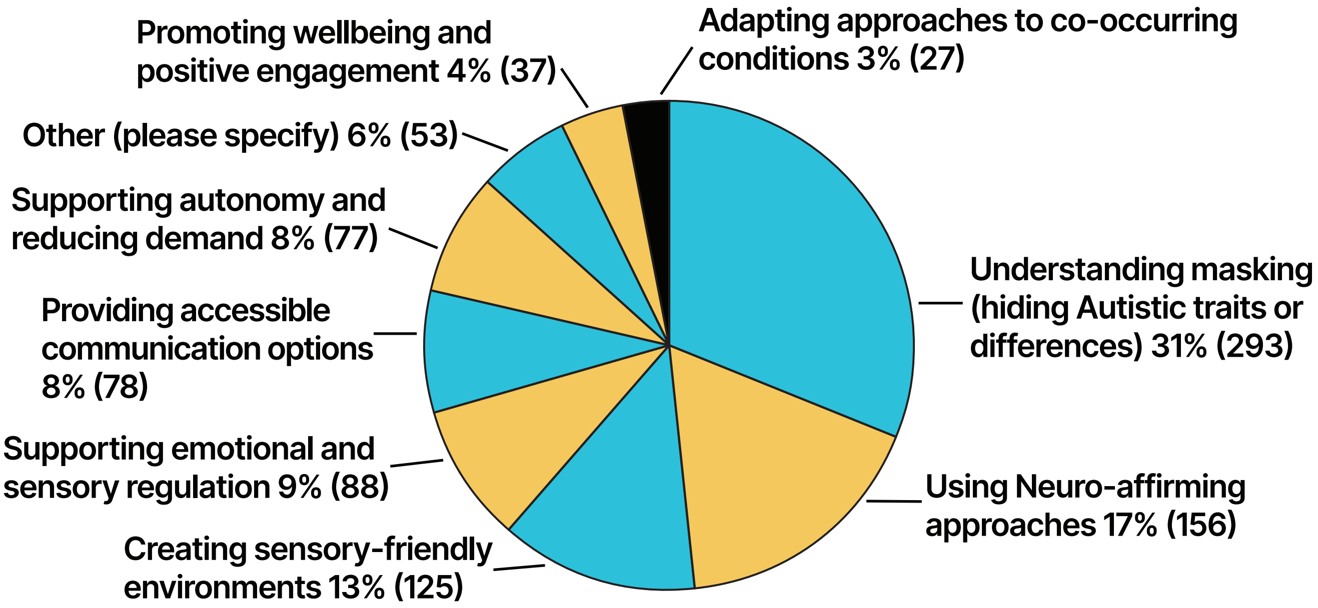


Figure 14

Among the 6% of respondents who wanted to highlight other areas where public sector staff should access training, many respondents replied, *"all of the above"*, whereas other responses wanted training focused on understanding masking, supporting access to employment, learning about how Autistic people experience the world, and to making towns and villages more accessible.

What the Autistic community want from the next *National Autism Strategy* to create more equal access to public services.

Respondents also shared what supports they would like to see in the *National Autism Strategy* that would create equal access to public services for the Autistic community:

“Mandatory autism training for all frontline public service staff – not optional online modules, but meaningful, in-depth training developed with Autistic people.”

“Every hospital, court and public office should have a quiet sensory space available without having to ask or justify it.”

“Forms and letters need to be written in plain English with clear visual guides – the system is overwhelming before you even walk in the door.”

“Policies are meaningless without accountability. There needs to be consequences when services fail to provide reasonable accommodations.”

“Nothing about us without us – Autistic people must be involved in designing services, not just consulted after decisions are made.”

99% of respondents resoundingly believed that a new *National Autism Strategy* should include the offering of post-diagnostic supports for Autistic people, following a diagnosis. In addition to post-diagnostic supports, respondents also want to see greater collaboration with the wider Autistic community on a new *National Autism Strategy* when planning, designing and implementing public services. These include:

"Consult with Autistic people across the spectrum, do not 'launch' what a committee of non-Autistic people have decided is what is 'good' for 'them'."

"I would weep with joy [if] public services didn't have bright fluorescent overhead lighting in every waiting room."

"I think designing places in a sensory way for Autistic people might make everyone feel more at ease... I see no disadvantage to purposely making public spaces more soothing... Places that feel like they're more for everyone."

"Supports more accessible, not everyone lives in the city...availability country wide not just in core cities like Dublin and Cork."

"Other" responses reflect a clear desire among respondents for the next *National Autism Strategy* to work towards building a rights-based approach to designing and delivering public services which are more accessible and responsive to the needs of the Autistic community. Respondents strongly felt that accessibility and reasonable accommodations for Autistic people should be built into our public services from the outset.

Many also highlighted the barriers created by complex systems, inaccessible sensory environments and differences in understanding autism among staff to get supports they require. Respondents also strongly believed that services and supports should be consistently available across all parts of Ireland, particularly for respondents living outside cities, and that there should be shorter waiting times and easier access to autism assessments and follow-on supports.

Childcare and Early Years

A key issue that we identified in this year's report lies with Access to Childcare and Early Years Services. We asked respondents if they felt that childcare was accessible to Autistic people:

In your experience, do you or your Autistic family member believe that Childcare and Early Years services are accessible to Autistic people?

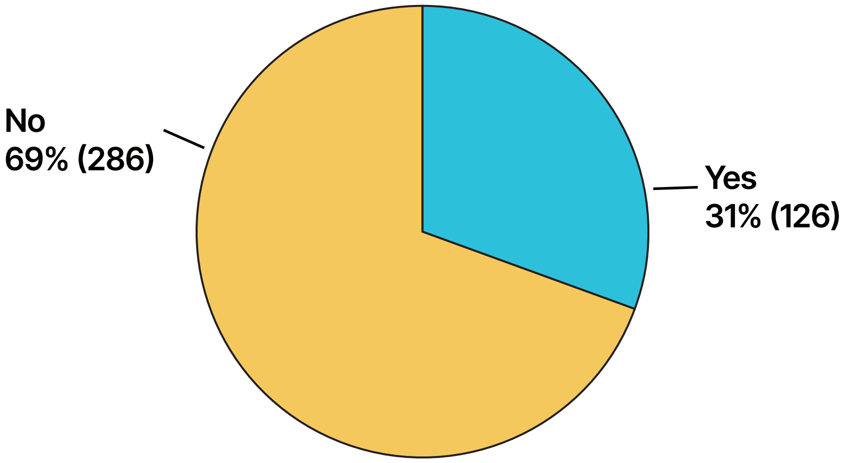


Figure 15

Only 6% of respondents affirmed their Autistic family member currently accesses an Early Intervention class.

Does your Autistic family member currently access an Early Intervention class?

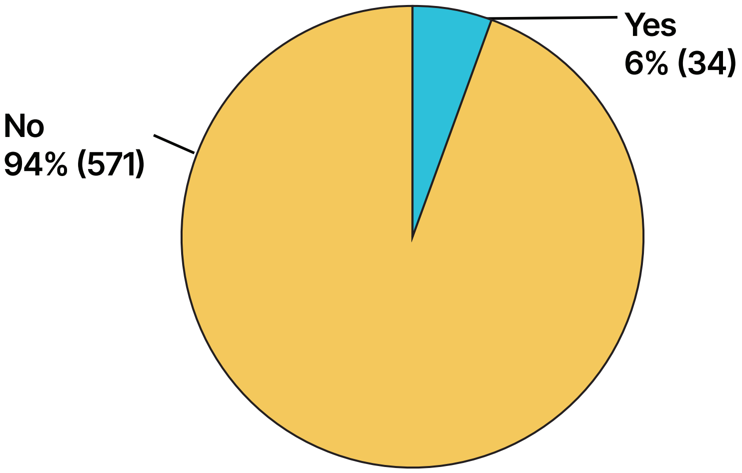


Figure 16

Respondents were asked about their experiences with their Autistic child's Early Intervention Class:

> *"Phenomenal. Couldn't speak high enough of his Early Intervention Class"*

> *"Fantastic school and staff, but no surety on path beyond EIC."*

> *"There is no support here."*

> *"My child didn't get access to early intervention as he was very good at masking"*

> *"My son is currently in Primary school, but he did avail of an Early Intervention Class- it was the making of him. And from there he continued his learning and independence by travelling on a bus to school from 3.5 years. The Early Intervention Classes are so important for Autistic children."*

Respondents also identified several challenges they faced when accessing childcare and early years supports:

If you or your Autistic family member are currently using, or having used in the past year, Childcare or Early Years services (i.e. preschool, creches, etc), what challenges have you or your Autistic family member faces?

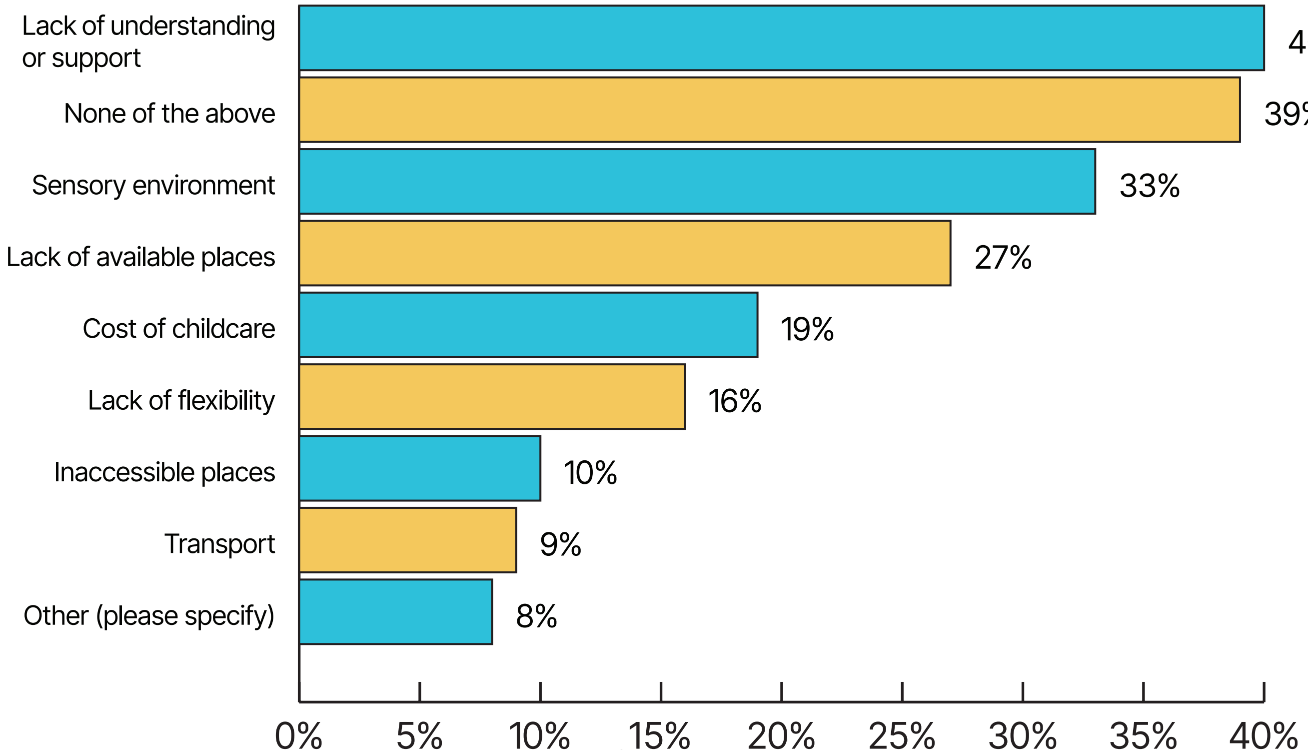


Figure 17

8% of respondents who selected *"Other"* when reflecting on their experiences in accessing Early Years settings highlighted additional barriers, including staff not understanding their Autistic child's sensory needs or ways they regulate themselves. One respondent described a particularly negative experience where their child was made to feel unwelcome in their preschool due to their support needs, underscoring the importance of ensuring Early Years settings to be accessible and inclusive to the Autistic community.

Respondents were also asked about how well their Autistic family member was supported when making the transition from preschool or early years settings to primary school. This transition can be a critical moment in the lives of young Autistic children as they move from one educational environment to another. Having the appropriate supports and techniques in place can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful transition. However, **almost 60% of respondents reported that their Autistic child did not receive any support during this transition period.** In our submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters on *'Inclusive Education and Article 24 of the United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'*, we highlighted the importance of ensuring a planned and seamless transition takes place between educational settings, particularly from early years to primary school.

How well was your Autistic family member supported by Early Years teams when transistioning from preschool/early years to primary school?

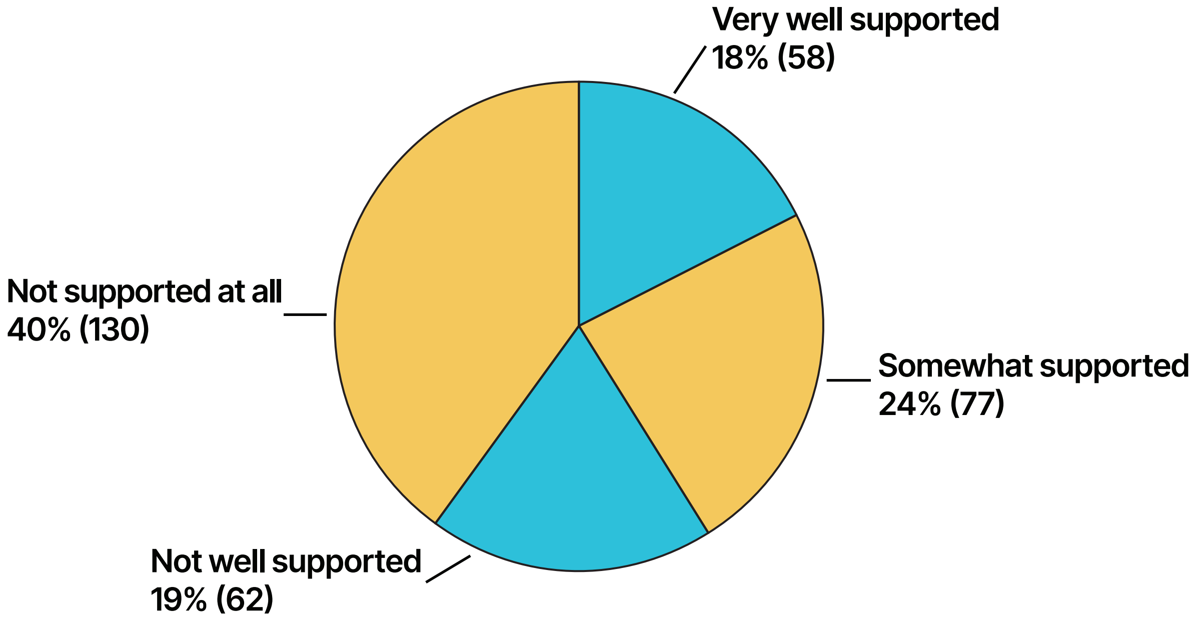


Figure 18

For those whose Autistic child was supported during this transition to primary school, respondents shared the following experiences:

"The existing teacher visited the new teacher and gave a detailed hand over."

"A quiet tour of the new school when it was empty and meeting with teacher before the school year started"

"Our son was given his own passport... They included what he likes/ dislikes, needed, didn't need when it came to movement breaks, sensory inputs to improve his learning time etc."

"I feel a whole team meeting approach, preschool teacher, new teacher and parents or guardians work on a transition plan together including social stories and meet and greet new classroom teacher..."

"Preschool was very structured and focused on having kids 'school ready' helping them to be able to read their own name, put on jackets and bags, tidying their toys, social expectations..."

For those who were not supported during this transition, respondents shared the following experiences when their Autistic child moved to primary school:

"Liaising between early years and primary was non-existent. Real knowledge on what I should do and what was going on. No communication from school regarding his needs in class..."

"Primary school has zero knowledge on masking in girls specifically therefore zero support given on allowing the child to feel that school was a safe place during the transition."

"Staff [were not trained enough] about Autistic children's needs. Labelled and criticised child as 'Bad' said there was 'Nothing positive to say about child' as they started primary school."

"Social stories, SNA access, sensory breaks would have helped."

The Access and Inclusion Model

Respondents were asked if their Autistic family member accessed supports through the Access and Inclusion Model in Early Years or Preschool – 38% said that they have accessed supports through AIM, which 62% said that they have not.

We also asked respondents if the AIM supports received met their Autistic family member's needs:

As an Autistic person, who would you feel comfortable sharing that you are Autistic with?

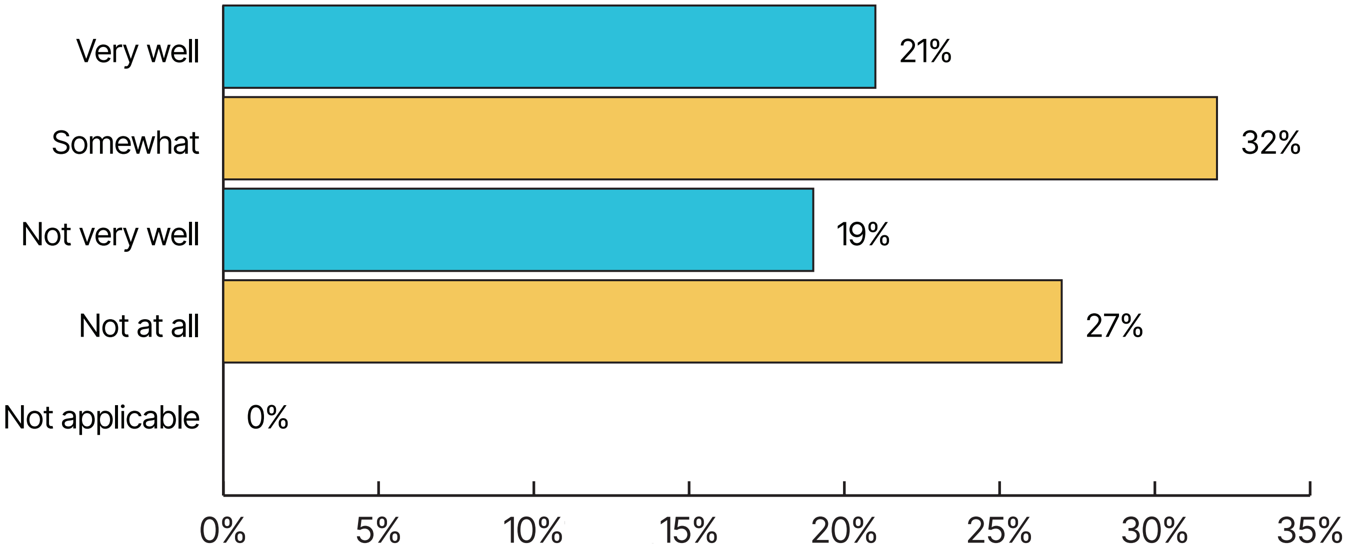


Figure 19

When asked about how easy it was to access AIM supports when their Autistic family member needed it – 18% found it very easy, 36% found it somewhat easy, 18% found it difficult, and 28% found it very difficult.

Has your Autistic family member accessed supports through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in Early Years or Preschool?

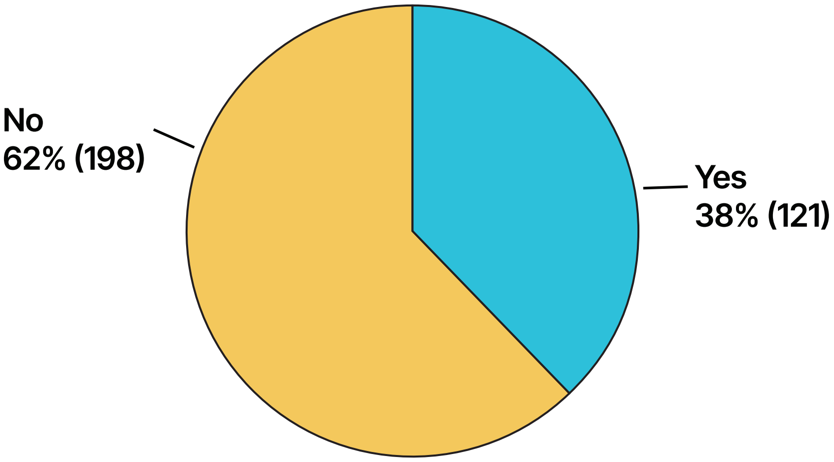


Figure 20

The report also explored what difference having AIM supports made to their Autistic family member's inclusion, participation, or wellbeing in Early Years services:

"She had a full time aims worker - without her, my daughter would not have been able to attend preschool."

"It was a game changer. Night and day. He went from being anxious and withdrawn to engaging in his own way and enjoying the playschool experience and learning."

"Her AIM worker has helped her social skills develop and makes sure that she is included with all activities! She sings and plays with her and has built up a lovely relationship with her."

"Enabled much more participation, which led to learning and integrating with the class much more."

"The problem was that even though they were very good, they weren't directly allocated to my child it was shared out. He's needs more 1:1 care and that wasn't an option."

Respondents were asked what they wanted to see included in a new *National Autism Strategy* with a particular reference to Early Years supports:

"Accredited training as a requirement for all staff in childcare and early years."

"Diagnosis at this young age can be difficult, it should be inclusive of children waiting for a diagnosis."

"Actual support staff that are assigned to the child and not the whole class."

"Pre-schools should not be allowed to discriminate on the grounds of disability. Too many are just saying they cannot support the child and to remove them."

"Early Years settings should include all wrap around services, OT [Occupational Therapy] and speech therapist should come to the preschool regularly."

"More staff understanding particularly for high masking children who can run into problems and be considered bold when they are purely trying to fit in or regulate."

"Collaboration between families, services, healthcare and education should be intrinsically linked at all times. This still is not happening with gaps and waiting lists."

Education
(Primary and Secondary School)

A significant proportion of our community are of school-going age and continue to face barriers to accessing an inclusive primary and secondary education, in line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*. As with previous years, in keeping with education being a core issue for our community, this report examines the lived experiences of Autistic students and their families within the education system. We asked respondents if their Autistic family member's school place was meeting their needs – **52% said that it was not meeting their needs, compared to 48% who said that it was meeting their needs.**

Respondents also reflected on why their Autistic child's school place was not meeting their needs. The comments below highlight the ongoing challenges in ensuring that the education system is inclusive of Autistic students:

"Teachers have very little awareness of autism and co-existing neurodivergence, as they apparently only get a half days training on same in college training to be Teachers. How is that acceptable in this day and age?"

"Doesn't have full time SNA access, has a different SNA at times throughout the day, no consistency, doesn't use his AAC device, not trained accordingly."

"The sensory room is tiny, and I asked if I could change something and they did the opposite of what I said, I never use the sensory room I hide in the bathroom instead."

"I often describe him as an 'in-betweener' too complex for one system, not complex enough for another. It has been incredibly hard to find a place that truly meets his needs... Children like mine don't fail the system - the system fails to create space for children who exist in the middle."

"She is treated as a "quirky" and sometimes as a difficult neurotypical child. They really struggle to understand and support her profile."

"My daughter had a PDA Profile, and the school just don't get it, I am worn out explaining that my daughter needs choices, we use choices at home, the whole time and it works, there are so many other things too they just don't get PDA."

"The educational setting does not align with functional, sensory, and emotional regulation needs. Masking contributes to an underestimation of distress, while the sustained impact is evident through burnout, anxiety, and reduced capacity for consistent attendance."

Respondents were also asked how inclusive they believed the following educational settings were for Autistic students.

Reflecting on your or your Autistic family member's experience, how inclusive do you feel the following education settings are for Autistic students?

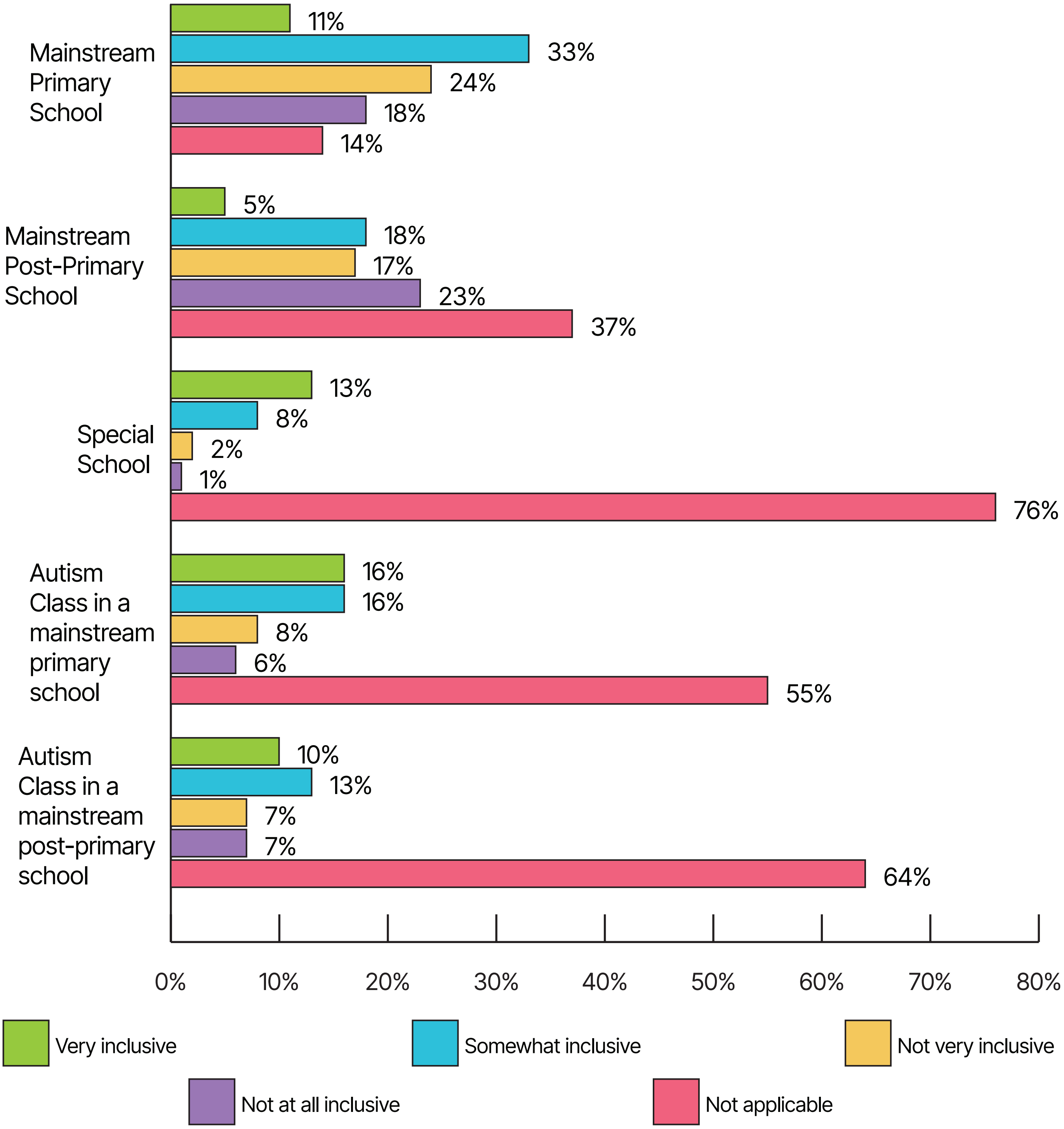


Figure 21

We also asked respondents why they felt that school was not inclusive for their Autistic child. *"Other"* responses, which represent a quarter of all feedback to this question, identify a range of structural and individual barriers including a lack of available school places, the impact of prolonged "school avoidance", and the individual needs of high-masking students who are frequently overlooked by both the special and mainstream education system. **58% of respondents noted the approach and style used in their Autistic child's school did not meet their needs**, whereas 42% noted that their child's school met their learning style.

If you selected "Not very inclusive" or "Not inclusive at all" for any setting, please tell us what the reasons for this are.

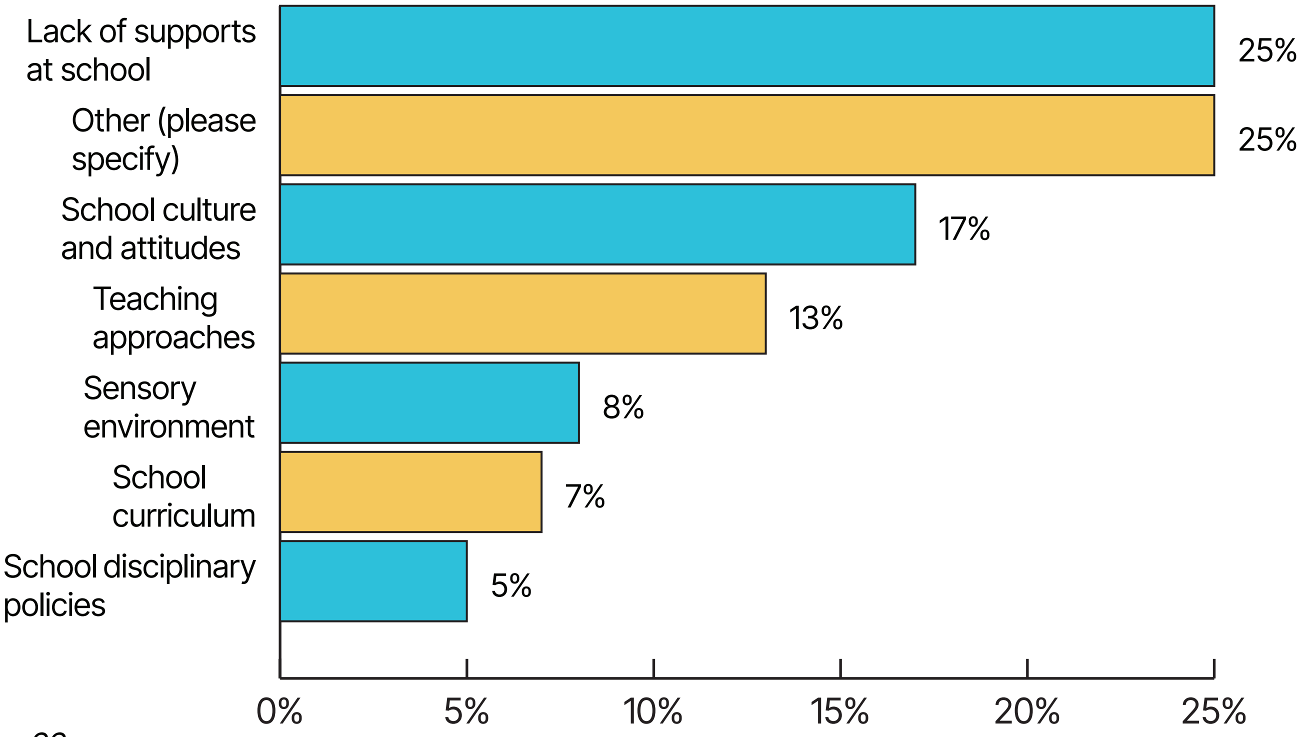


Figure 22

In addition, respondents were asked if their Autistic child experienced any of the following since December 2024 – respondents could identify more than one option in this question:

- 29% said that they experienced reduced timetables,
- 14% experienced seclusion,
- 5% experienced physical restraint,
- 5% experienced suspensions,
- 1% experienced expulsions, and;
- 64% experienced none of the above.

Respondents were also asked about how important they think having an autism diagnosis is to access an autism class. Of those who engaged with this question, 78% supported the idea of requiring an autism diagnosis to access an autism class, in the absence of having a fully inclusive education system. ***54% felt it was very important and 24% felt it was important.*** *A further 15% felt that it was neither important nor unimportant, whilst 6% felt it was not important and 1% felt that it was not important at all.*

AsIAm continues to advocate for an inclusive education system that meets the needs of all Autistic students and will contribute to the National Convention on Education, which aims to shape reforms across the education system. This includes ongoing engagement with the Review of the EPSEN Act and ensuring that Ireland's approach to education aligns with its obligations under the UNCRPD, particularly the right to inclusive education in keeping with Article 24 of the UNCRPD, supported by General Comment No. 4. Whilst a Review into the EPSEN Act was published following a comprehensive examination of the legislation, it has yet to be accompanied by a clear implementation plan, highlighting the need for sustained Government action to deliver on commitments to inclusive education in practice.

We also asked respondents if their Autistic child was supported when making the transition from primary school to secondary school.

How well was your Autistic family member supported by their primary school when transitioning from primary school to secondary school?

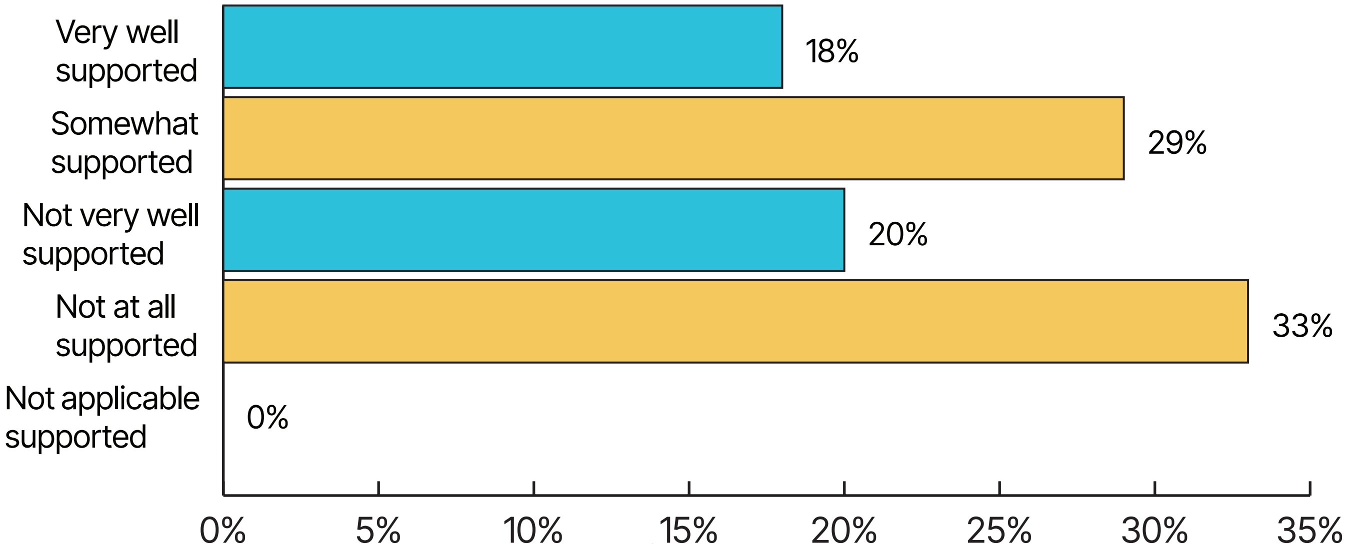


Figure 23

Respondents shared their experiences on how their Autistic child was supported during this transition from primary to secondary school:

"His primary school teacher and SNA took him to visit his secondary school on a few occasions to get him used to it."

"The full file was transferred from primary school to secondary school including meetings. All very well organised."

"Social story about leaving primary school. Secondary teacher visits primary school to meet child. Social story about new school."

"What helped me transition from primary school to secondary school was I did resource and we did the transition to secondary school booklet which would get me prepared for secondary school."

Respondents also highlighted the negative experiences of their Autistic child, when they did not receive any support during the important life phase of transitioning from one school setting to another:

"She did not get a diagnosis until 1st year so there were no supports."

"Communication from their primary school to the new secondary school didn't exist."

"Because he does well academically and masks very well, they thought it was my imagination!"

"A one-page document listing needs doesn't equal a meaningful handover. A proper conversation between teacher/ resource teacher/ SNA input should happen."

"No preparation at all, we did all the prep bringing him to the school to see it and explain everything."

Eamon's Story

A child named Eamon who uses an electronic communication device has just started school. After the first day, the teacher informs the parents that Eamon will not be allowed to use the device in school. The teacher said Eamon was pressing all the buttons, which made noise. Eamon's parents explain this is part of him learning how to use the device.

The principal has said that this communication method is not in use in the school, and the child must use the school's system, which has not worked for Eamon in the past. The class teacher and SNA (Special Needs Assistant) are willing to attend training for the electronic communication device; however, the principal says the school cannot invest the time or the money in this. She also has concerns that the device is noisy and Eamon will distract both himself and other children, or every child in the class will want one like his.

Fiacre Ryan

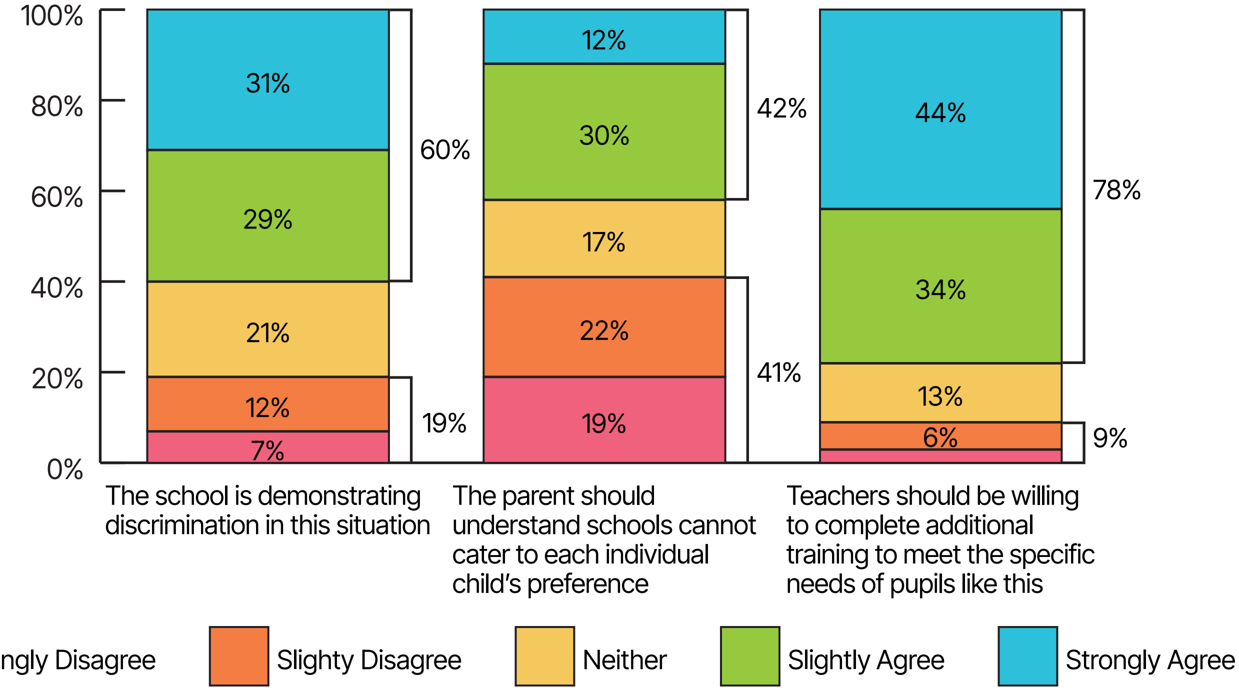
Why did you want to ask the Irish public this question?

"I was told that I could not use my communication device at school, however my parents objected and got this decision reversed. I then used it for state exams and recently graduated from university having used it throughout my course. I believe I have a right to reasonable accomodations, and my preferred communication method."

What do you want the public to know about this issue?

"Being able to communicate and express my thoughts and feelings is a basic human right. It enables me to interact with my environment, socialise, integrate into my community and access education and other supports towards independent living. Taking away an individual's voice is cruel and morally wrong. Please advocate for non-speakers to have all forms of communication and thinking valued, respected and supported."

AsIAm put Eamon's story to the public and found that:



- Support for teacher training is very strong, with 78% agreeing staff should be willing to build the skills needed to support pupils like Eamon. Even so, 60% see the school's response as discriminatory, suggesting the public expects schools to do more before drawing the line.

Consent and Access to Sexual Health and Wellbeing

As with last year's Same Chance Report, which documented Autistic family members' experiences of consent and sex education during their Autistic child's school years, this year's report continues to explore this important topic.

Respondents were asked if they felt the sex education their Autistic child receives or has received in school is adapted to be accessible to them. The insights below highlight the urgent need for the Department of Education and Youth to provide the necessary supports and resources to ensuring that sexual health and wellbeing education is accessible to Autistic students. These findings also align with a report published by AsIAm in partnership with the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's We-Consent project and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), titled ***Autistic People's Understanding of Consent and their Right to Protection from Sexual Harm***, which highlighted significant gaps in accessible consent education for Autistic people.

Do you feel the sex education your Autistic family member receives/received in school is adapted to be accessible to them?

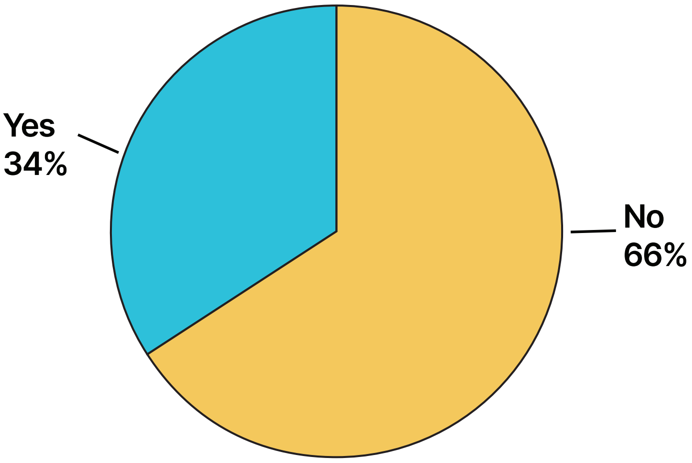


Figure 24

Respondents were also asked if they had access to resources to help teach their Autistic child about consent:

Do you feel you have access to resources to help you teach your Autistic family member about consent?

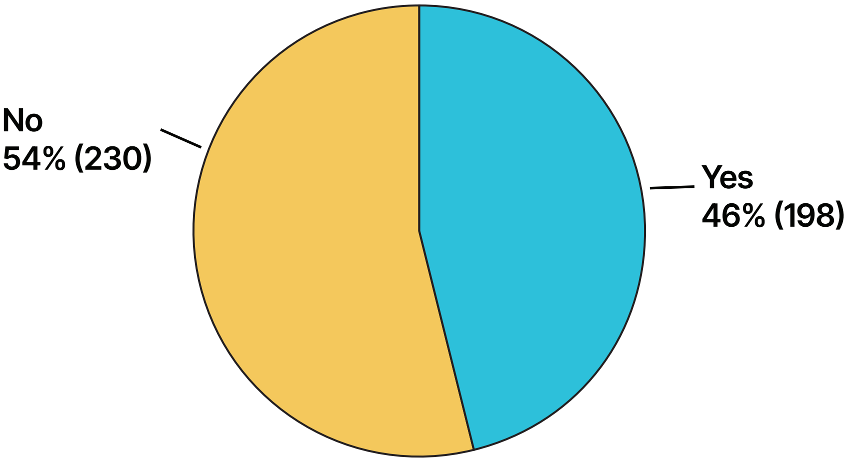


Figure 25

Finally, we asked respondents about what changes they, or their Autistic family member, want to see from a future *National Autism Strategy* that would make the education system more inclusive for the Autistic community.

"It should be easy to extrapolate from the number of children in Autism Classes in Primary schools, how many spaces will be needed at minimum at second level... There should be an easy transition."

"Recognise that high masking Autistic children need support in school. They are NOT 'fine'. They are exhausted from masking all day and eventually burnout. There is no strengths-based intervention. Everything is deficit based."

"No child needs to sit in a chair all day. Outdated teaching and teachers need more courses about autism... Movement breaks, no homework or understanding that if it's not completed that's not because they didn't want to but are burnt out."

"Changes to the way 'bad' behaviour is approached, rather than assume bad behaviour needs to be punished, ask why it's happened does the child feel overwhelmed? And understand a lot of school punishments are archaic."

"'Nothing about us without us', greater consultation with Autistic children and their families on how best to facilitate school environments that supports learning and inclusion in supporting their sensitive nervous system and sensory needs."

Further and Higher Education

Access to Further and Higher Education is a key pathway for Autistic people to exercising their rights to independence, employment, social inclusion and participation in community life. However, as with previous years, this year's Same Chance Report highlights that barriers remain to full participation in Further and Higher Education. Respondents shared their perspectives on whether they believed Further and Higher Education settings to be accessible:

Based on your or your Autistic family member's experiences, are Further and Higher Education settings accessible to Autistic people?

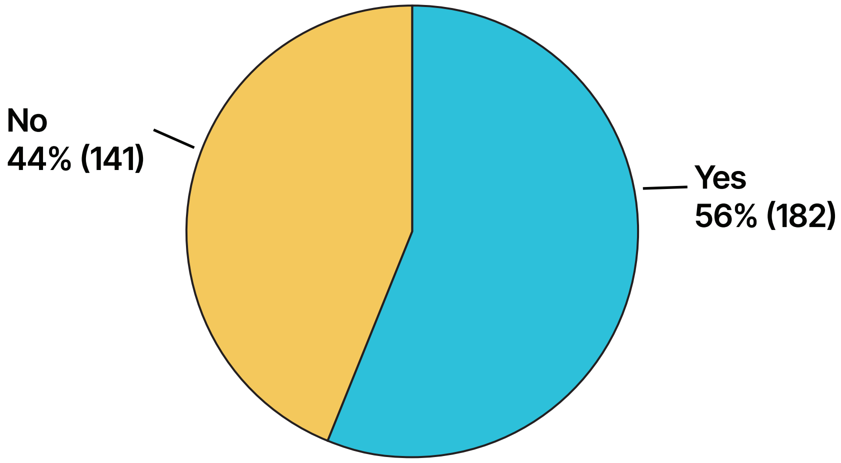


Figure 26

We also asked if they or their Autistic family member attended a Further or Higher Education setting, such as University over the past five years – 16% attended a Further Education setting, 25% went to Higher Education, 6% did both, with 53% not attending any of these settings in the past five years.

In addition, respondents were surveyed on how accessible their Further or Higher Education experience was.

How accessible was the Further or Higher Education Institute you or your Autistic family member attended overall?

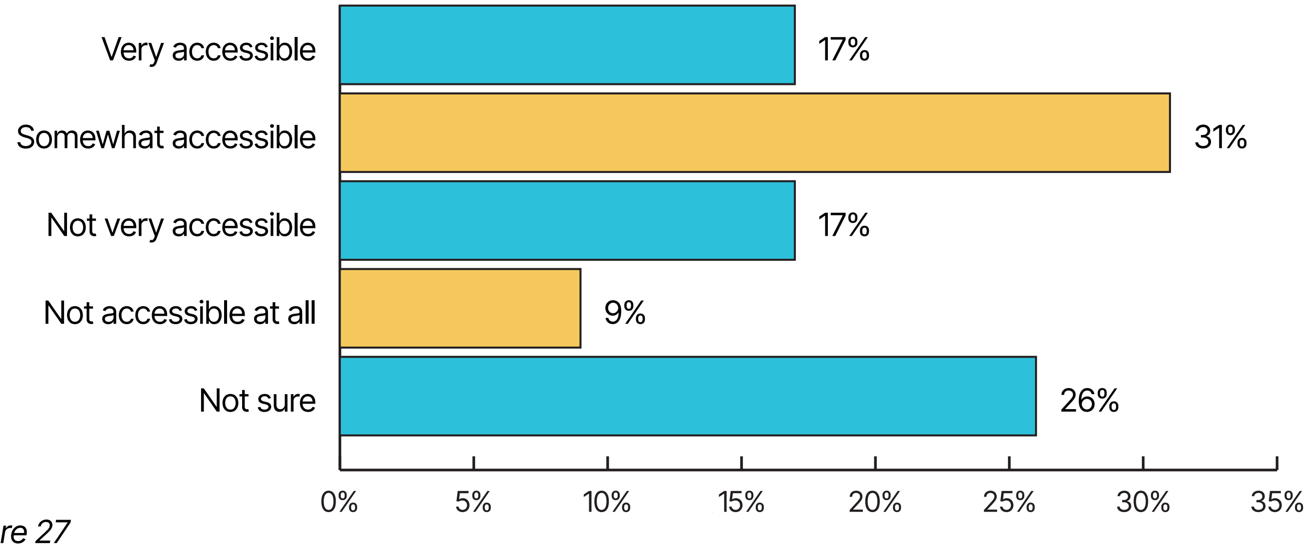


Figure 27

Although 48% found their experience to be accessible in some way, many respondents also highlighted challenges they faced when attending their Further and Education Institute. *Figure 28* below highlights some of these experiences:

Which areas were challenging, if any?

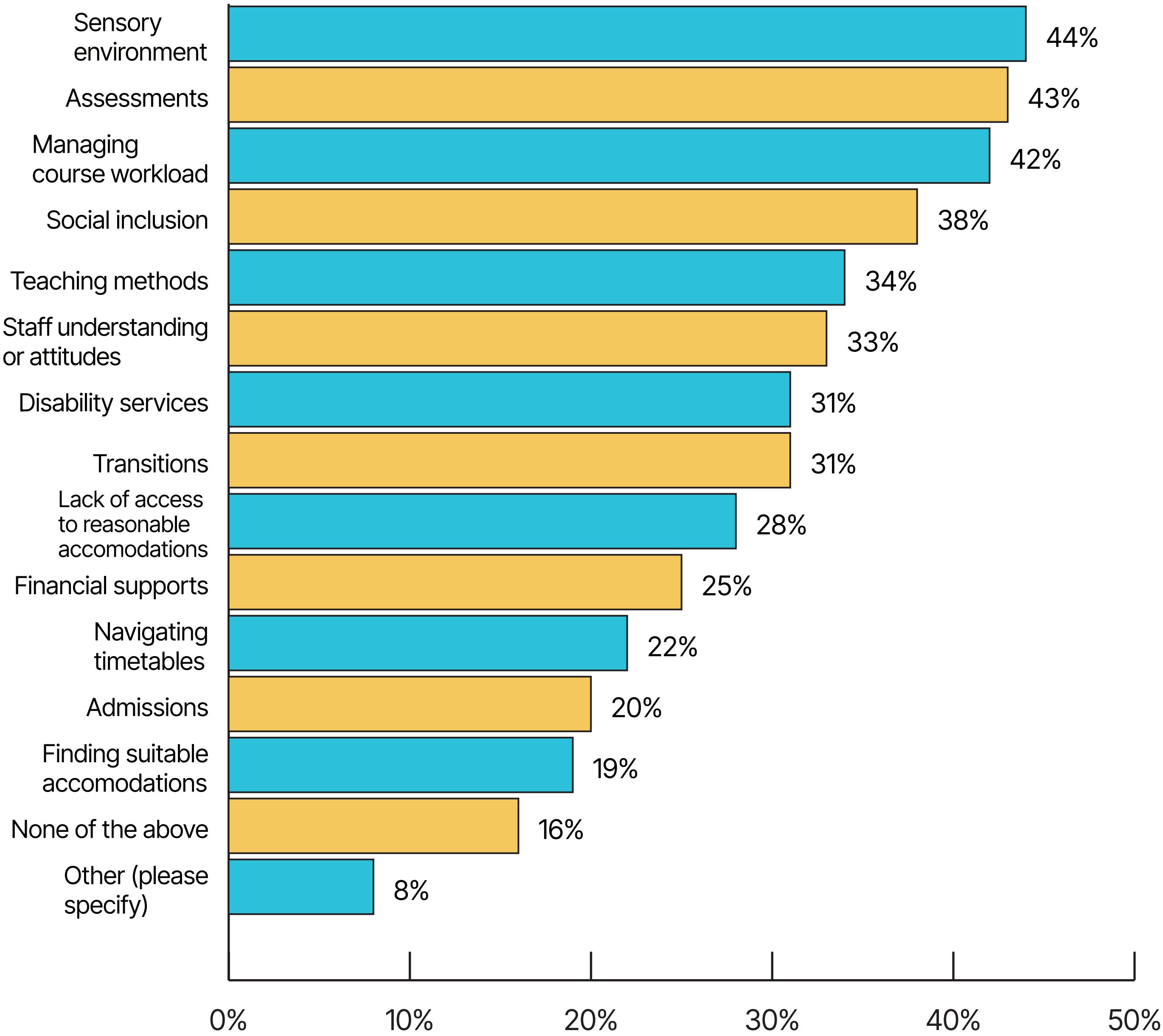


Figure 28

Other barriers highlighted by respondents include not being able to access remote learning, lack of support due to late diagnosis, difficulties with accessing transport and being required to participate in presentations and group projects. Respondents also shared their perspectives regarding the support received, if any, during the transition from secondary school to Further or Higher Education settings.

How well were you or your Autistic family member supported (from school staff) when transitioning from secondary school to Further or Higher Education?

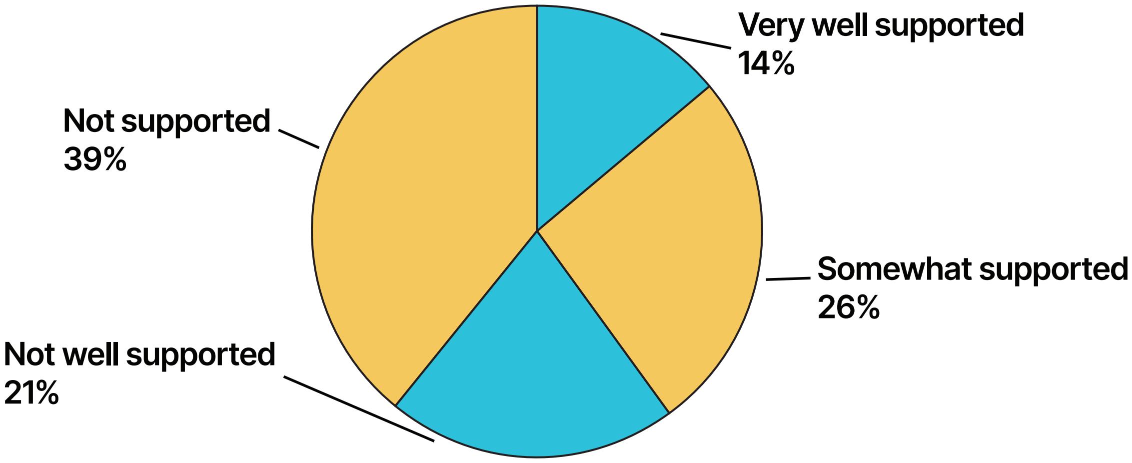


Figure 29

Finally, we asked respondents to select a range of options on what they want to see in a future *National Autism Strategy* that would improve Autistic students' experiences in Further and Higher Education settings, respondents could choose more than one option to this question:

- 79% reported autism-informed training for lecturers and staff
- 66% reported clear national standards for supports and accommodations
- 65% reported more sensory-friendly learning environments
- 63% reported stronger links to employment and wider supports
- 60% reported better transition supports into college and training
- 60% reported more consistent disability services across institutions
- 52% reported stronger student voice in policy and decision-making
- 41% reported better data on access, participation and outcomes

9% of other respondents shared they wanted to see more support with:

- Managing course workloads,
- Securing graduate roles after completing their degree,
- Making courses more accessible remotely,
- Keeping mental health supports when making the transition into university and;
- Greater understanding throughout their student journey.

Access to Disability Services

As with previous Same Chance Reports, access to Disability Services remains a key concern for our community. We asked respondents what services they engage with:

Which of the following services do you or your Autistic family member currently engage with?

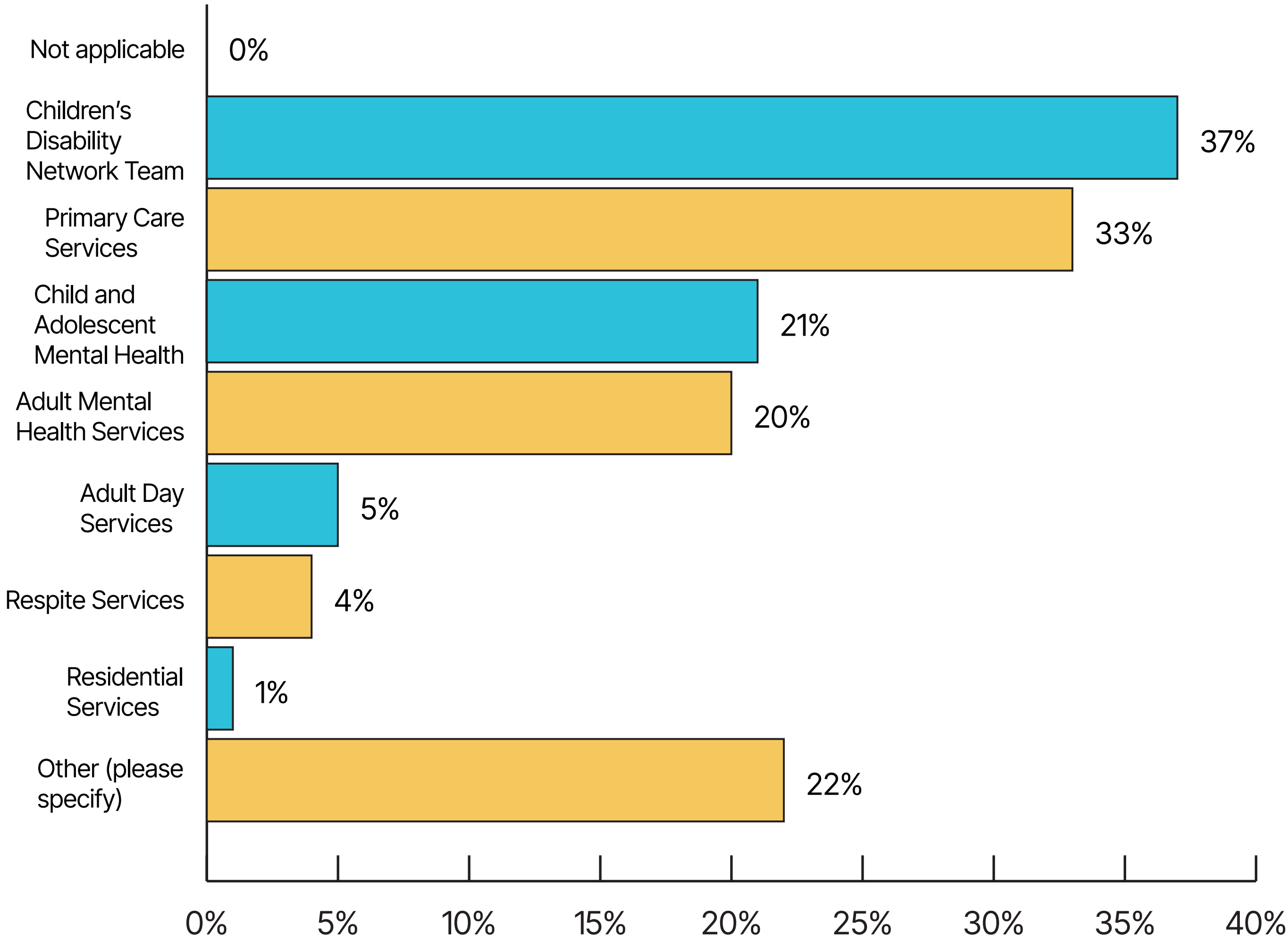


Figure 30

22% of respondents who replied 'Other' confirmed that they were:

- On a waiting list for services,
- Struggling to access the supports they require,
- Accessing supports privately,
- Accessing post-diagnostic supports.

Respondents were also asked how accessible disability services are to them or their Autistic family member in their community:

- 8% reported that they were very accessible.
- 24% reported that they were somewhat accessible.
- 52% reported that they were not so accessible.
- 16% reported that they were not accessible at all.

We also asked what made it difficult for them to access these services:

- 73% said long waiting times.
- 48% said poor communication from services.
- 43% said services not meeting their or their Autistic family member's needs.
- 42% said lack of local services.
- 35% said difficulty navigating the system.
- 31% said services not being autism-specific or neuro-affirmative.
- 25% said a lack of funding.
- 22% said not meeting eligibility criteria.

15% of respondents shared other experiences they faced, including uncertainty around how the service will support them, being only accepted into services during a crisis, accessing one-to-one support, the cost and availability of services and lack of consistency and continuity of services.

For families who are on a waiting list to access disability services, we asked how long they were waiting to access services. *Figure 31* below highlights the scale of how long Autistic people and families must wait for supports within the system:

If on a waiting list, how long in total have you or your Autistic family member been waiting to access these services to date?

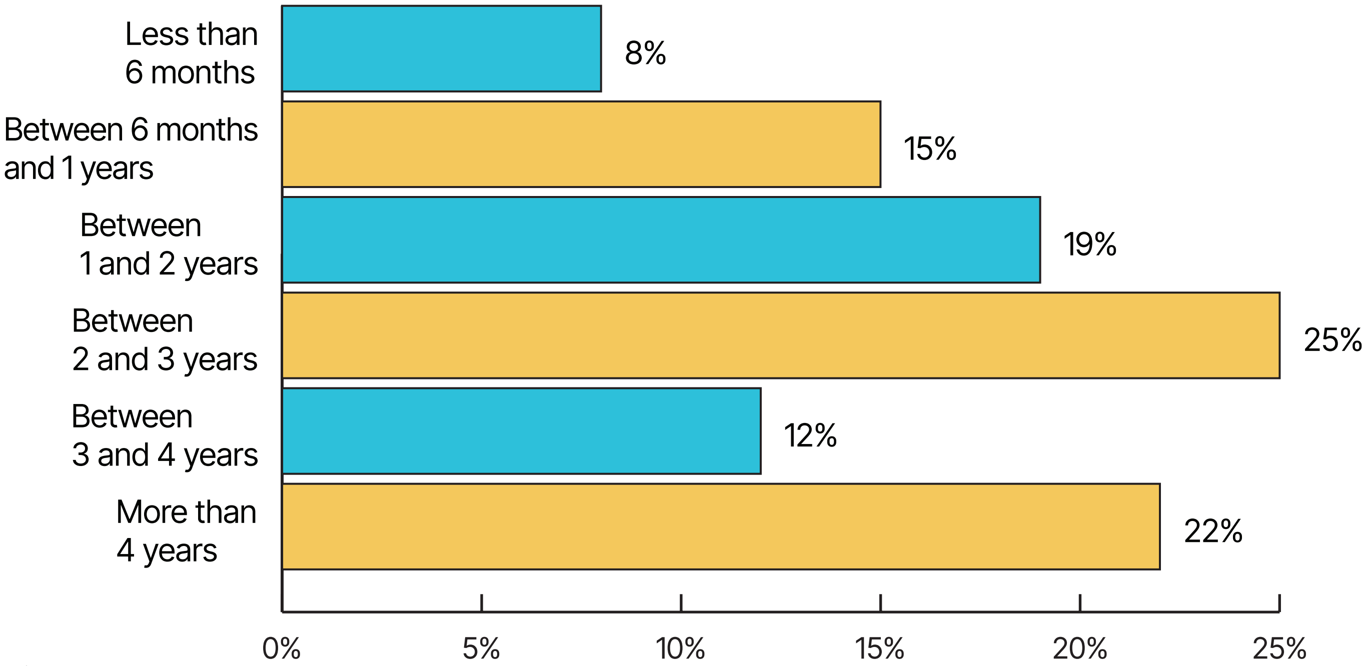


Figure 31

Respondents were also asked if they or their Autistic family member were supported when making the transition from secondary school to adult services (e.g. disability services, day services, employment supports):

How well were you or your Autistic family member supported when transitioning from secondary school to adult services (e.g. disability services, day services, employment supports)?

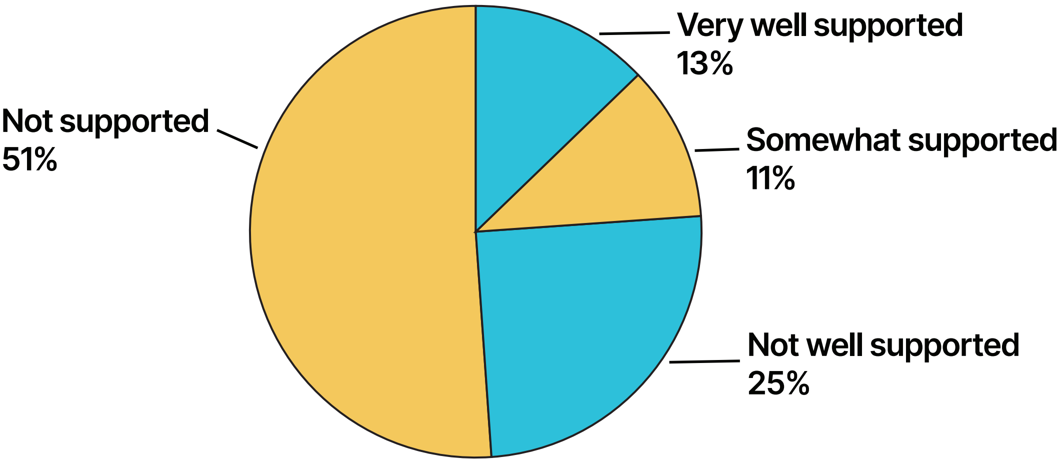


Figure 32

Respondents shared what supports they found helpful when making the transition from secondary school to adult services:

"My daughter has an Aspect worker, and she has been a fantastic support in helping her sibling to navigate life as an adult, so grateful to have this support for her."

"He left school age 17 went to NLN then onto PLC very well supported in NLN."

"Multiple trips to day services, favourite SNA accompanied."

"My therapist in CAMHS kept me for another year to help me transition which was so lovely."

"We had great support from the HSE Opportunities Officer and the Personalised Budget Officer."

"Guidance Counsellor and matching with new young adult spaces and new college supports that became available because of new funding."

Respondents also shared their experiences on how they were not supported when transitioning to adult day services, and what supports they felt were missing:

> *"They send you back to the GP without services the day you turn 18 and are left to navigate alone. I myself suffered significant regression in progress I had made as a result."*

> *"No services available to me due to lack of diagnosis so had to navigate workplace accommodations myself."*

Access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication

As with last year's report, respondents were asked questions about their experiences with accessing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices. First, they were asked whether they or their Autistic family member would benefit from access to an AAC device. The findings in *Figure 33* below reflect the views of respondents for who this related to:

In your view, would you or your Autistic family member benefit from access to an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device?

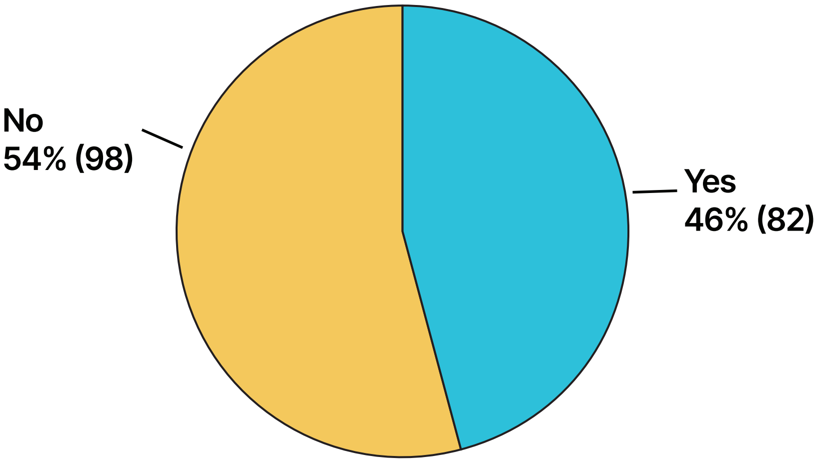


Figure 33

We also asked about their or their Autistic family member's situation regarding accessing an AAC device:

If you answered "Yes" to the last question, can you please tell us what you or your Autistic family member(s) situation is when it comes to accessing a device?

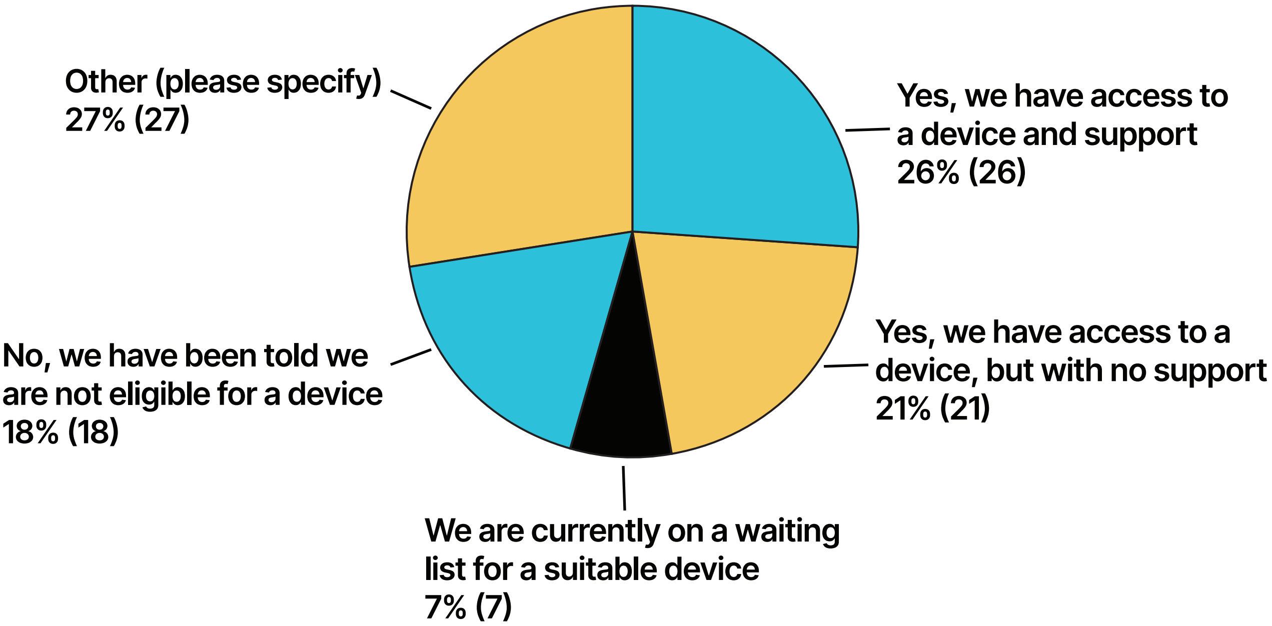


Figure 34

The report also explored the specific challenges respondents faced when trying to secure an AAC device for themselves or their Autistic family member. Respondents highlighted barriers including long waiting times, inconsistent eligibility criteria and a lack of follow-up support once a device was received. **The experiences shared below illustrate these challenges in more detail:**

"Took way too long to receive a device... took us over 3 years to secure one."

"We had to source and fund an AAC device by ourselves... due to long waiting lists."

"I contacted school, they told me CDNT needs to do this, but CDNT said school, so being bounced from one to the other."

"No follow up training or support for the first 3 years of having it... we finally got official training... 3 years too late."

"My daughter is in the 4th percentile for handwriting, but I was told... only 2 percentile or below and would not qualify for AAC."

Other barriers that respondents shared included, having to navigate long waiting lists for Speech and Language Therapy, needing more awareness of AAC options, and navigating fragmented disability services to access devices.

Assessment of Need (AON)

The Assessment of Need (AON) process is a key mechanism through which children with disabilities in Ireland are assessed to identify their health and support needs under the *Disability Act 2005.* For many families of Autistic children, this process represents the first formal step in accessing services and supports. However, respondents continue to face persistent and worsening barriers to accessing these supports within the public health system. In this context, the Government has proposed amendments to the Assessment of Need process and committed to a wider review into the *Disability Act 2005.* AsIAm's engagement in this process highlights the need for any reforms to strengthen the Autistic community's rights to timely and effective assessments and supports, in line with Ireland's obligations under the UNCRPD.

Among those who had previously engaged with the Assessment of Need process, a combined **75% of respondents reported experiencing issues with the current system in practice.**

How accessible do you or your Autistic family member find the Assessment of Needs (AON) process if you or your Autistic family member has engaged with it? (This is the statutory process used within the HSE to identify health and education supports for children under 18 under the Disability Act 2025.)

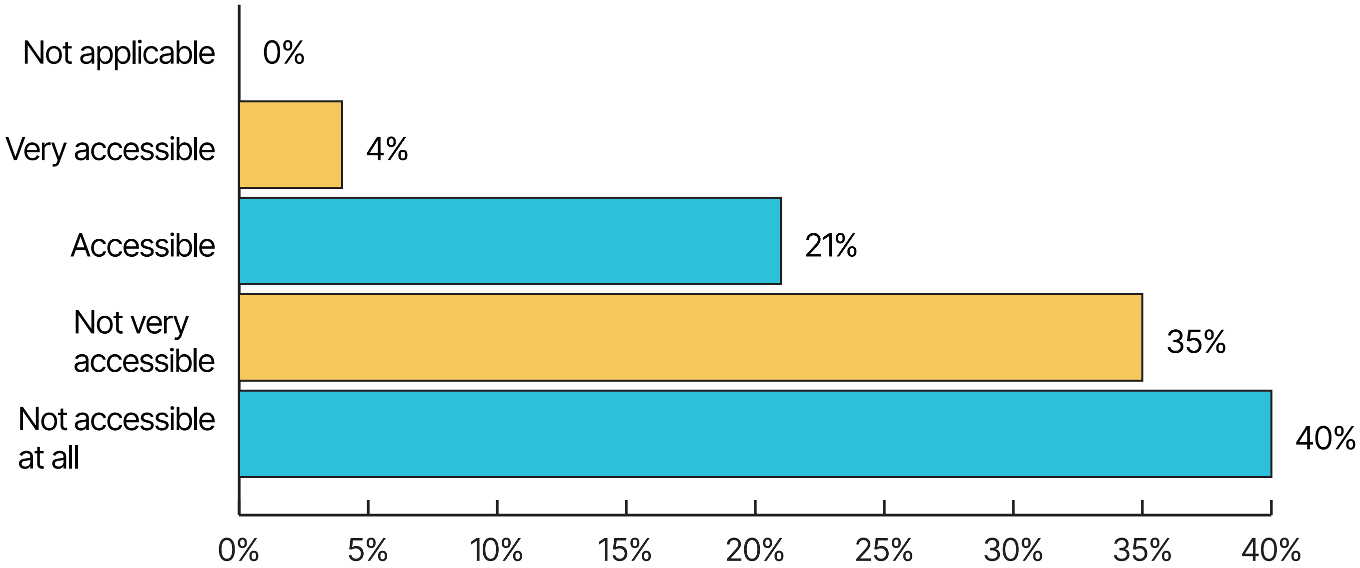


Figure 35

Respondents were also asked about their experiences of navigating the Assessment of Need (AON) process. The insights below provide a snapshot of the challenges many families face when engaging with the AON system:

"Waited 2 years on the list. Made complaint to HSE, complaint upheld, and deadline for completion was set out by court."

"AON went over the six months, when I wrote to complain, my daughter's name was placed on another internal waiting list."

"Took just over a year from my initial application... afterwards has been very disappointing. The recommendations are not being followed, and I've had to fight on his behalf to access services."

"I found the whole process very overwhelming and confusing."

Across responses, families consistently described the Assessment of Need process as slow, complex and frequently in breach of statutory timelines, with many reporting wait times far exceeding the six-month legal timeframe. Even when assessments were completed, respondents highlighted a persistent gap between getting an assessment and access to recommended services, leaving families to pursue complaints, advocacy or access supports privately to meet the needs of their Autistic family member.

Respondents were also asked which changes would improve the AON process:

Which of the following changes would make the AON process better?

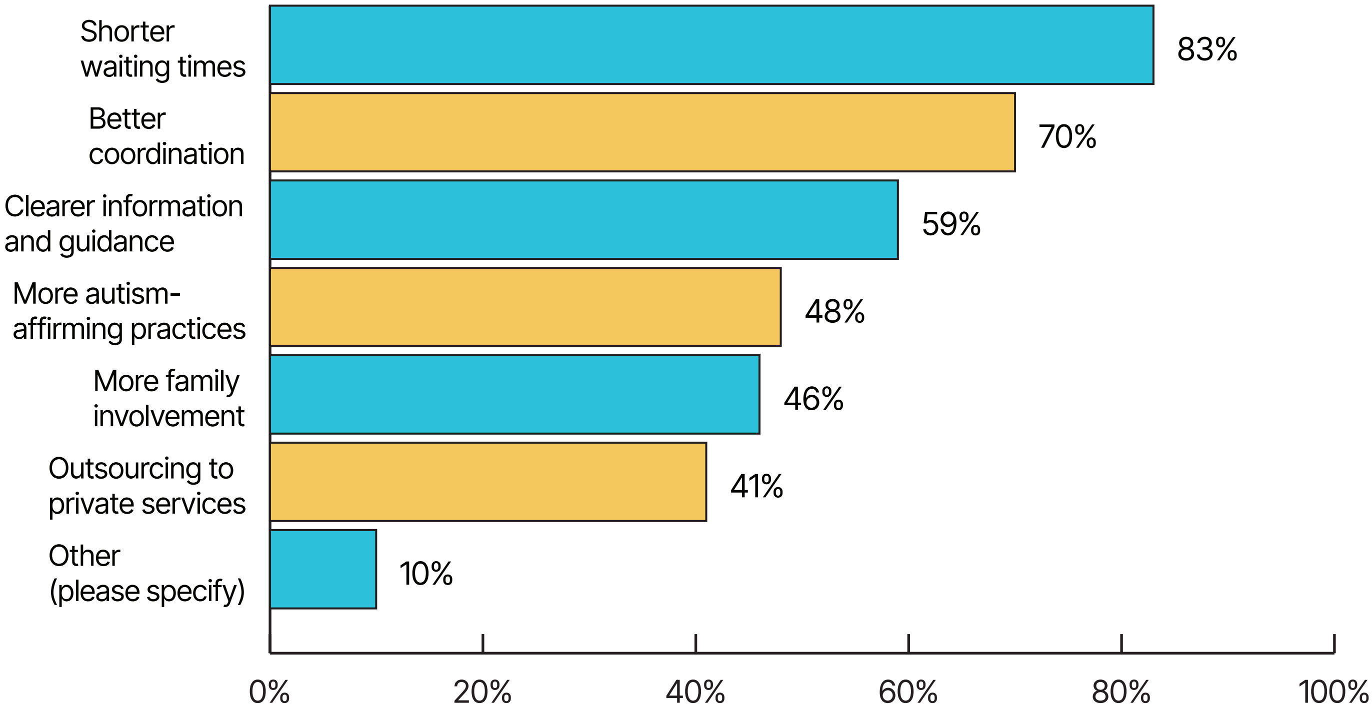


Figure 36

10% of respondents shared ‘other’ responses like the following:

> *“Ideally having staff and resources, but as a default private service for assessment but that leaves disjointed care after diagnosis.”*

> *“Broader scope, diagnosed with both autism and ADHD but everything is one step at a time. From AON referral to diagnosis in public system took 5 years. Same process for another child privately took 2 months privately and was done concurrently.”*

> *“Wording of legislation not optimal. The confirmation or ruling out of a diagnosis is useful (not just a statement of services). Stage 1 of the process (assessment by an “Assessment Officer”), is being used to deny children full assessments and to cut waiting lists and is not fit for purpose.”*

* * *

Responses from respondents below indicate post-diagnostic supports remain largely unavailable to many Autistic people and their families.

After receiving an autism diagnosis, were post-diagnostic supports available to you or your Autistic family member?

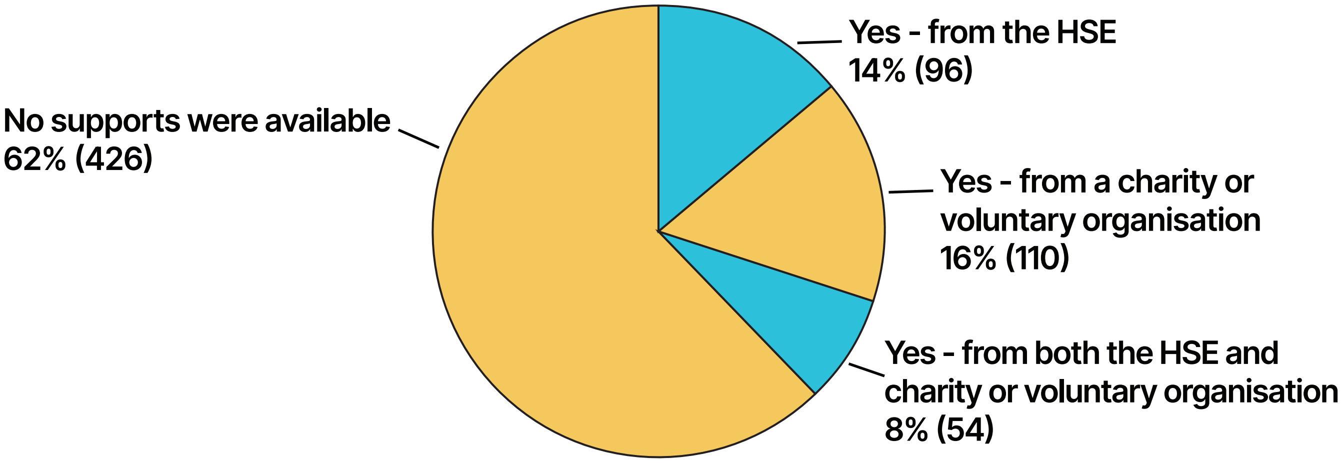


Figure 37

Social Protection and Meeting the Cost of Living

Social protection plays a vital role in ensuring that Autistic people and families have the resources needed to meet their essential everyday needs to participate fully in society. Payments such as the Disability Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Carer's Allowance provide an important source of income for many Autistic people and families.

Over the past year, AsIAm has engaged extensively on issues relating to social protection and the continually rising cost of living, including on proposals to introduce a Cost of Disability payment. However, consistent with previous years, findings from this year's *Same Chance* report, which highlighted both the financial pressures faced by many Autistic people and families and the critical role these supports play in helping households make ends meet.

However, Autistic people and families frequently report that accessing these supports can be emotionally demanding, even distressing and humiliating, with application and appeals processes often requiring respondents to repeatedly document their needs and disclose sensitive personal information to show they are eligible for supports. Many Autistic people and families tell us that that they are treated with suspicion for even looking for supports.

Reflecting these barriers, **we found that 77% of respondents did not find the social protection system to be accessible to Autistic people**, whereas 23% of people did – a significant increase from 2025's report where 64% did not believe the social protection system is inclusive of Autistic people.

Do you or your Autistic family member believe that the social protection system is accessible to Autistic people?

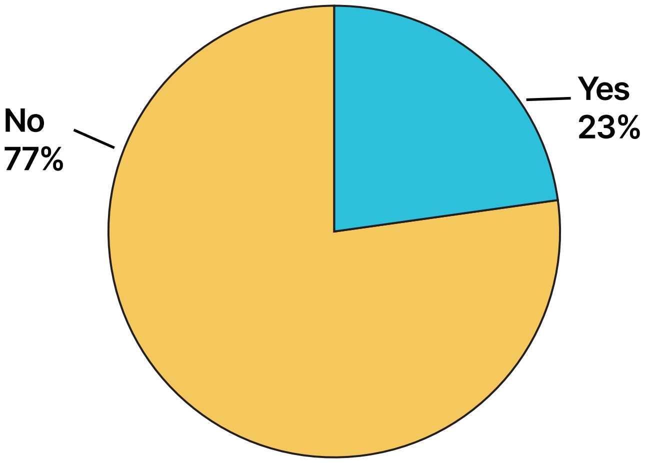


Figure 38

Reasons they shared why the social protection system was not accessible included:

"Autism is not seen as "enough" of a disability, even when coupled with multiple co-occurring conditions to receive financial supports. However, I am then forced into taking extensive sick leave and into a vicious burnout cycle because I cannot cope but cannot afford time off."

"My lifelong disability was initially described as not lifelong when applying for benefits, only when I appealed was my disability seen as legitimately lifelong."

"Being rejected for supports regardless of copious documents. The documents were not read, and we received a copy and paste careless response. There is absolutely no empathy or understanding just a quota or even a policy to reject everyone for support. We have had nothing but appalling experiences with the public system."

"Practical barriers to formal diagnosis and medical certification (private healthcare costs), and then acknowledgement of 'severe' impacts of Autism in high-masking, late diagnosed adults. We can often 'push through' at work at the cost of severe burnout and health impairments but then be seen as 'capable of employment' and ineligible for welfare."

If you answered "No" to the last question, please tell us why you or your Autistic family member believe that the social protection system is not accessible to Autistic people.

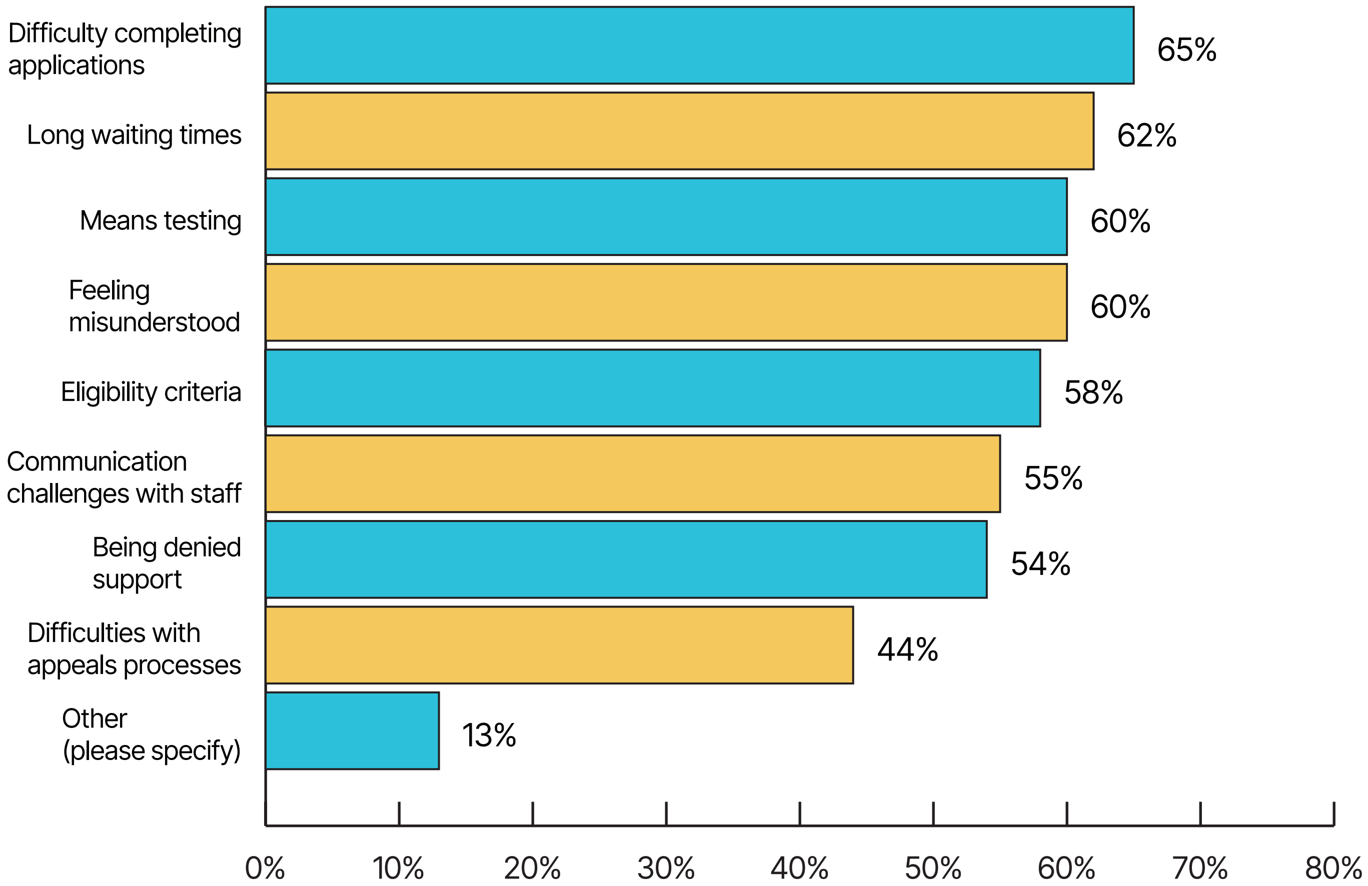


Figure 39

13% of respondents *(see Figure 39)* who shared other responses highlight that the social protection system is often only accessible through significant advocacy from families due to a pervasive lack of clear information and a bureaucratic environment described as *"adversarial"* or hostile.

Additionally, many respondents emphasise that the system frequently dismisses the disabling impact of being Autistic, particularly for Autistic people who are high-masking, often deeming them *"too capable"* for support, despite having to navigate burnout and significant disabling barriers to their full participation in society and community.

We also asked if respondents were in receipt of disability social protection payments – of those that this question applied to, 62% said that they were in receipt of these payments whilst 38% said that they were not in receipt of disability payments. Below shows a breakdown of the type of social protection payments currently being received by respondents.

- 41% were in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- 33% were in receipt of Disability Allowance.
- 8% were in receipt of Carer's Allowance.
- 4% preferred not to say.
- 2% were in receipt of Illness Benefit.
- 1% were in receipt of Invalidity Pension.
- 11% responded 'Other'.

3% of respondents “strongly agreed” that current payment rates of disability social protection payments were enough to meet their/their family member(s) needs, and 10% of respondents “agreed” that current rates are enough to meet their needs. 19% neither “agreed nor disagreed” that rates were enough. 30% “disagreed” that payments were enough to meet their needs, and 38% “strongly disagreed” that these payments currently met their needs, 68% in total.

If you or your Autistic family member are in receipt of disability-specific social welfare payment(s), do you agree that the current payment rates are enough to meet your or your Autistic family member(s) needs?

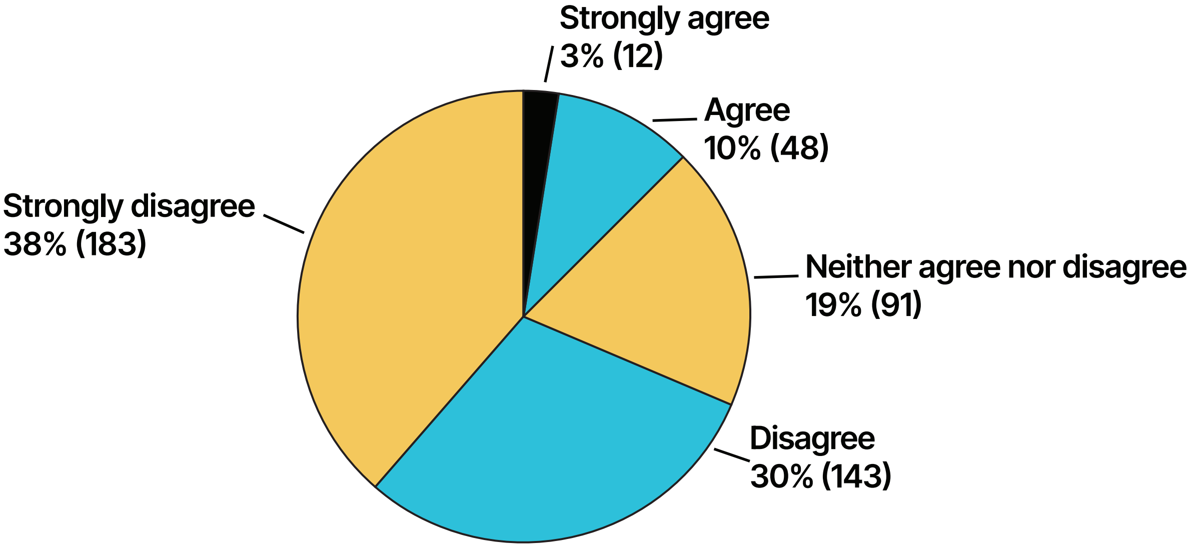


Figure 40

Considering the changes to social protection announced in Budget 2026, 1% felt much better off financially than in 2025, 5% felt better off that in 2025, 51% felt that they were about the same, 30% felt worse off financially, and 13% felt much worse off financially – a significant increase from last year's report.

To better understand the impact of eligibility criteria for supports such as Disability Allowance and Carer's Allowance, respondents were asked to share their experiences.

The Government has made a commitment to abolish the means test for disability social protection payments, such as Carer's Allowance. What do you want to see happen to the means test within the next year (i.e. Budget 2027)?

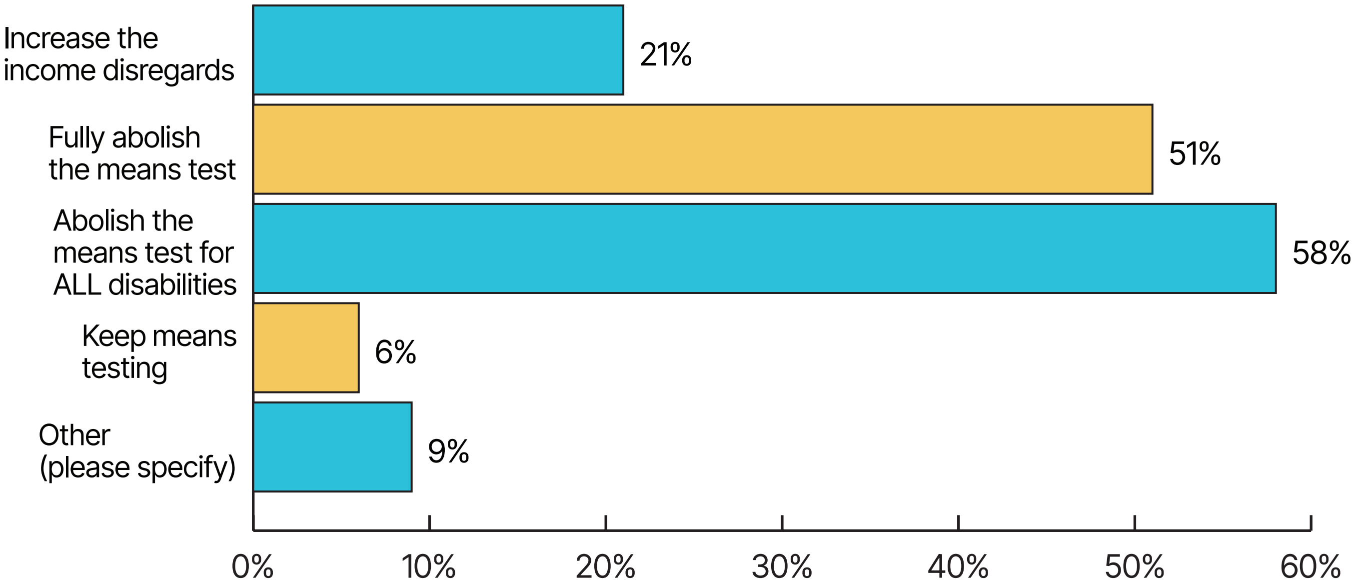


Figure 41

9% of respondents also shared a range of experiences, including one community member saying: *"People should not be forced into poverty because they have a disability".* **Another said that** *"I think the means testing process is too complicated to get past, extremely difficult to get approved for things".* Another also said that "Base the payment on the needs of the Autistic individual and not their family's income". These insights show the need for a change within the social protection system, and the requirement to create a more human rights-based approach to the social protection system.

Meeting the Costs of Disability

Autistic people and families have been significantly impacted by rising living costs and inflation in recent years. Many in our community report increased costs for everyday essentials such as food, heating, electricity and clothing, alongside additional expenses associated with supports, therapies and services. These financial pressures often mean that families must reduce working hours or take on greater caring responsibilities to support an Autistic family member. Autistic people and their families are more likely to experience poverty and financial hardship, reflecting the well-documented link between disability, poverty and social exclusion.

A recent report from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) titled ***'Adjusting Estimates of Poverty for the Cost of Disability'*** highlighted that these costs can be significantly higher than once believed. Coupled with inflation, additional costs related to disability ranged between €488 and €555 per week (€25,376-€28,860 per year), significantly higher than the Indecon ***Cost of Disability Report***. This report also states that for households with a family member with high support needs, they would need an income increase of 93% to achieve this same standard of living.

As an organisation, we believe that poverty should not be an inevitable part of being Autistic or raising an Autistic child, and that families must be recognised, supported and fairly resourced by the State to ensure they have the same chance to participate fully in society.

Reflecting the intrinsic and interconnected relationship between poverty and disability, respondents strongly believed that they face additional costs on the grounds of being Autistic or raising an Autistic family member.

Do you or your Autistic family member believe that there are any additional costs on the grounds of being Autistic, or raising an Autistic family member?

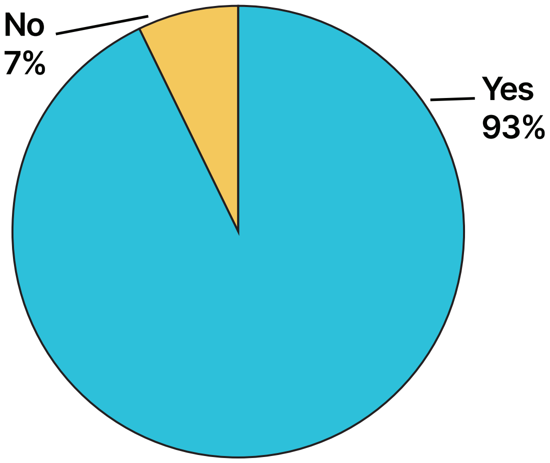


Figure 42

We also asked respondents to offer examples of these costs, and these include:

> *"No public therapies available, all our therapies are private. E.g. one of ours at the moment is €130 for 50 min session once a week. Took us 3 years to get it. The price of assessments".*

> *"I could not attend school without noise cancelling headphones, which are expensive… Everything 'sensory' is more expensive 'Sensory Experiences e.g Sensory Santa', Sensory toys and equipment".*

> *"I have strong dislikes for certain clothing and must buy more expensive clothing just to get things like removable tags".*

> *"Regular household damage/ breakages etc due to child's struggles with things… more expense to replace things… Items get lost/ misplaced regularly… same with equipment/furniture getting damaged".*

> *"One parent giving up work to care loss of earnings… Higher home heating costs and higher food/ clothes shopping costs to support their highly sensitive nervous and sensory systems".*

AsIAm and many other disability organisations have consistently called on the Government to introduce a specific Cost of Disability payment. The ***Programme for Government*** recognises the importance of this payment and support for Disabled people. This payment, if introduced effectively would cover these additional costs and support our community with daily life and would support Autistic people to meet their access needs. This was particularly reflected in the views of respondents, with 98% believing that such a Cost of Disability payment should be introduced.

Do you think that a Cost of Disability payment should be introduced to address the additional cost of living as an Autistic person or raising an Autistic family member?

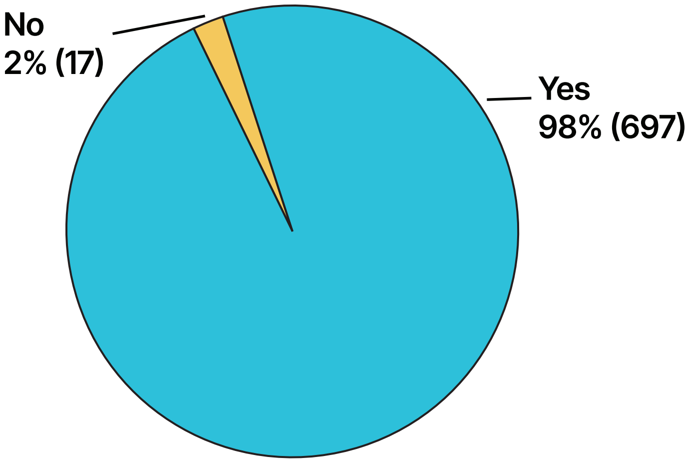


Figure 43

Considering the Government's commitment to introduce a Cost of Disability payment, we asked respondents about what costs they wished to see included in a future Cost of Disability payment. Some extra costs that respondents want this payment to cover include:

The Government has committed to implementing a Cost of Disability payment over its lifetime. This payment is intended to recognise and address the additional everyday costs that disabled people face because of their disability or support needs. What costs do you or your Autistic family member want to see included in a future Cost of Disability payment?

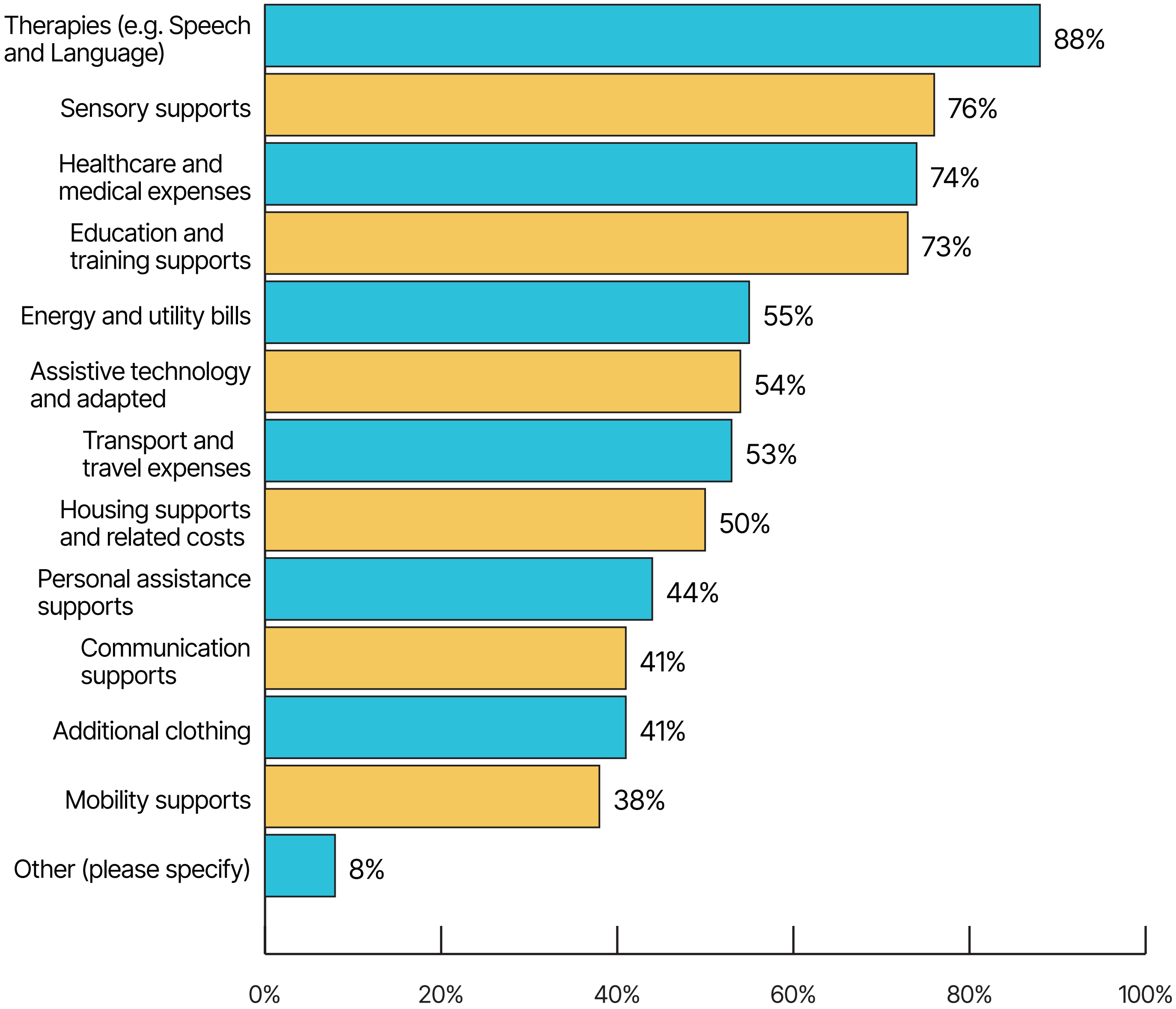


Figure 44

8% of respondents would like to see the Cost of Disability payment cover other expenses like specialised medication, pet supports, home support, supports at work, meeting their sensory regulation needs, counselling and mental health supports, dietary needs and legal supports.

Employment and Self-Employment

Employment and self-employment are important pathways for Autistic adults to achieve independence, financial security and meaningful participation in society. Through our engagement with respondents, many Autistic adults want to work, particularly in roles that align with their interests, skills and passions. However, Autistic people continue to face significant barriers both in accessing employment and in sustaining work once employed. These barriers also extend to recruitment practices that do not accommodate neurodivergent communication styles, limited workplace understanding of autism, and a lack of appropriate supports or reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Over the past year, AsIAm has been working with employers by introducing initiatives which aim to address the barriers to employment and has made policy submissions to the Department in relation to the ***Roadmap for Social Inclusion*** and the ***Pathways to Work Strategy***. These submissions highlight the structural barriers to employment that Autistic people continue to face. In addition to this, AsIAm's ***Strategic Plan 2025-2030*** aims to support employers embrace a roadmap to systematically and measurably increase access to employment opportunities for Autistic people, and support them to pursuing their chosen career paths.

Reflecting this commitment, AsIAm partnered with Ibec to publish the ***Roadmap for Autism and Employment*** which sets out coordinated actions to tackle these structural barriers and make workplaces more inclusive for Autistic people. We also recently worked with Insurance Ireland to develop the ***Autism Accessible Employer Charter***, an industry-wide commitment where companies pledge to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of Autistic employees within the Insurance industry.

For those that engaged in this aspect of the research on employment, 45% reported that they were currently in paid employment. A further 15% indicated that they were not in paid employment but would like to have a job, whilst 6% were self-employed or running their own business. However, 10% reported that they were not currently seeking work, and 5% said they would like to pursue self-employment in the future and a further 2% preferred not to say.

Among the 17% of respondents who shared other experiences, some were working weekends whilst in education, were in retirement, on career breaks, volunteering, on sick leave or were family carers.

We also asked respondents if they had any positive experiences in the workplace or while looking for work in the past 12 months.

Have you or your Autistic family member had any positive experiences in the workplace or while looking for work in the past 12 months?

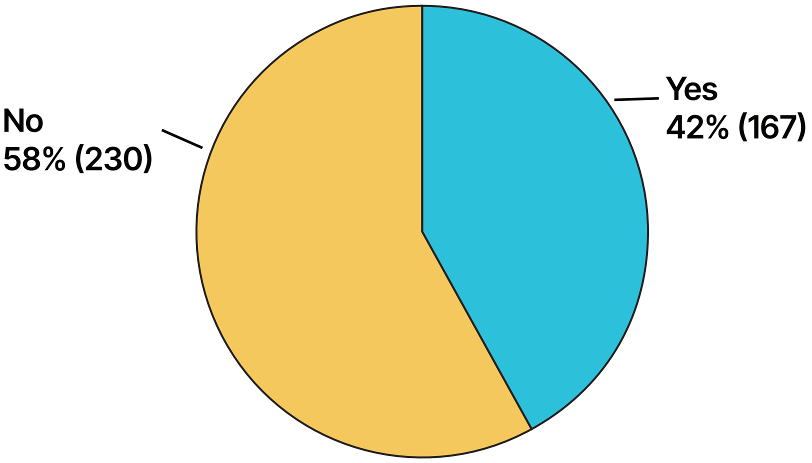


Figure 45

We also learned that 76% of respondents required a reasonable accommodation at work or when looking for work, compared with 24% who did not need an accommodation.

We also asked respondents if they were able to access the supports or accommodations they need:

If you responded 'Yes' to the last question, have you or your Autistic family member been able to access the supports or accommodations you or your Autistic family member need?

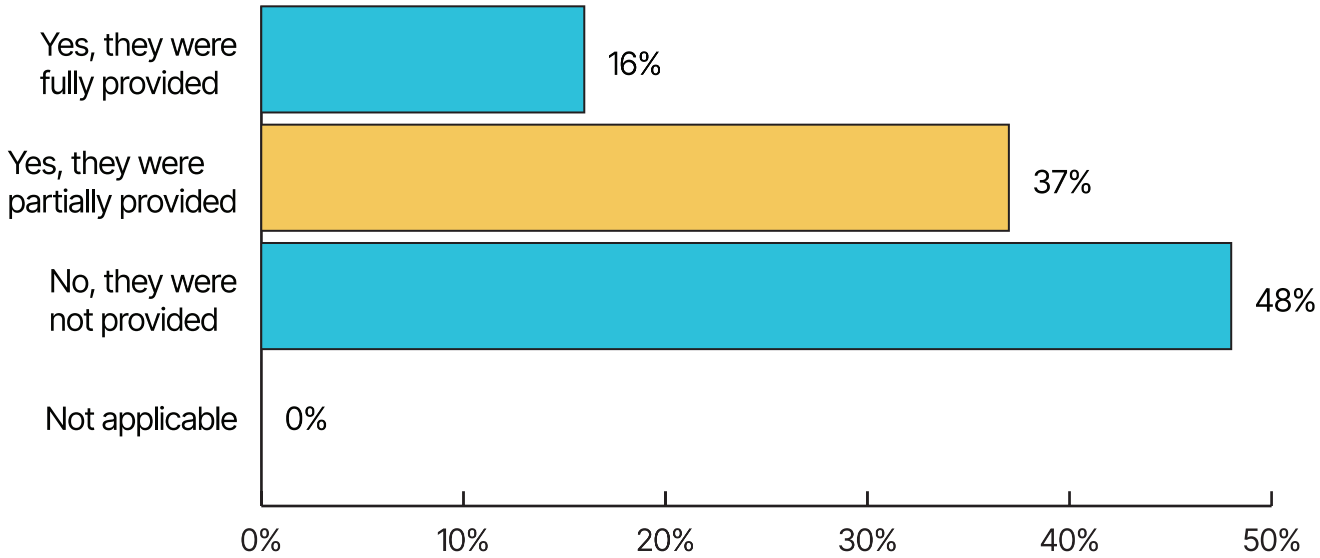


Figure 46

Building on this, Autistic people shared some of their experiences and realities when looking to access workplace accommodations:

> *"I wouldn't feel confident asking for the questions in advance etc because I wouldn't feel sure that I wouldn't be discriminated against."*

> *"While my employer engaged in a formal workplace needs assessment... the recommended supports have not been implemented in practice... Six months after the report was issued... the primary recommendations remain unfulfilled."*

> *"My manager kept forgetting to uphold my accommodations because she said I was 'doing so well'... the two managers went back on some pre-approved accommodations and said they no longer were happy to provide them."*

> *"I was called a liar by HR, told I was hired under false pretences and had they known I was Autistic they wouldn't have hired me. Took me 2.5 years of legal battle to negotiate very basic and very reasonable accommodation."*

> *"I worked successfully for ten years with a company who was inclusive and wonderful... post diagnosis I was supported in hybrid and flexible working which allowed me to excel in every aspect of the job."*

Respondents held strong views on whether they believed that employers in Ireland are becoming more autism-accessible – reflecting that this was still a significant gap in practice.

Do you or your Autistic family member believe that employers in Ireland are becoming more autism-accessible (e.g., sensory considerations in office layouts flexible working, clear communication)?

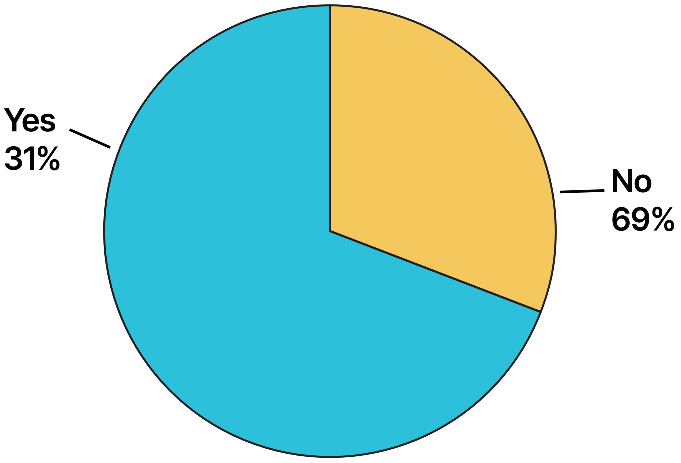


Figure 47

Access to Self-Employment

For this year's report, we also asked respondents questions on their experiences with accessing entrepreneurship and self-employment. Respondents were invited to share what they want the Government to do to remove barriers and create opportunities for Autistic people to access entrepreneurship and self-employment:

> *"Abolishing means testing would allow me to try things without the fear of losing support."*

> *"Support service for explaining and helping to complete taxes, business registration etc. Funding specific to Autistic people trying to start a small business."*

> *"The LEO is fantastic, however their 'tools for disabled individuals' are very limited... Disabled individuals are much more likely to need to be self-employed but struggle to receive grants for start-up costs."*

> *"Services do not understand that an Autistic person may be unable to meet a project deadline due to burnout and may need extensions or postponements. This should be built into enterprise supports and funding applications."*

> *"Single liaison or point of contact for all issues i.e. transitioning off social welfare, finding admin or marketing support, ongoing training, certification."*

Respondents also shared their perspectives on what they believed the main barriers to Autistic people going into business:

"Administration… you are dealing with forms and systems designed for neurotypical people. It's exhausting. Doing a single online banking transaction takes me twenty times longer than it takes my partner… It's an ocean of numbers and numbered numbers."

"I'd love to make screen printed t-shirts as a small business for pocket money, but I fear that it might negatively harm my lifeline of disability allowance in the future… I'm safer not testing it out and possibly leaving myself in a bad way."

"As Autistic, I don't understand and cannot network. I am too fragile to deal with the public."

"Not knowing what good areas of business to go into for Autistic people, finding suitable ideas, and not having a step-by-step guide to get started."

"Executive function challenges, lower energy and lack of ability to work usually hours."

Finally, we asked respondents about what changes wanted to see included in a future National Autism Strategy that would make workplaces more accessible and inclusive to Autistic people:

"Mandatory education. Sensory hours. Understanding of different communication styles."

"I want more concrete action besides an Instagram post/story showing how everyone has completed an autism awareness training. I want data that shows especially government/public services have employed Autistic people i.e. met their commitments."

"In the next strategy, I would like to see a stronger focus on Autistic adults in the workplace, particularly at mid-to-senior career levels... If Ireland is serious about improving Autistic employment outcomes, strategy must move beyond access to employment and focus on sustainability, progression, and retention."

"All workplaces should have sensory rooms. All managers should have disability and autism training. Workplaces should strive to employ a percentage of neurodivergent workers."

"Windows for natural lighting in all offices, less reliance on fluorescent lighting."

"I need more time and energy than I do money... Work environments also not always fit for the physical and mental health of neurotypicals."

"I would like if employers felt more urgency in providing accommodations. Often people are fobbed off for a long time. A binding timeline for implementation would be helpful."

Pillar 3 of the Autism Innovation Strategy – Accessible, Inclusive Communities

Living in the Community

Pillar 3 of the *Autism Innovation Strategy* focuses on building accessible, inclusive communities where Autistic people can participate fully in everyday community life. Our survey findings highlight that while some community spaces are experienced as accessible, many Autistic people and families continue to encounter barriers. These barriers are particularly pronounced when engaging in social, recreational and cultural activities. Respondents also identified a range of changes that could support greater participation, including more sensory-friendly environments, improved understanding of autism among staff and volunteers, and stronger accessibility supports across community settings.

First, respondents shared experiences about community environments they or their Autistic family member find accessible

	Very accessible	**Accessible**	**Not so accessible**	**Not accessible at all**	**Not applicable**
Cafes & Restaurants	7%	49%	34%	9%	1%
Community events or Festivals	5%	30%	45%	15%	5%
Community Halls	5%	33%	35%	9%	18%
Leisure centres/ gyms / swimming pools	8%	40%	36%	10%	6%
Libraries	36%	47%	10%	2%	5%
Places of Worship (i.e. Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples, etc)	11%	29%	14%	6%	40%
Shops / Retail Outlets (i.e. Retail Parks, Shopping Centres)	7%	38%	43%	11%	1%
Sports clubs	4%	21%	37%	15%	23%

Kate's Story

A young woman in her twenties named Kate is enjoying a concert in the disabled seating area. She wears a short sparkly dress and dances throughout the night. Some attendees in the area glance at her with scepticism or quietly judge her presence.

Kate has no visible difficulty but must prepare a lot to enjoy the event. The noise and crowd level overwhelms and upsets her, making her hugely anxious and taking days to recover.
In this space, she can relax fully and feel safe.

Kate Rafferty

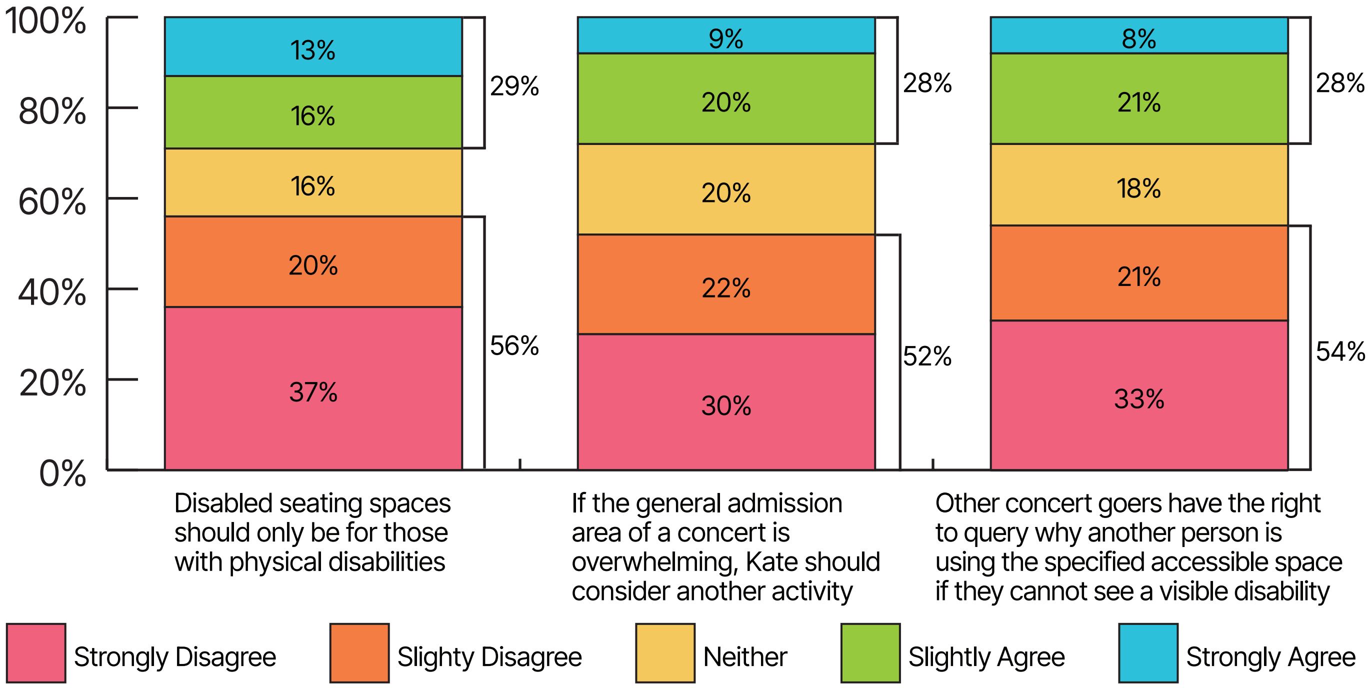
Why did you want to ask the Irish public this question?

"I am an avid concert goer. Music is my life and I use it for regulation. I love concerts, I love live music and I love seeing my artists I listen to every day in person. I personally have horror stories about concerts I have attended in relation to accessibility.
I get asked all the time. Why do you go to concerts if it's so hard for you? I feel I deserve to go to a concert just as much as any other person. Why should I not go because a venue does not have the right supports for me? and on the other hand, I feel I I don't think it's fair that I am judged for using supports venues do have."

What do you want the public to know about this issue?

"Accessibility in venues in Ireland is usually for wheelchair users. Tickets are not available for non-wheelchair users generally. There are so many Autistic people and other people with hidden disabilities that need support too and would highly benefit from the accessible area in venues and concerts. At many venues that claim to accommodate Autistic individuals, the provision is often limited to a pull-out chair placed in a temporary or makeshift area. Consideration for sensory needs is minimal."

AsIAm put Kate's story to the public and found that:



- On balance the public rejects the idea that accessible spaces should be limited to people with visible physical disabilities.
- Just over half disagree that Kate should avoid concerts altogether, or that others have the right to question her use of accessible seating.

Respondents also shared insights on what would encourage them or their Autistic family member to participate more in their local community:

What would encourage you or your Autistic family member to participate more in your local community?

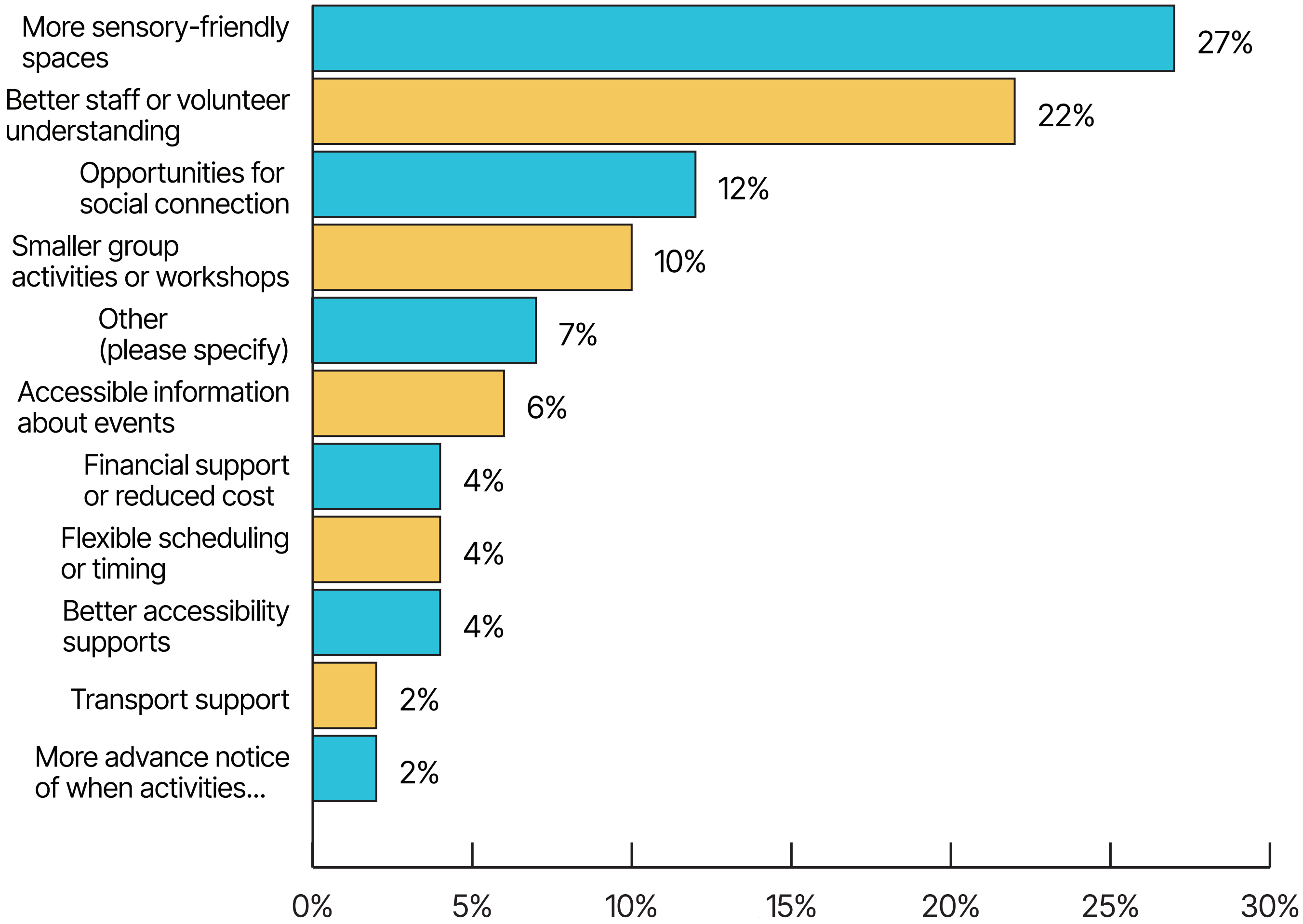


Figure 48

Of the 7% of respondents who shared other experiences, some replied "all of the above", others said funding for additional coaches or staff to support Autistic people with high support needs. One respondent replied: *"There is little understanding of what inclusion even means in some communities. Putting a tent and a bean bag in the corner does not make inclusion. There needs to be a broader discussion of what adult inclusion looks like also and what it means to have an Autistic child on a football team or scout group. What's does the day to day mean, not just the sensory needs but also the individual's needs".*

Respondents also reflected on if they or their Autistic family member had been excluded from any activities or events because their support needs were not considered by the event organiser. With over 70% confirming or experiencing exclusion to participation in events, is a reflection on more work needing to be done on delivering on the *Autism Innovation Strategy*.

Have you or your Autistic family member been excluded from any activities or events because your/their support needs were not considered by the event organiser?

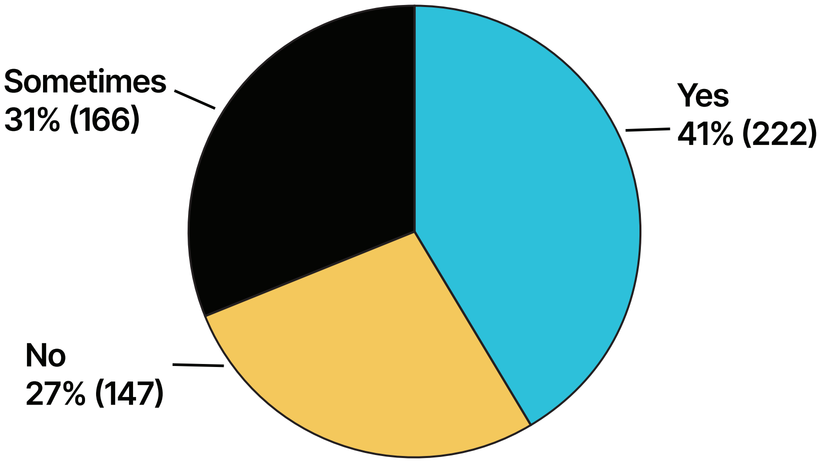


Figure 49

Access to Transport and Mobility

Access to Public Transport

Access to reliable and accessible public transport plays a crucial role in enabling Autistic people to participate fully in community life, including accessing work, education, social activities and essential services. In our recent report on Autistic adults and Loneliness, titled ***"We Just Want to be Included"***, Autistic adults referenced lack of accessibility of public transport as a key barrier to being included in their community and to their overall wellbeing. However, many Autistic people and families continue to face significant barriers to using public transport, including limited availability of services in their local areas and systems that are not designed with their needs in mind. Respondents shared their experiences accessing public transport: *(see Figure 50)*

How accessible is public transport for you or your Autistic family member?

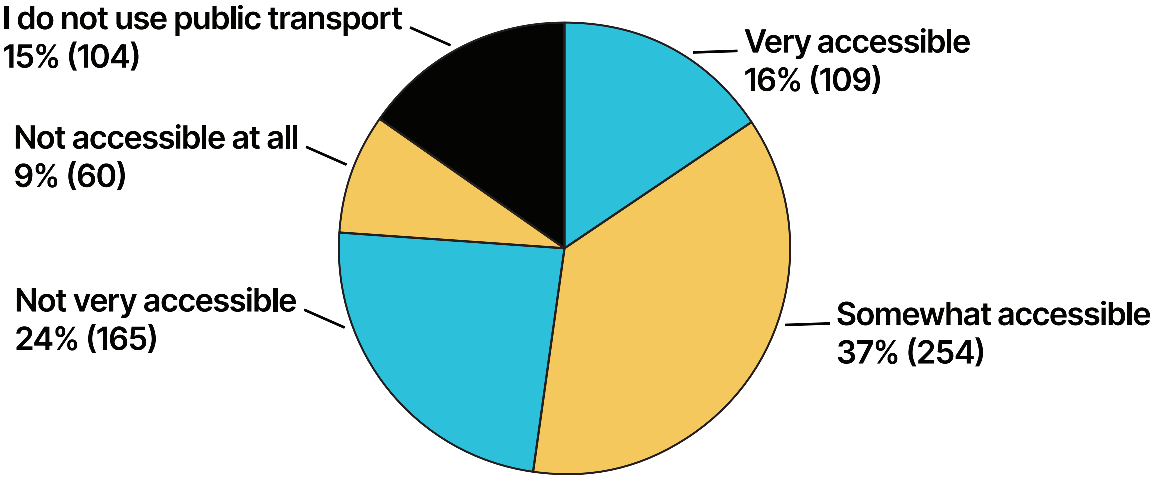


Figure 50

Respondents also shared the following barriers when accessing public transport:

Have you or your Autistic family member experienced any of the following when accessing public transport?

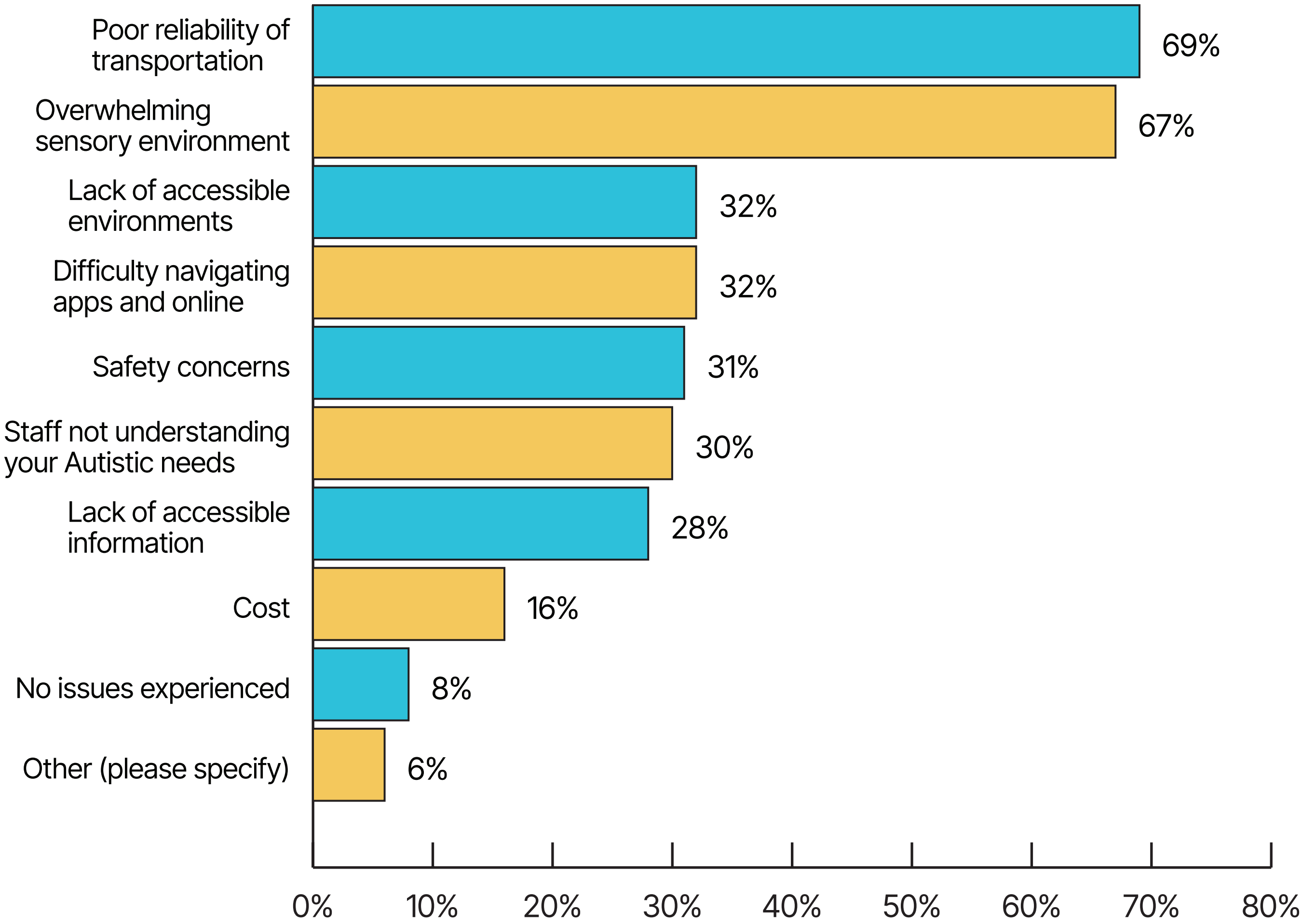


Figure 51

Among the 6% of respondents who identified other barriers to accessing public transport, many highlighted challenges related to overcrowding, sensory overwhelm, and difficulties navigating services in rural areas. For example, one respondent described the *"sheer volume of people in Dublin city trying to use buses in rush hour,"* while another shared that buses sometimes begin moving before they are seated, which *"puts me into a meltdown."* Others noted sensory challenges such as passengers using *"loud mobile phones without headphones,"* and feeling safe when using bus or rail services, which can make travelling by public transport particularly difficult.

Driving and Accessible Parking

Respondents were also asked in this year's report about driving and mobility. Of the respondents in which this question related to, 63% reported that they or their Autistic family member drive, while 37% said they do not. We also asked respondents who drive whether driving test examinations, such as the Driver Theory Test and practical driving test, are accessible to Autistic people.

If you responded "Yes" to the last question, based on your experience, do you or your Autistic family member believe Driving Test Examinations (i.e. Driver Theory Test, etc.) are accessible to Autistic people?

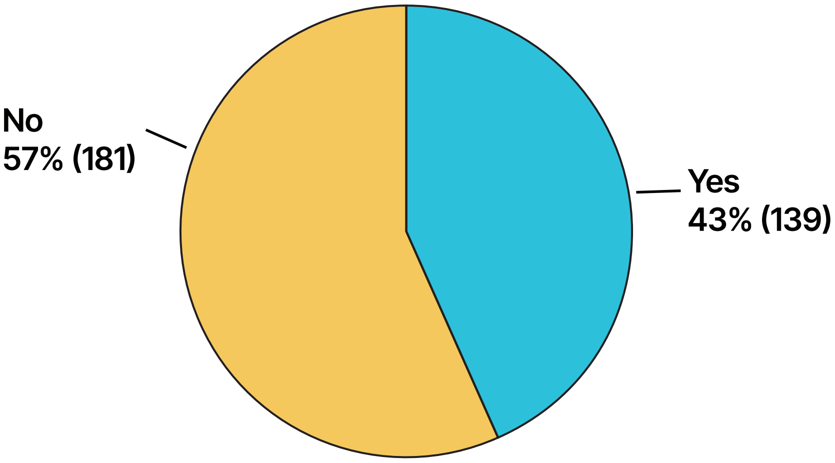


Figure 52

Respondents also shared their experiences with the Driving Test Examinations process.

> *"More understanding by professionals e.g. instructors and testers, especially in relation to how many multiple demands driving entails, why this is hard for Autistic people, and an understanding of Autistic communication preferences."*

> *"An neurodivergent informed driving instructor, who is aware of the learning differences around instructions, verbal communication, memory etc."*

> *"The driving test and theory test are not autism friendly maybe test in a quite less stressful environment with less time restrictions."*

> *"It takes me about twenty times longer than other people to learn procedural stuff and make it automatic. It makes learning to drive much more expensive than it is for neurotypical people."*

> *"We could also do with a simulator for training as they have for flying this would be a safe way to learn to drive before going on the road or behind the wheel of a car."*

> *"A step-by-step guide, from start to finish, of what you need to do to get on the road, the order in which to do them, and the costs associated with each part of the process."*

We also asked respondents whether they or their Autistic family member would benefit from priority parking spaces in the community.

Would you or your Autistic family member benefit from priority parking spaces in the community?

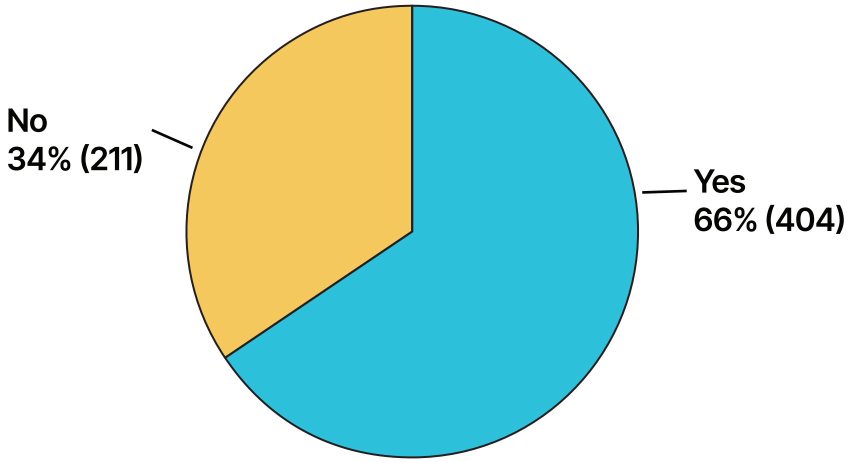


Figure 53

* * *

Among the respondents who would benefit from priority parking or from accessible parking spaces, 93% of respondents did not have access to these spaces.

If you answered “yes” to the last question, do you or your Autistic family member currently have an access to priority parking?

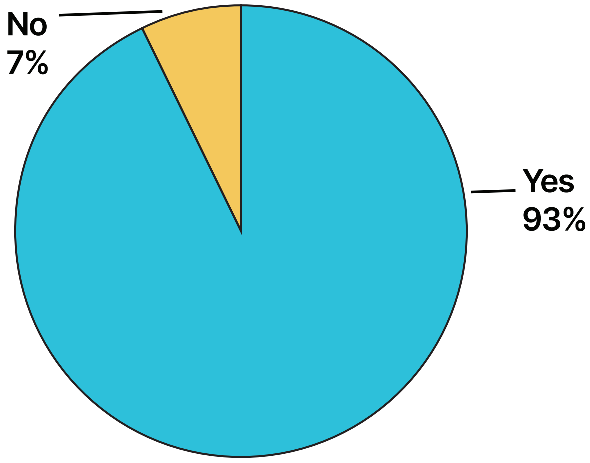


Figure 54

When asked why accessing priority parking spaces is important for themselves or their Autistic family member, respondents replied:

> *"My child has no sense of danger at all and will run at any chance they get."*

> *"If I had this, it would give me space to get out of the car comfortably without squeezing out and possibly becoming overstimulated."*

> *"Getting to a venue is stressful enough, finding parking, being late etc causes unnecessary anxiety."*

> *"I also have hyper mobility which makes walking painful and uncomfortable. I do not qualify for a blue badge because of the limitations of it right now."*

* * *

We also asked respondents about changes they or their Autistic family member want to see included in a future National Autism Strategy that would make access to transport and mobility more accessible to the Autistic community:

> *"Proper enforced quiet carriages and dim lighting on trains. Better understanding by staff of needs."*

> *"More frequent and more reliable public transport services this would reduce overcrowding and benefit everyone."*

> *"Free travel pass extended to all Autistic people, more reliable public transport, subsidised taxis for appointments."*

> *"Have sensory spaces in public transport stations. Have priority boarding for Autistic individuals. Potentially designated seats with more space to avoid distress of a person touching me."*

Access to Social Spaces

Access to safe, low-pressure social spaces is an important part of enabling Autistic people to connect with others and participate in community life. However, survey findings indicate that such opportunities remain limited, with 81% of respondents reporting that their local community does not offer dedicated or sensory-friendly social spaces for Autistic people, such as small groups, quiet rooms or autism-friendly clubs and activities.

* * *

What the Community like to see from Community Spaces in the National Autism Strategy

Respondents want to see a future where community participation is not a discretionary choice made by individual organisations, but a fundamental, accessible right supported by the State:

> *"Even small towns have Autistic people, we deserve supports too, more support in small places would be nice."*

> *"Where there is process of planning a community space being built, there should be an open forum for various people to discuss if as to whether or not it is a good idea and what they would to see as a community space."*

> *"More focus on adult spaces with a diversity of activities... More teen activity spaces and programmes. Again. For high functioning teens who are always forgotten!"*

> *"It would be great to have a Government Accessibility Grant for local communities or businesses to help them make services and community spaces more accessible for everyone."*

> *"An understanding in clubs and teams that Autistic people can contribute to their community in many ways they do not always need to feel like an accommodation."*

Pillar 4 of the Autism Innovation Strategy – Building Capacity

Access to Information

Pillar 4 of the Autism Innovation Strategy focuses on building capacity within the Autistic community by strengthening access to information, supports and opportunities for self-advocacy. Access to clear, reliable and accessible information is vital in supporting Autistic people and families to understand their rights, navigate services and make informed decisions about supports, education, employment and community life.

However, access to clear and accessible information remains a significant barrier for many Autistic people and families. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) reported that they do not know where to find clear information about their rights, compared to 33% who do.

Did you or your Autistic family member receive information or guidance on how to navigate services and supports? This could include written guides, online resources, workshops, or advice given by staff working in health, education or community services

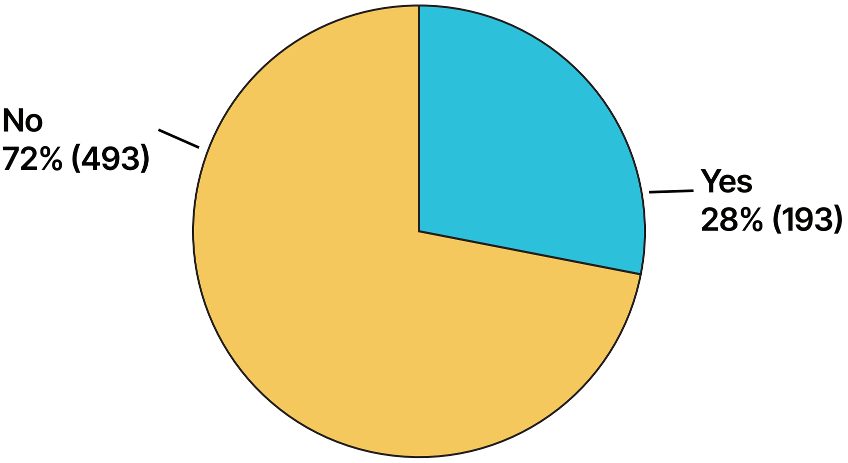


Figure 55

These findings highlight the ongoing need for more accessible information and clearer support pathways to support Autistic people and families to understand and access the services they require and need.

We also asked respondents where they access this information or guidance in navigating services:

If you responded "Yes" to the last question, where did you or your Autistic family member receive this information or guidance?

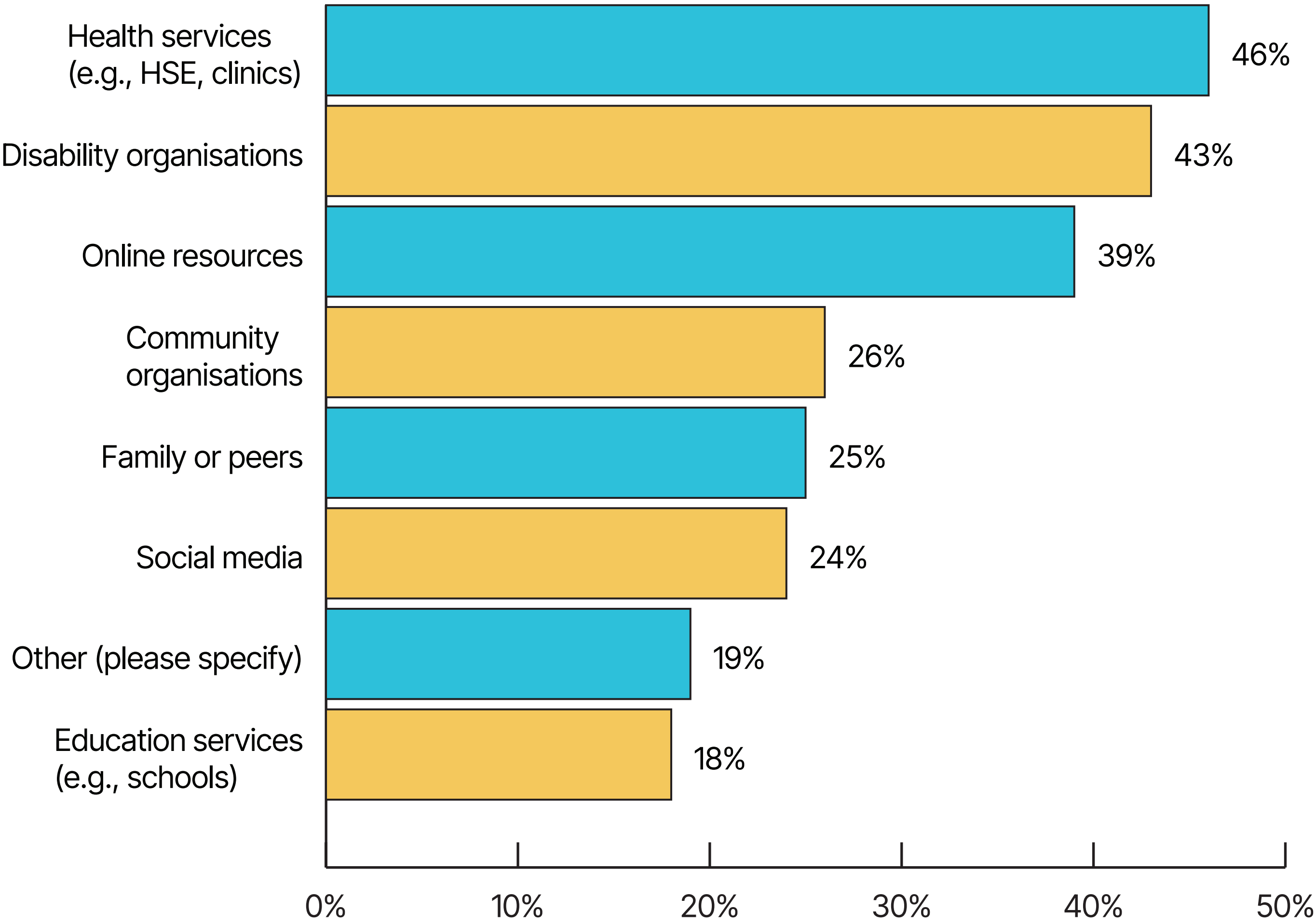


Figure 56

19% found information or guidance through other means, including directly from AsIAm, through other Autistic-led organisations, from another service, from a clinical professional or through word-of-mouth from families.

We also asked respondents how often they believe parents and families receive clear and accessible information from the State about key legal entitlements. Across all areas examined- including education, disability services, social protection and health services. The majority of respondents reported that they had difficulties with receiving clear and accessible information, and that they rarely or never receive clear information about services. This included a combined 78% who rarely or never receive clear information about education, 65% for disability services, 70% for social protection and 76% for health services respectively, reflecting the hardship respondents experience when navigating complex systems to access public services they need.

	Always	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**
Disability Services	1%	3%	18%	42%	36%
Education	2%	4%	29%	35%	30%
Health Services	1%	4%	24%	40%	31%
Social Protection	1%	4%	19%	38%	38%

Leadership and Advocating for your Rights

Respondents were also asked to share situations where they or their Autistic family member faced barriers when trying to advocate for their rights. Responses highlight the emotional and practical challenges many people face when navigating services and supports. Some perspectives shared by respondents include:

"I am often at a loss as to where to find information... I am exhausted. I am stressed out trying to navigate a labyrinthine system that lacks consideration and compassion for the people it is supposed to serve."

"The forms you have to fill in... are so emotionally draining and most people I know myself included put off filling them in... it makes you feel like you have to fight for every tiny bit of help you need."

"I struggle day in and day out to get assistance... because I'm not seen as 'bad enough'. I feel defeated to even advocate for myself."

"I am not always able to verbalise my experiences, am often dismissed or ignored, and have had serious health issues overlooked."

"I am not always able to verbalise my experiences, am often ignored or dismissed and have had serious health issues overlooked."

"I was the victim of a crime and the process of reporting it and finding supports afterwards was extremely difficult and distressing as very few professionals (particularly the Garda) were not or received very little training in neurodiversity/disability."

Respondents expressed overwhelming support for more dedicated autism-specific spaces in their communities. **95% of respondents said they would like to see more dedicated autism groups and spaces locally**, highlighting the strong demand for environments where Autistic people and families can connect, access support and participate in community life in a safe and understanding setting, and for these supports to be near to where they live.

Considering this, we asked respondents what supports they would like to see provided through AsIAm's Community Support Hubs, which aim to act as accessible "one-stop-shops" for the Autism community. Respondents said:

"Information and support (moral).
I have a PDA , and it is very very lonely."

"It would be great to have someone who could talk to you after you or a family member are diagnosed and tell you what supports are out there for you."

"Autism Culture Nights, where the things we love and are good at can he shared and shown in a caring way. Promote the ways in which we are vital for society... Ask Autistic people to run these groups and pay them (properly) to do so."

"A clear space for all on the spectrum, even those who are expert Mask wearers due to societal pressures, it would be nice not to feel judged just because 'you don't look Autistic'."

"I wouldn't know where to start answering that. I am so isolated, it would be alien to me."

"Information sessions, explanation of rights, an advocacy program, and potentially a peer support group."

" I would love to meet other adults with autism, so more meet up groups would be amazing. AsIAm helped me to get my current job through the career support service so now that I'm on my feet I'd love to meet other Autistic individuals like me."

Autistic Leadership

Autistic people's leadership and participation in decision-making are vital to ensuring that policies and services reflect their lived experiences. However, responses to the Same Chance survey suggest that opportunities for Autistic people to take on leadership roles remain limited.

Have you or your Autistic family member had any opportunities to take part in leadership roles in your local community?

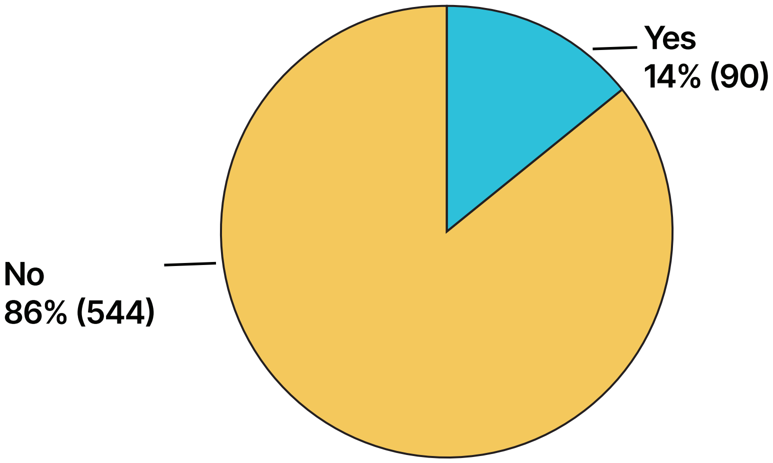


Figure 57

Similarly, **82% said they had not been involved in consultation or decision-making processes,** such as advisory groups, consultation panels or policy submissions.

Have you or your Autistic family member had any opportunities to participate in consultation or decision-making processes (e.g., advisory groups, consultation panels, sending written policy submissions)?

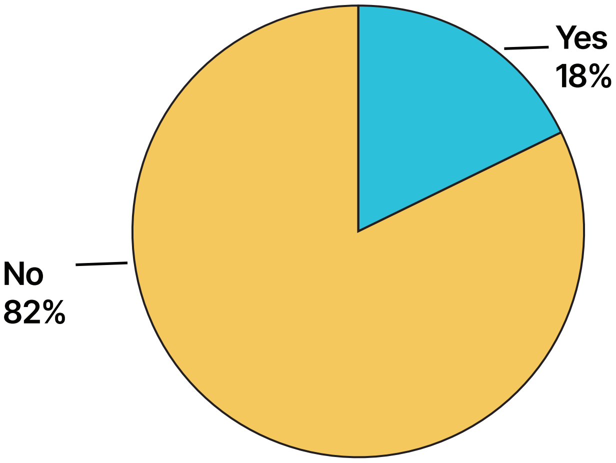


Figure 58

These findings highlight a significant gap between the principle of *"nothing about us without us"* and the reality experienced by many Autistic people and families and reflect a growing desire among the community to be more involved in these and shaping future policy affecting the lives of Autistic people.

We asked respondents about the barriers to taking part in leadership, consultation, or decision-making activities:

"I would love to but between working, managing a household and having to become an interim expert in OT, SLT and psychology while my child's name sits on waitlists, I am completely time poor."

"There is a perception that lived experience is not always reflected in decision making. Greater accessibility, flexibility, and genuine inclusion of parent and Autistic voices would make participation more realistic and meaningful."

"It's always town halls which I find intimidating and stressful."

"Anytime I would try to join anything I have felt unwelcome, because I for the impression people thought I was weird, or rude or abrupt."

"I'm only recently diagnosed so it's likely these things were available to me but didn't consider myself suitable for them."

"I have never felt that there is much chance for anyone Autistic to be part of the opportunity of leadership... there is no fair and due process to having autism and decision-making."

Independent Living

Independent living is a fundamental right recognised under Article 19 of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, which affirms that Disabled people should be able to live in the community with the supports they need to exercise choice, autonomy and participation in everyday life. However, responses to our report indicate that many Autistic people and families feel these supports are not currently in place, and the findings below highlight significant gaps in supporting Autistic people to live independently and fully participate in their communities. *(see Figure 59)*

Do you or your Autistic family member have the supports needed to live independently in the community?

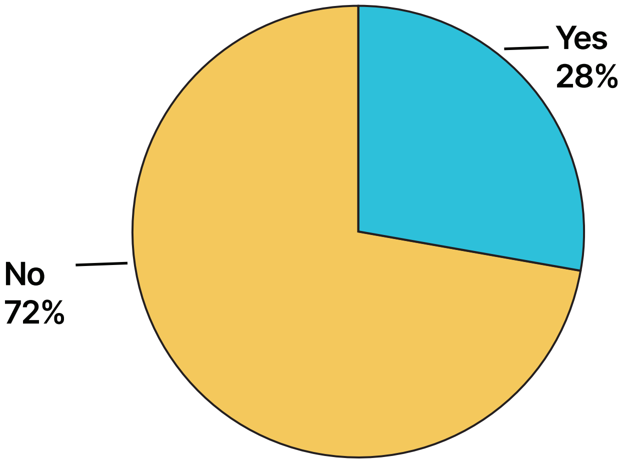


Figure 59

We also asked respondents about what supports they need to live independently in the community: *(see Figure 60)*

If you responded "No" to the last question, what supports would you or your Autistic family member need to live independently in the community?

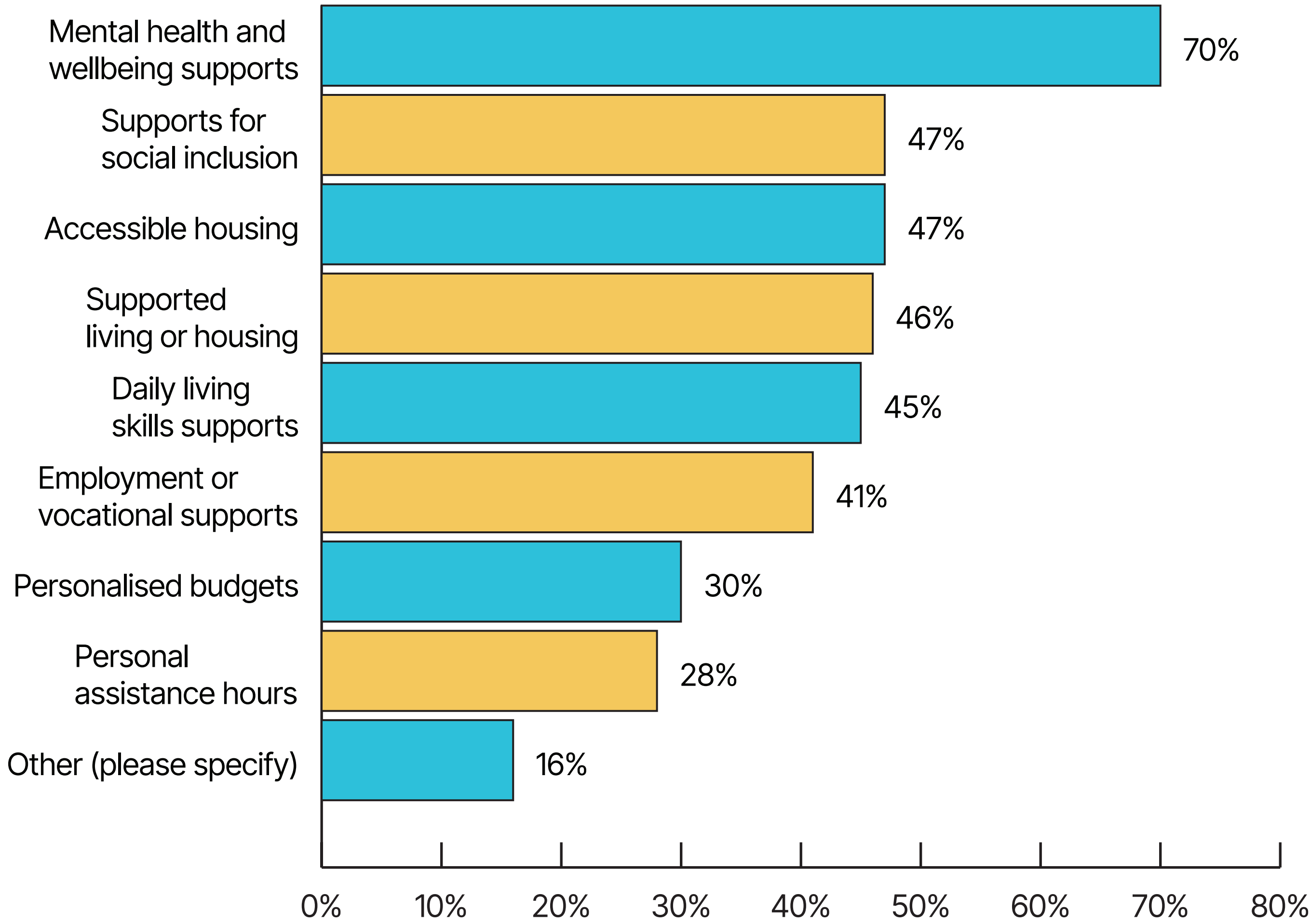


Figure 60

Among the 16% of other respondents who identified other supports needed to live independently, many emphasised the importance of financial security, access to housing, and practical day-to-day supports. Financial barriers to accessing housing and independent living supports were frequently highlighted, with several respondents sharing that current rates of social protection supports were not sufficient to fully meet the cost of living independently. One respondent stated that they need *"money to do so,"* while another shared that *"Disability Allowance wouldn't even cover rent... I have no chances of living alone in the foreseeable future."* Others highlighted the importance of having ongoing support networks, explaining that even when living independently, they still rely on family or community assistance. One respondent explained that *"I live independently but have family nearby who help me a lot."* Others raised concerns about personal safety, particularly when living alone, which one respondent stated: *"A lot of it [is] fear. Especially as an Autistic woman. I feel like a vulnerable, easy-to-take-advantage-of person, and I have been taken advantage of many a time."*

How the next National Autism Strategy Can Support Independent Living for Autistic People

Respondents shared what they would like to see in a future National Autism Strategy to support more Autistic people to live independently in the community:

"Independence should be understood as supported, sustainable participation rather than the absence of need."

"For our Autistic daughter, our death is something she fears. She needs to be in her own home and happy well before this happens... As any change is difficult, she needs to be transitioned over time gently."

"I believe that there should also be community classes where Autistic people can learn how to be both independent and interdependent together - there is no shame in needing support from your community after all!"

"Personal assistance."

"Access to assistance to aid in tasks that I am unable to complete independently, particularly on days when I cannot eat, sleep take medication etc."

"I would love more access to something like an as you need autism coach support... Everyday adult life skills information, navigating your responsibilities and your rights as a citizen is a big thing."

Conclusion

The findings of this year's Same Chance Report show both the progress made and the significant barriers that remain for Autistic people and families across Ireland. While the *Autism Innovation Strategy* takes important steps forward towards building a more inclusive society for our community, the perspectives shared by the 1,676 respondents who contributed to this report shows the urgent need for meaningful change to happen across education, employment, health and public services to make these rights real in practice. AsIAm's *Strategic Plan* builds on our impact in supporting our community over the past decade and responds to the growing needs and barriers faced by our community. In this Plan, we renewed our commitment to supporting Autistic people across the life course and have committed to ensuring that no Autistic person lives more than 100km from an AsIAm in-person support. However, delivering this commitment will require lasting structural change. The Government must therefore commit to legislate for a new National Autism Strategy that is rights-based, adequately resourced and centred on the experiences of Autistic people and our wider community, building a comprehensive framework for building a truly autism-affirming Ireland and that every Autistic person has the *"Same Chance"*.

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AsIAm - Autism in Ireland

March 2026

National Survey

Who we Spoke to

Fieldwork dates:

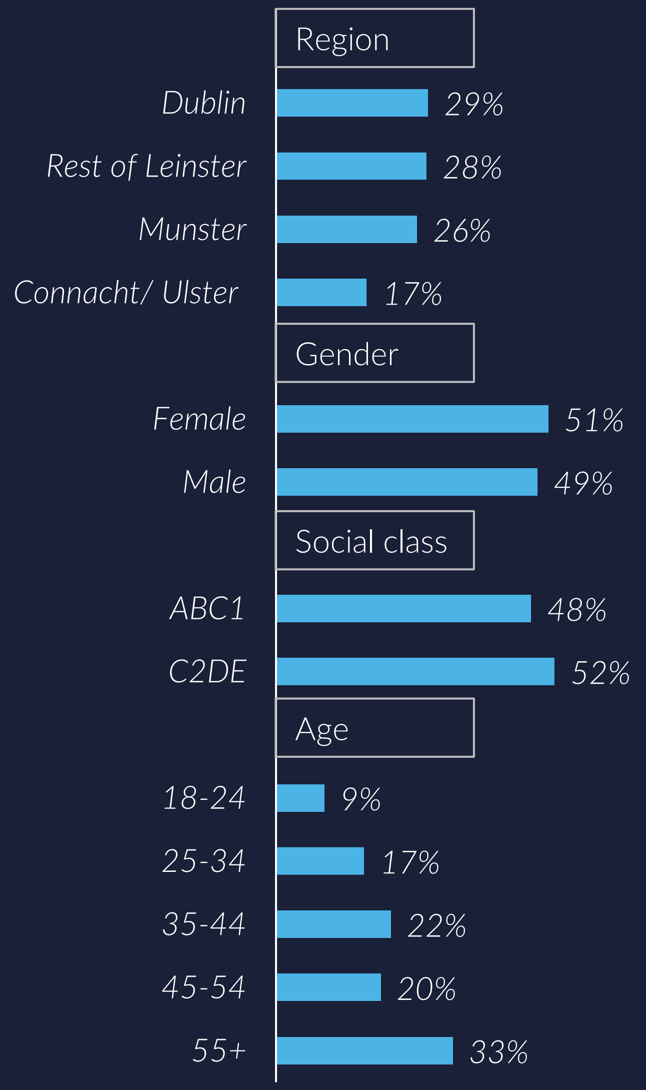
26th February– 11th March 2026

Sample size:

An online survey of 1,000 adults, aged 18+yrs in the Republic of Ireland.

Nationally representative of the population based on age, gender, region, and social class.

The sample has a margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level.



Key Headlines: Ireland's Autism Landscape:

Strong Support, Persistent Structural Gaps

Public support for Autism-related policy, rights, and inclusion remains consistently high in 2026. Around 4 in 5 support key measures such as removing barriers to equal opportunity, a statutory right to diagnosis, and expanded access to services.

Alongside this, 63% believe misinformation about Autism has increased and 73% say stigma remains in Ireland, highlighting ongoing systemic challenges that require coordinated policy and public response.

Public Attitudes: Conditional Acceptance in Everyday Life

Acceptance of Autistic people continues to strengthen in principle. For example, 4 in 5 agree Autistic people should not have to mask to be accepted, and over 3 in 5 are comfortable socialising publicly with Autistic individuals.

However, in everyday social situations, attitudes remain more conditional. There is notable uncertainty in how people interpret actions (i.e.: with just over 1 in 3 unsure in caregiving contexts).

This suggests that while awareness is high, practical understanding is less developed. There remains a need for deeper public education to translate awareness into confident, inclusive actions in real-life contexts.

Key Learnings

Ireland's Autism Landscape 2026

Autism Policy & Public Investment

There is strong public backing for systemic change. Around 4 in 5 support removing barriers so Autistic people have equal opportunities, and similar levels support a National Autism Strategy and expanded financial supports.

At the same time, 32% believe the State cannot afford to provide Autism services to all who need them, indicating an underlying tension between ambition and perceived feasibility

Inclusive education & school environment

Support for inclusive education remains high. 80% support mandatory Autism training for teachers and SNAs, and around 3 in 4 support a legal right to therapy supports.

There is also a clear preference for support-led approaches over discipline, with almost 3 in 5 rejecting punitive responses to actions linked to distress or to be overwhelmed.

Community inclusion & social norms

4 in 5 agree that Autistic people should not have to mask to be accepted and should be supported from a young age to advocate for their needs.

By contrast, views are more mixed on adjusting long-term plans to support someone experiencing Autistic burnout, and many are unsure where they get most of their information about Autism, although 2 in 5 get their information from Autistic people they know.

Diagnosis, Rights & Access to Services

Public support for access to Autism diagnosis is very strong. Almost 4 in 5 agree that diagnosis is important for giving people the same chance in day-to-day life, that the State should create an adult assessment pathway, and that

Autistic children should have a right to diagnosis as part of their assessment of need. By contrast, views are more mixed on whether diagnosis is mainly about access to services, with almost half agreeing and 28% unsure..

Stigma & Perception & Misinformation

The findings point to a public that recognises Autism stigma and misinformation but is still not fully clear on where misunderstanding ends and misconception begins.

While strong majorities agree that stigma remains in Ireland (73%) and that misinformation has grown (63%), uncertainty is still evident around a number of beliefs about Autism, including its causes and how actions such as demand avoidance should be understood. The statement that “we are all a little bit Autistic” attracts more agreement than disagreement.

Public Attitudes Towards Autism in Everyday Life - Vignettes

Public responses to Autism are shaped by context, expectations and social norms

Key Learnings from Vignettes

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We explored public perceptions through five stories that highlight Autistic people in different social settings.
Acceptance is strongest where outcomes are clear and individual (e.g. adult assessment), but becomes more conditional in everyday and institutional settings, and most uncertain where actions are socially interpreted (e.g. parenting and caregiving contexts).

Philip's Story: Social inclusion in everyday interactions

- Philip's story shows that inclusion is often still expected to happen on majority terms, with 56% agreeing he cannot expect strangers to do things his way.
- While 64% would have liked Philip to stay at the party, there is less certainty around how others should adapt in the moment, with 26% unsure whether he overreacted.

Eamon's Story: Communication rights & inclusive education

- Eamon's story highlights strong public expectation that schools should build capability, with 78% agreeing teachers should be willing to complete additional training.
- At the same time, it shows that inclusion in education is still negotiated against perceived limits of time, resources and practicality, with 42% agreeing schools cannot cater to every individual child's needs.

Kate's Story: Attitudes towards accessible spaces

- Kate's story suggests good support for accessible spaces being used on the basis of need, not just visible disability, with 57% rejecting the idea that these spaces should only be for physical disabilities.
- It also points to continued sensitivity around invisible needs being questioned by others, even though 54% reject the idea that other concert goers have the right to challenge use of this space.

Rebecca's Story: Social adaptability

- Rebecca's story reveals hesitation in how people interpret visible Autistic traits in parenting and caregiving contexts, with 32% unsure whether visible actions like rocking would affect trust in caregiving.
- Uncertainty appears strongest where trust, safety and social judgement intersect, with 33% unsure whether Rebecca's actions are genuine or performative, while 40% say they feel sorry for her child.

Mary's Story: Self perception

- Mary's story points to strong support for adult Autism assessment as a route to greater self-understanding, with 71% agreeing she would feel more positive about herself if she knew she was Autistic.
- It also suggests the public sees value in adult assessment in its own right, with 60% rejecting the idea that Mary should not pursue an Autism assessment simply because children may also need access to support.

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PHILIP'S STORY

Vignette 1

Philip's story of social inclusion in everyday interactions

Philip, aged 30, is at a social gathering. He came with a friend but doesn't know the place or people. When he's relaxed, he finds meeting people much easier. His friend mentioned to the hosts and some other guests to give him a chance to adapt to his surroundings, and to choose quieter moments to introduce themselves.

Most of the people don't take the advice seriously. They ask him to join a party game right away, and make banter with him, with the hosts asking him to choose what food he wants at the same time. Philip becomes overwhelmed. He says to the host that what she's asking is irrelevant as he's already eaten. The host and her husband are upset by this. Philip decides to go home.

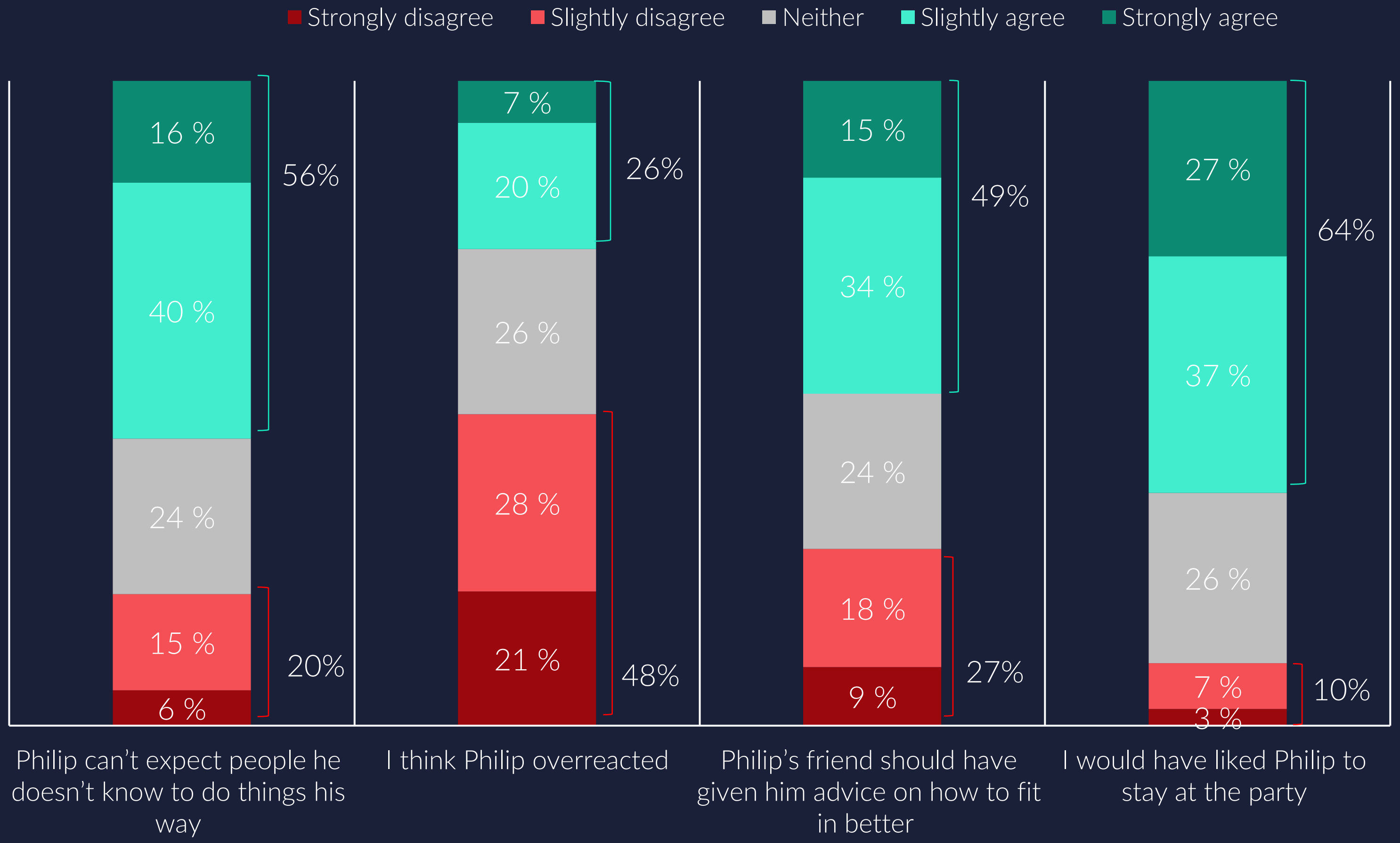
Public attitudes suggest a clear tension between expecting adjustment and wanting inclusion.

More than half believe Philip cannot expect strangers to do things his way, and just about half disagree that he overreacted, with a further 26% unsure, indicating considerable uncertainty in how people judge his reaction.

There is also recognition that others could have helped more, with half of the adult population saying his friend should have advised him on how to fit in better.

Overall, the clearest consensus is around inclusion, with 64% saying they would have liked Philip to stay at the party.

Attitudes towards social inclusion in everyday interactions



Q. Thinking about Philip's situation, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

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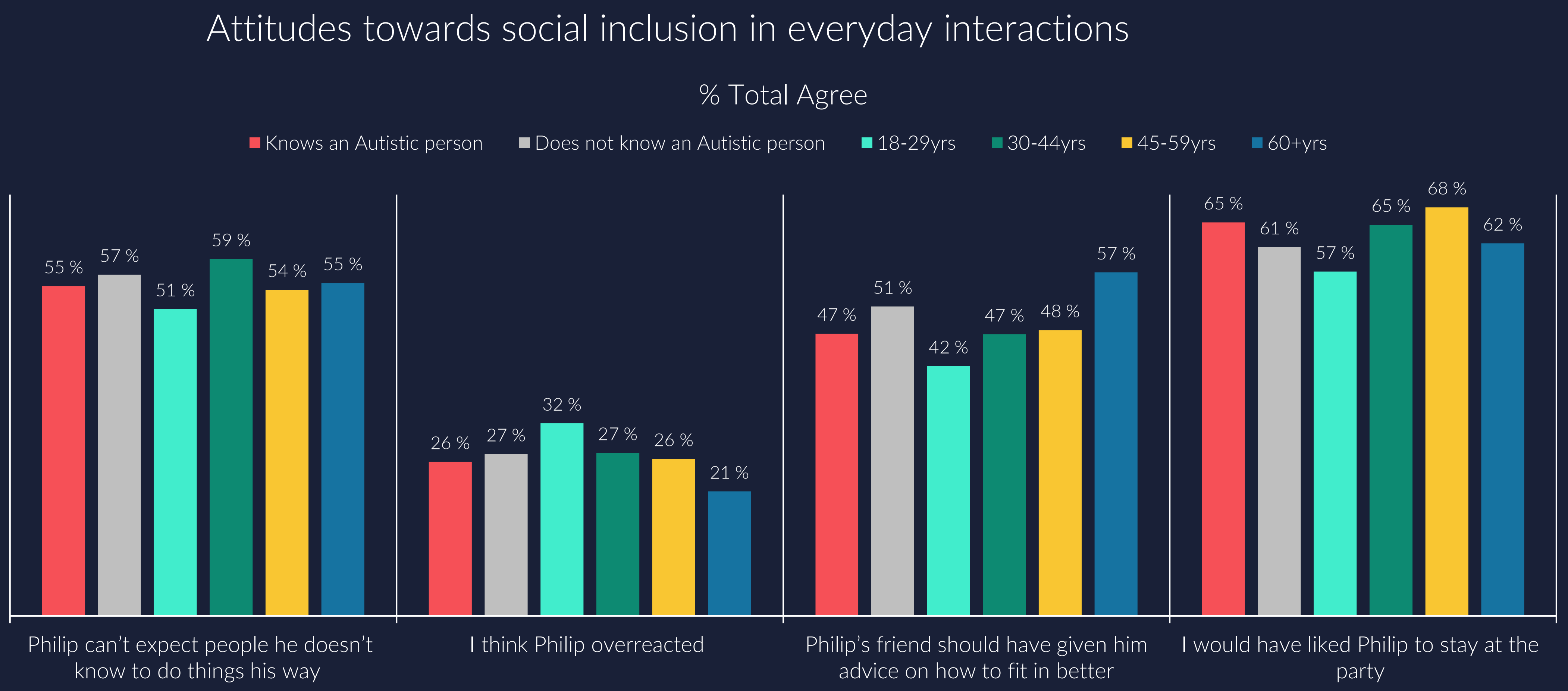
Attitudes towards how situations like this should be handled become more inclusive with age



Q. Thinking about Philip's situation, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

EAMON'S STORY

Vignette 2

Eamon's story of communication rights & inclusive education

A child named Eamon who uses an electronic communication device has just started school. After the first day, the teacher informs the parents that Eamon will not be allowed to use the device in school. The teacher said Eamon was pressing all the buttons, which made noise. Eamon's parents explain this is part of him learning how to use the device.

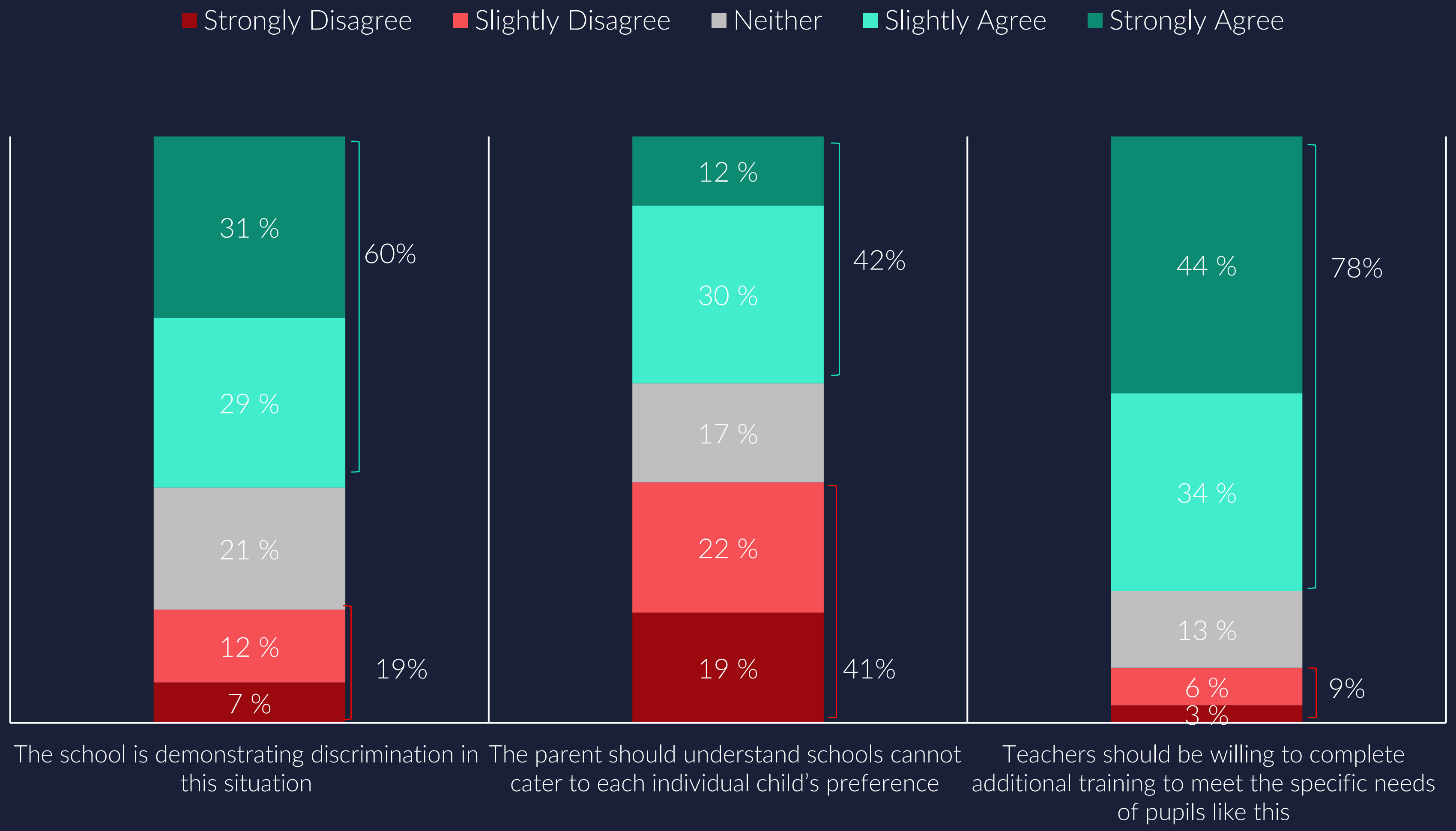
The principal has said that this communication method is not in use in the school, and the child must use the school's system, which has not worked for Eamon in the past. The class teacher and SNA (Special Needs Assistant) are willing to attend training for the electronic communication device; however, the principal says the school cannot invest the time or the money in this. She also has concerns that the device is noisy and Eamon will distract both himself and other children, or every child in the class will want one like his.

Capability building expected, but limits to school responsibility recognised

Support for teacher training is very strong, with 78% agreeing staff should be willing to build the skills needed to support pupils like Eamon. Even so, 60% see the school's response as discriminatory, suggesting the public expects schools to do more before drawing the line.

At the same time, views are less absolute when it comes to school responsibility, with 42% agreeing that parents should not expect schools to cater to every individual child's needs.

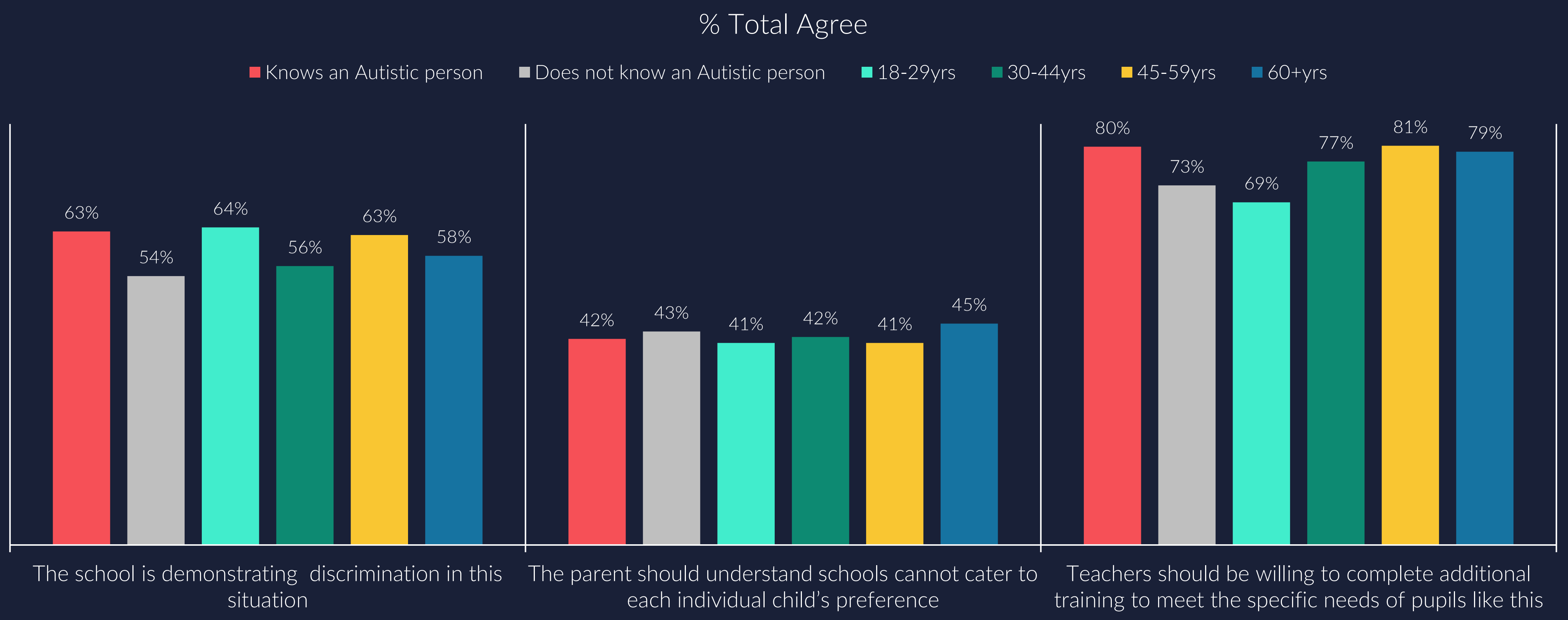
Attitudes towards community rights & inclusion in education



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

Personal familiarity with Autism increases perceptions of discrimination

Attitudes towards community rights & inclusion in education



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

KATE'S STORY

Vignette 3
Kate's story of attitudes towards accessible spaces

A young woman in her twenties named Kate is enjoying a concert in the disabled seating area. She wears a sparkly dress and dances throughout the night. Some attendees in the area glance at her with scepticism or quietly judge her presence.

The girl has no visible difficulty but must prepare a lot to enjoy the event. The noise and crowd level overwhelms and upsets her, making her hugely anxious and taking days to recover.

In this space, she can relax fully and feel safe.

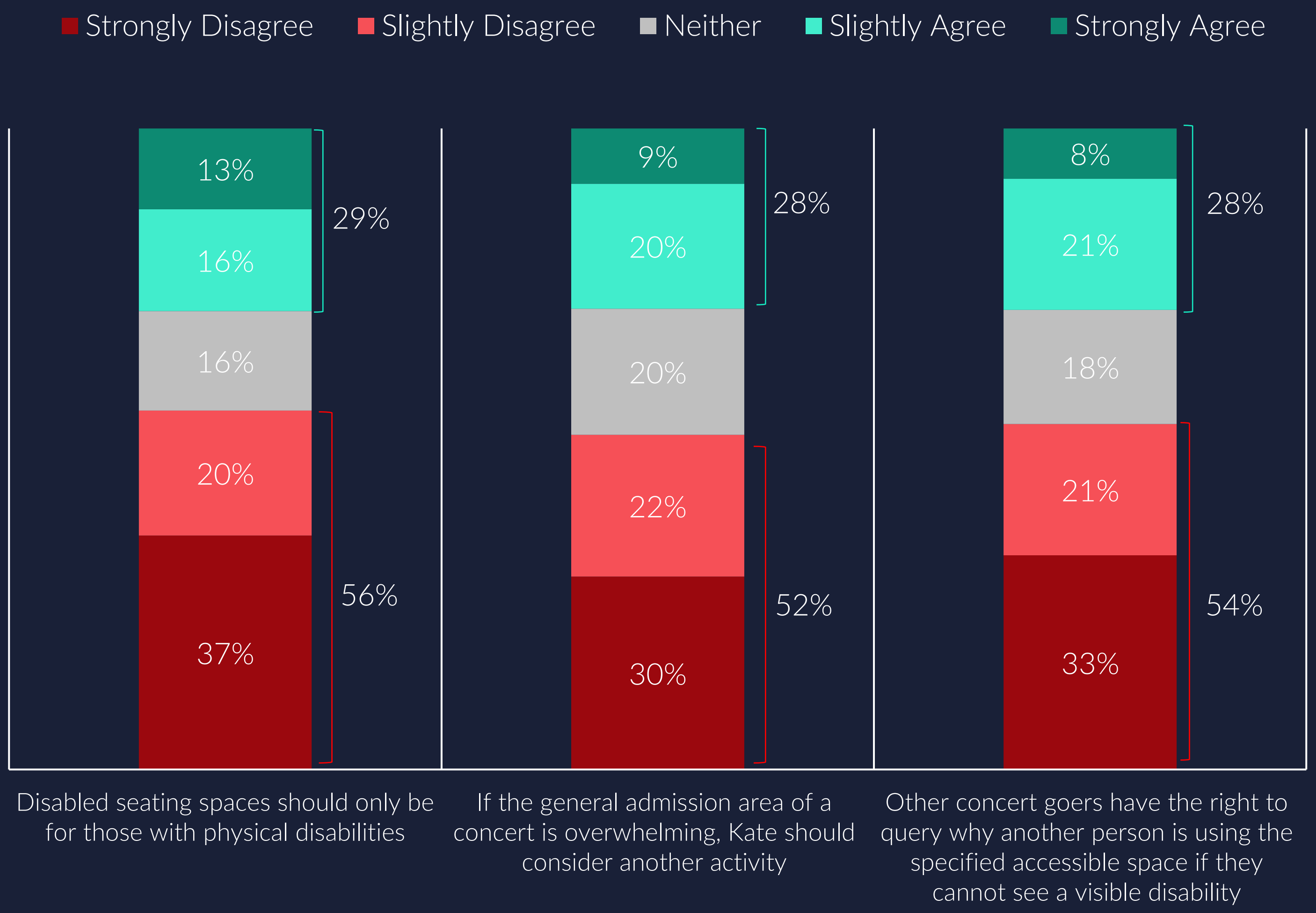
Broad support for access based on need, not visible disability

On balance the public rejects the idea that accessible spaces should be limited to people with visible physical disabilities.

Just over half disagree that Kate should avoid concerts altogether, or that others have the right to question her use of accessible seating.

Overall, the findings suggest general support for access based on need rather than visible disability.

Attitudes towards accessible spaces



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

Views are broadly consistent across age groups and familiarity with Autism

Kate's story

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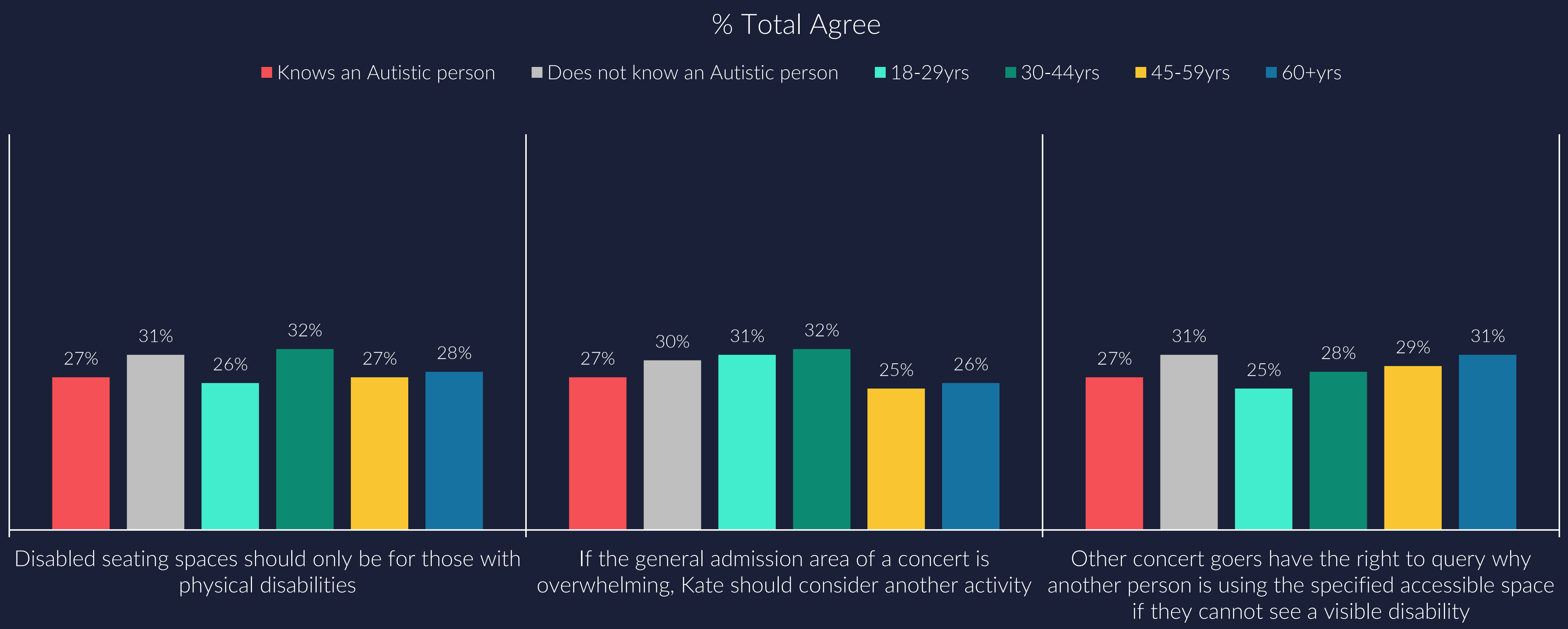
Attitudes towards accessible spaces

% Total Agree

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

REBECCA'S STORY

Vignette 4
Rebecca's story of social adaptability

Rebecca approaches you at the school gate to invite your child to a playdate with her daughter. She says she will drive your daughter there and back. She asks you very directly and doesn't smile when she asks.

You have heard Rebecca says that she is Autistic and were surprised by this. You have since noticed at school concerts she begun to rock and flap her hands during the music.

You decide to avoid the playdate, as you are not sure if your child will be safe.

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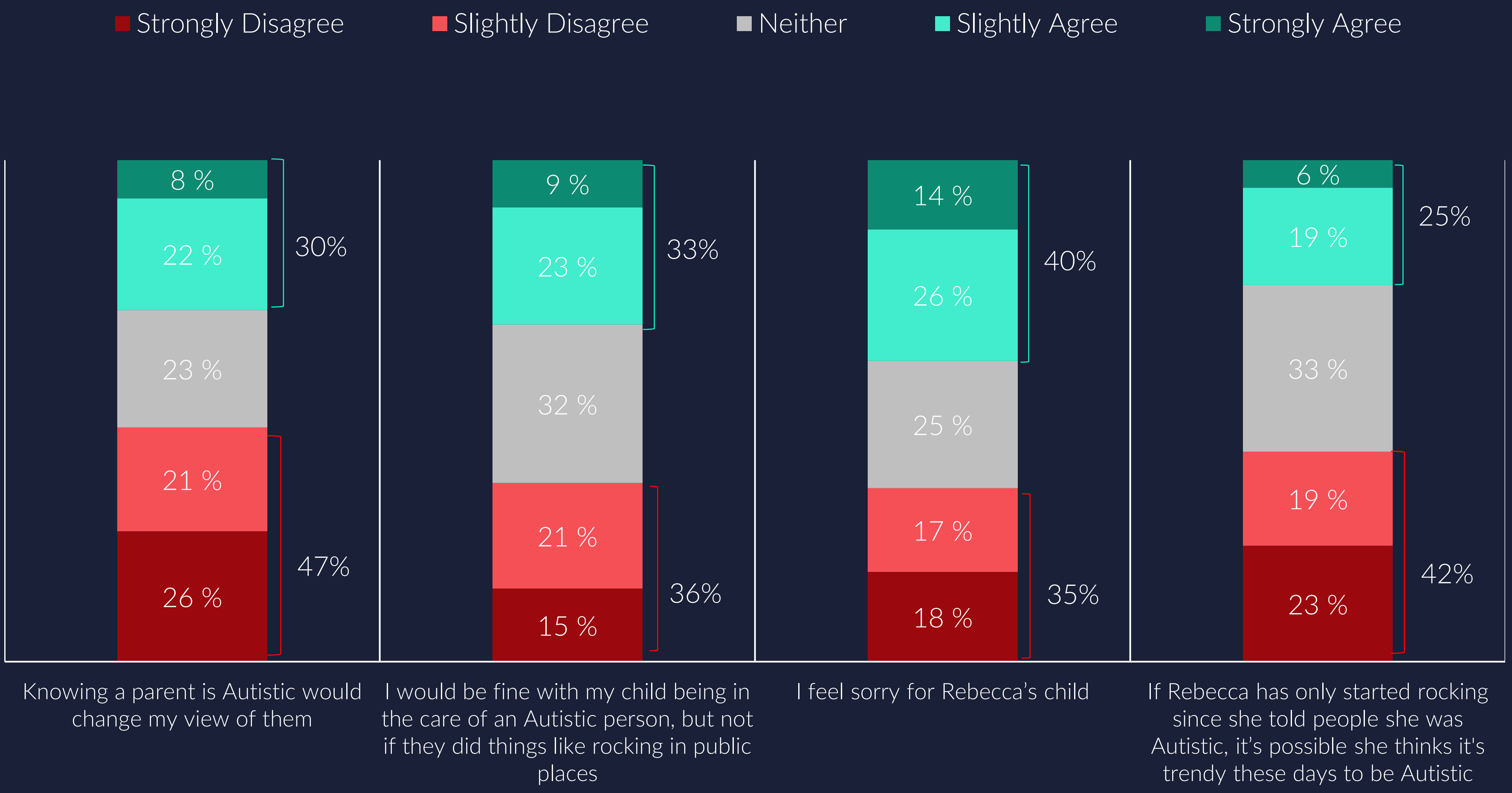
Rebecca's story prompts a mix of uncertainty and concern.

Neutral responses are high across statements, suggesting many people are unsure how to interpret Autistic traits in a parenting context.

This hesitation is most evident where Autism becomes more visible, with around a third unsure whether rocking in public would affect trust in caregiving (32%) or whether Rebecca's actions are genuine or performative (33%).

At the same time, 2 in 5 say they feel sorry for Rebecca's child, indicating that this uncertainty can translate into concern when parenting and care are involved.

Attitudes towards social adaptability



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

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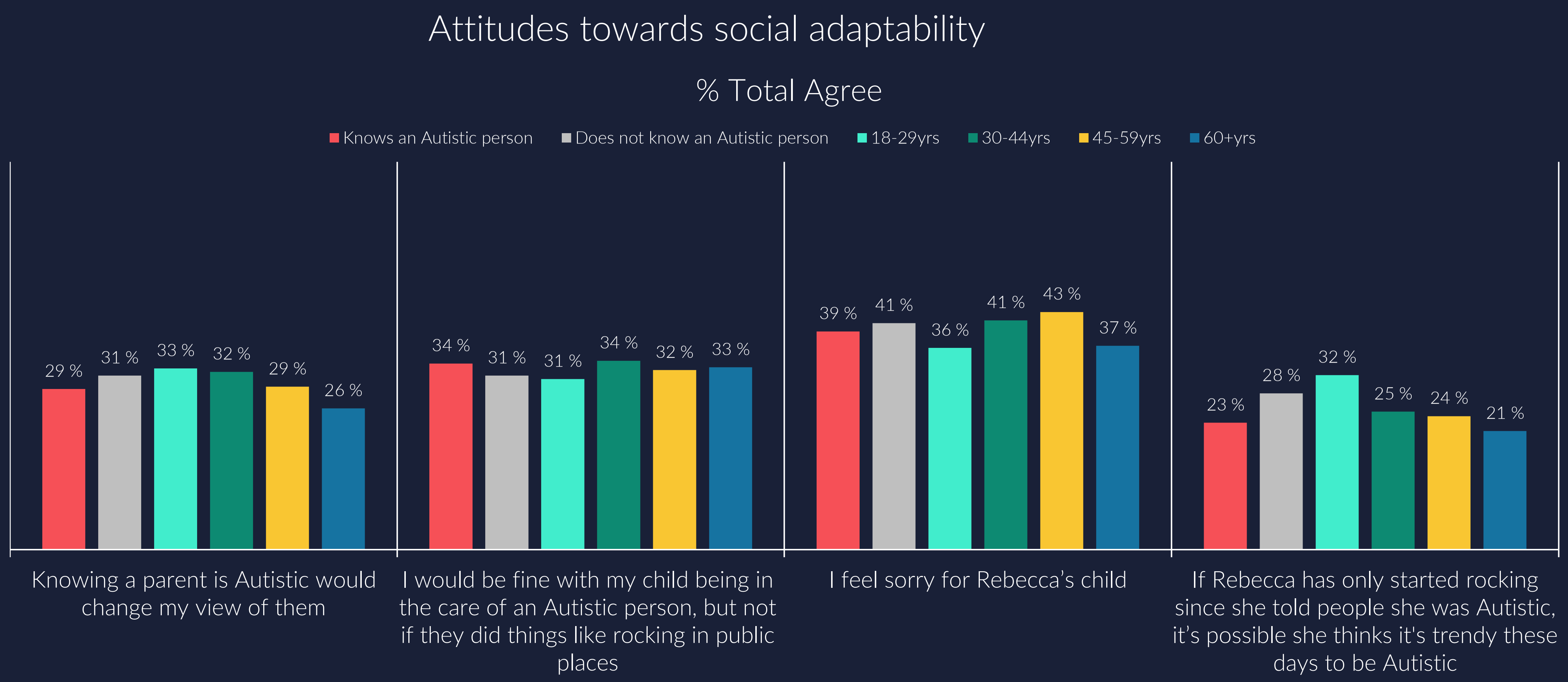
Younger respondents are more likely to question Rebecca’s actions (32%), while older groups are more likely to say they feel sorry for her child.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

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MARY'S STORY

Vignette 5
Mary's story of self perception

Mary is a woman in her late fifties, who adores her job as a bookkeeper. However, she often feels slightly out of step with the people around her, even when she is with friends and family. She sometimes says things she thinks are funny, but no one laughs, and she is not sure why. There are times when others meet up and she is not invited, and this has happened more than once. When Mary mentions it, people tell her she is overthinking things or imagining problems.

But to Mary, it never feels small. She spends a lot of time trying to understand what people mean by watching their faces and body language. This is exhausting, and she often goes home feeling drained and upset. Busy, noisy places make everything worse, and sometimes the world feels overwhelming. Mary does not know why everyday life feels so difficult for her. Mary is considering if going for an Autism assessment might help her.

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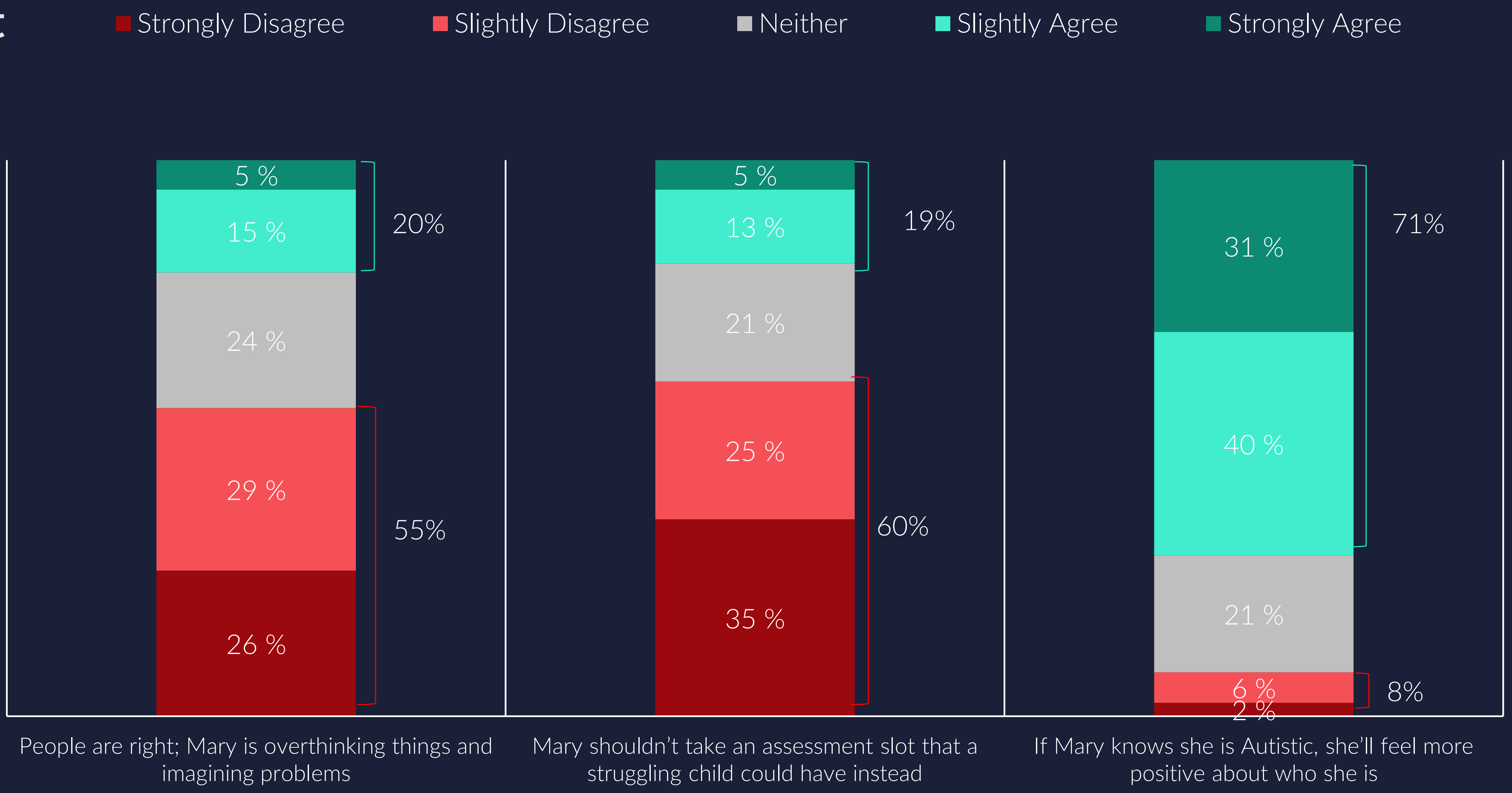
Mary's story attracts strong support for adult assessment.

Over half reject the idea that she is simply overthinking things or that she should give up an assessment slot for a child, while 7 in 10 agree that knowing she is Autistic would help her feel more positive about who she is.

Attitudes towards self perception



Q. Thinking about Mary's situation, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

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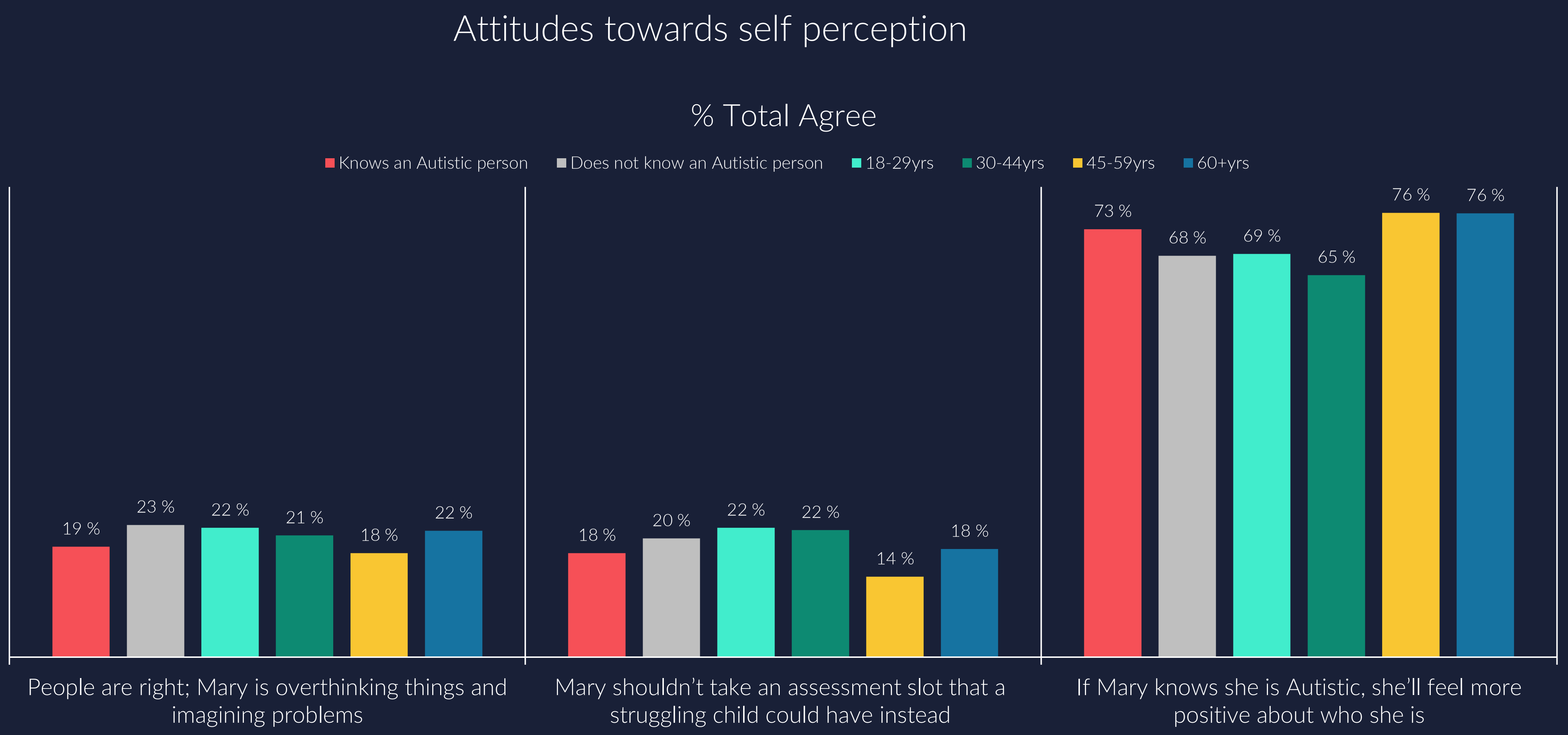
Across all groups, around two-thirds to three-quarters believe Mary would feel more positive about herself if she knew she was Autistic.



Q. Thinking about Mary's situation, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

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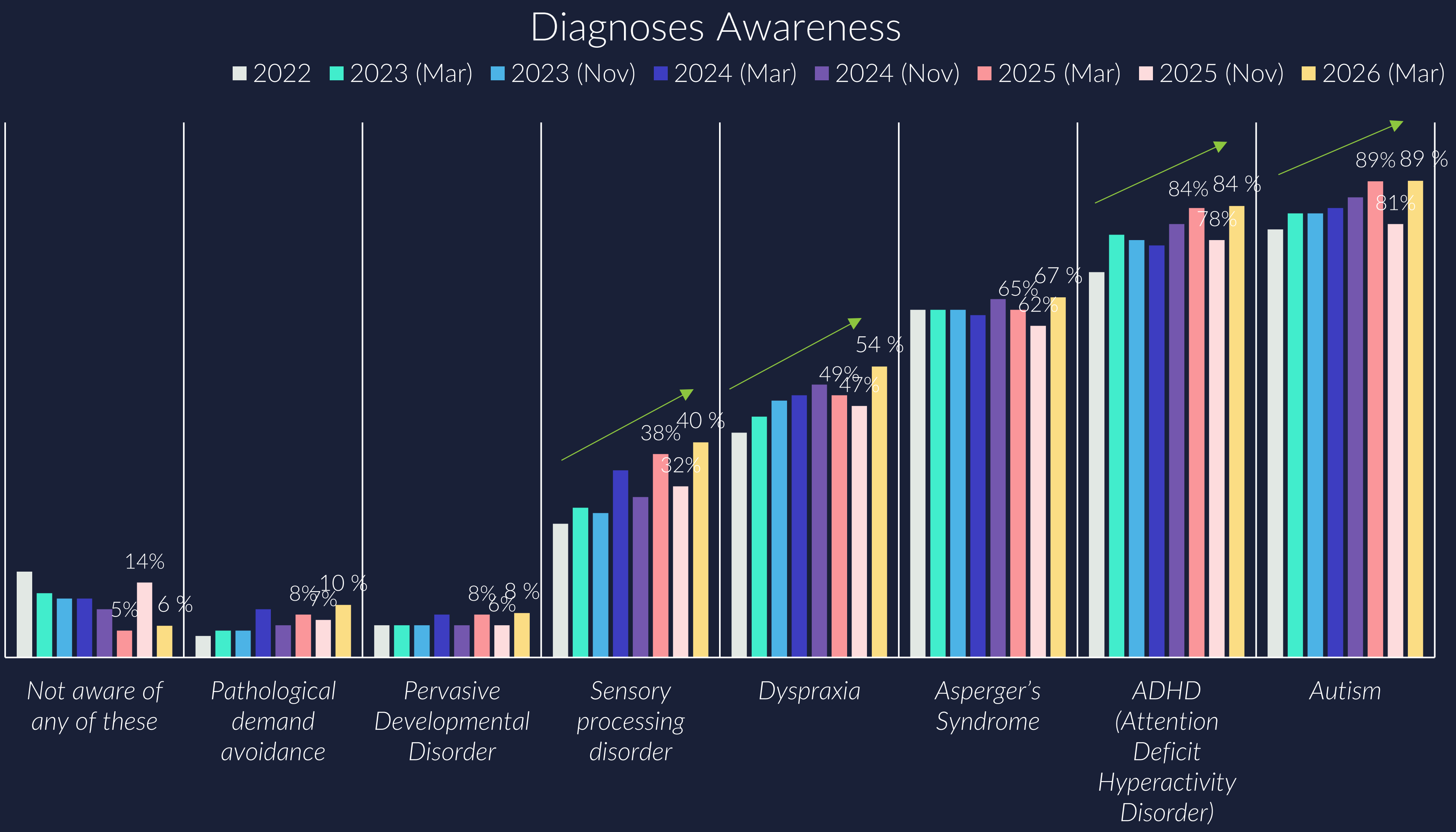
Knowledge of Autism

89% are aware of Autism as a diagnosis.

Autism and ADHD Continue to Lead Public Awareness

Autism continues to have the highest recognition (89%), followed by ADHD (84%).

Awareness of dyspraxia (54%) and sensory processing disorder (40%) has grown over time, while the proportion not aware of any diagnoses has declined to 6%, indicating broad familiarity with neurodevelopmental diagnoses.



Q. Which of the following diagnoses if any, are you aware of? Please choose all that apply.
Base: 1000

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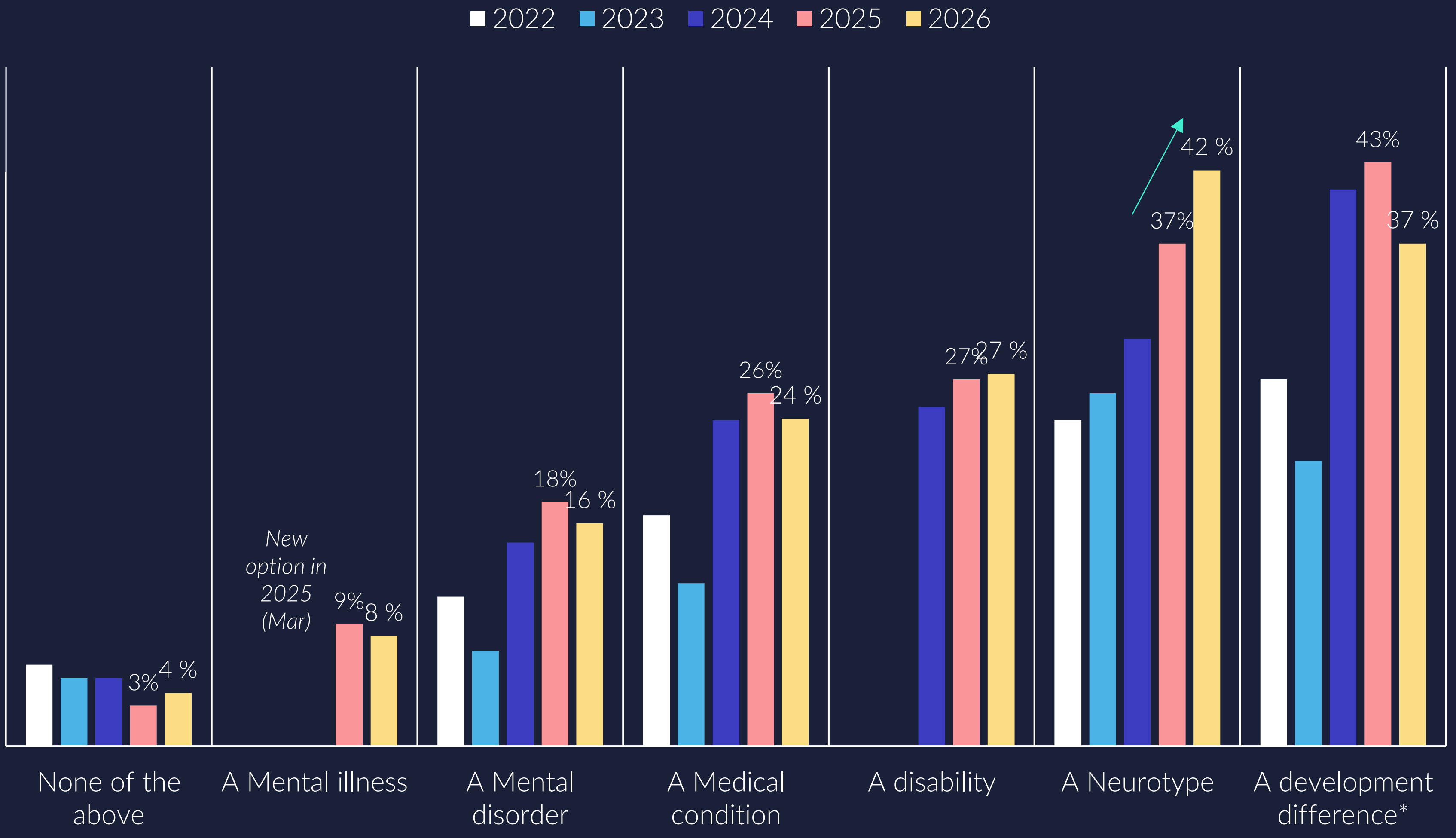
Public Language Around Neurodivergence Continues to Evolve

The term “neurotype” continues to gain traction in how people describe Autism and related diagnoses.

In 2026, 42% of respondents selected “a neurotype”, overtaking “a developmental difference” (37%), a reverse of 2025.

This suggests a gradual shift in public language away from medicalised labels and towards non-medical identity-based descriptions.

Do you think Autism is . . .



*Previously worded as a developmental condition pre-2024).

Q. Do you think Autism is…… Please choose all that apply.
Base: 1000

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Although social differences still dominate perceptions of Autism, the longer-term trend suggests a more balanced view, with growing recognition of strengths, ‘different thought processes’ the highest association, with some decline in negative stereotypes.

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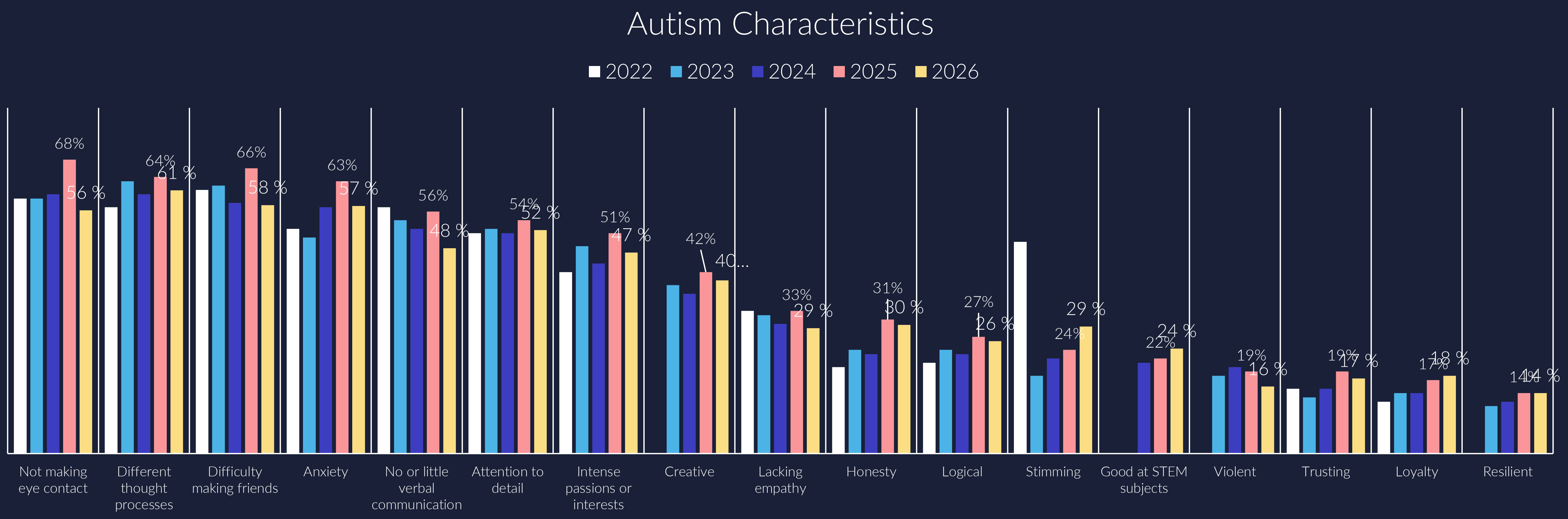

Q. Which of the following characteristics, if any, would you associate with Autism?
Base: 1000

Note: some of the characteristics were added in later waves, so the data for those may not be available.

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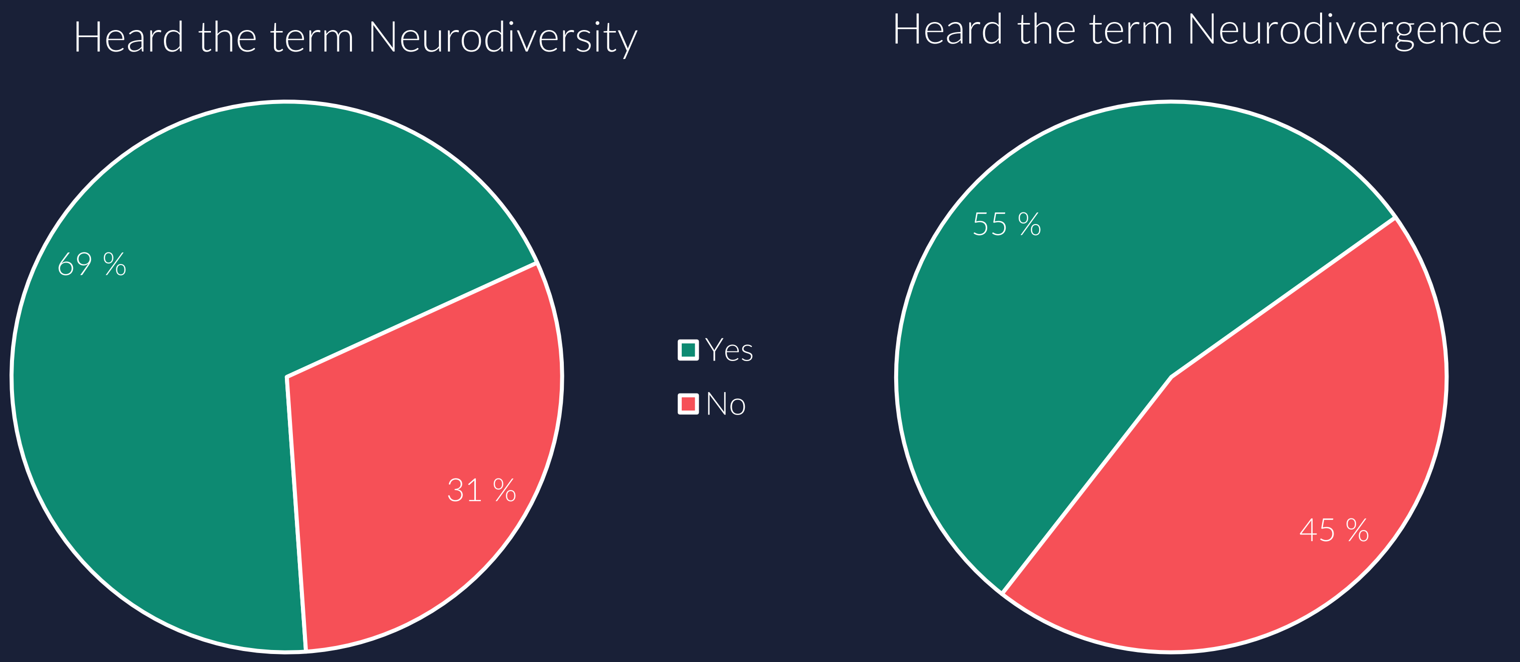
Awareness of Neurodiversity is higher than Neurodivergence.

While 7 in 10 report having heard the term “neurodiversity”, over half are aware of the term “neurodivergence”.

This suggests that although the broader concept is relatively well recognised, the terminology describing individuals within that framework is still less familiar.


Heard the term Neurodiversity

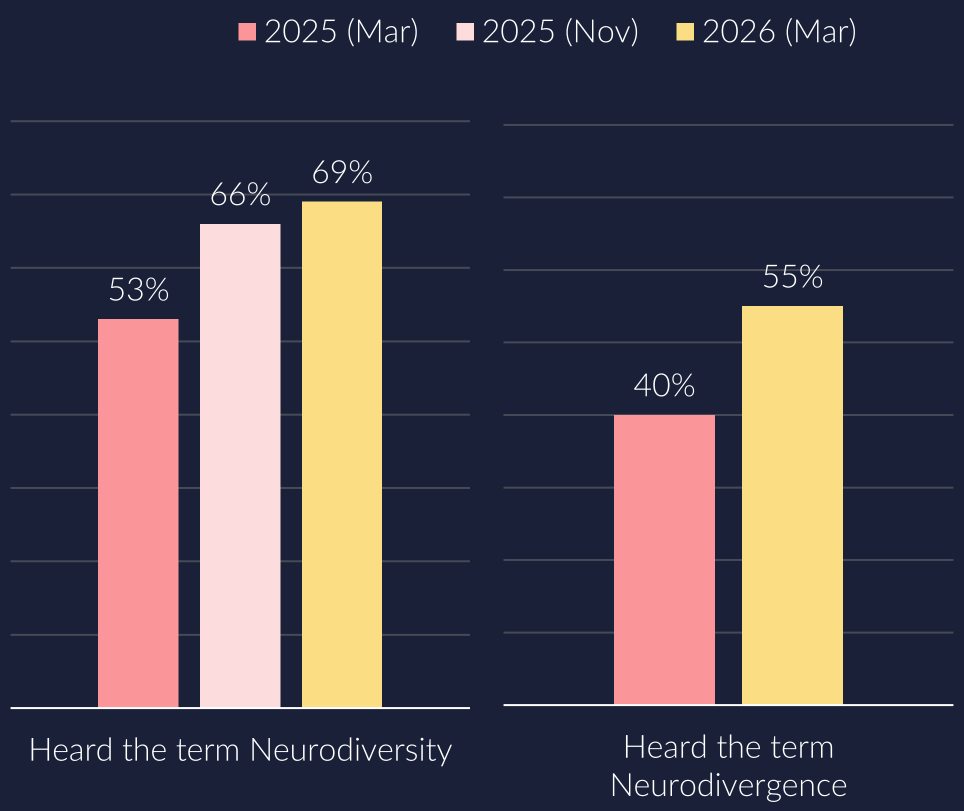
Heard the term Neurodivergence

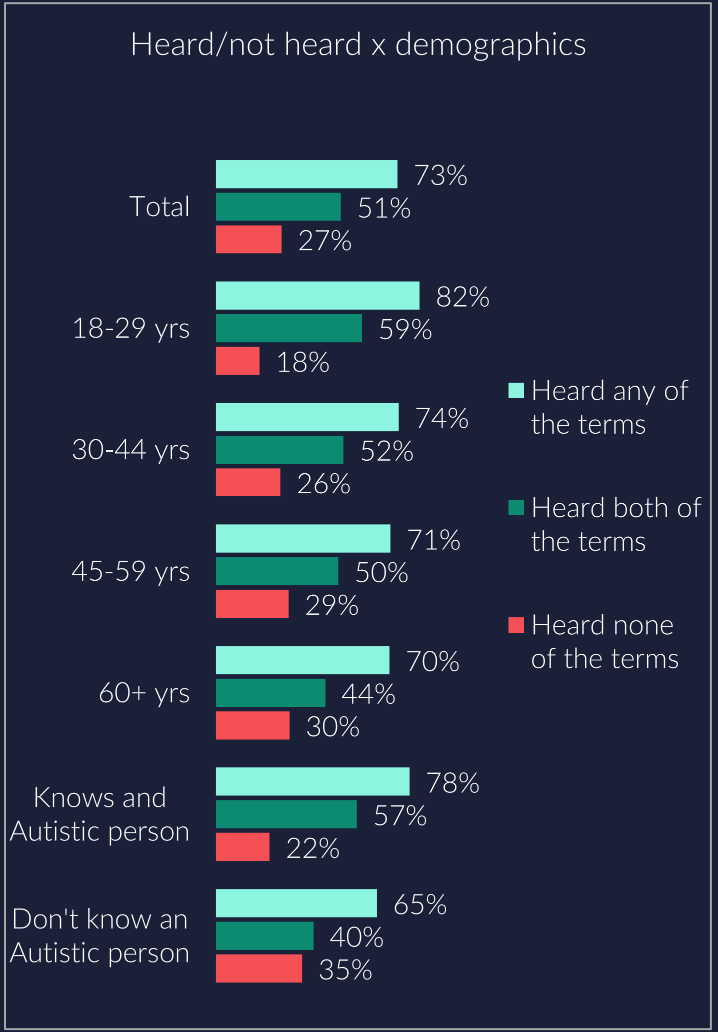
Q. Have you heard the term “neurodiversity”? Q. Have you heard the term “neurodivergence”?
Base: 1000

Recognition of “neurodiversity” grows, while “neurodivergence” is also becoming more widely recognised.

Recognition of the term “neurodiversity” has risen from 53% to 69% since March 2025, with 55% now also recognising the term “neurodivergence”.

Almost three in four were aware of either term.



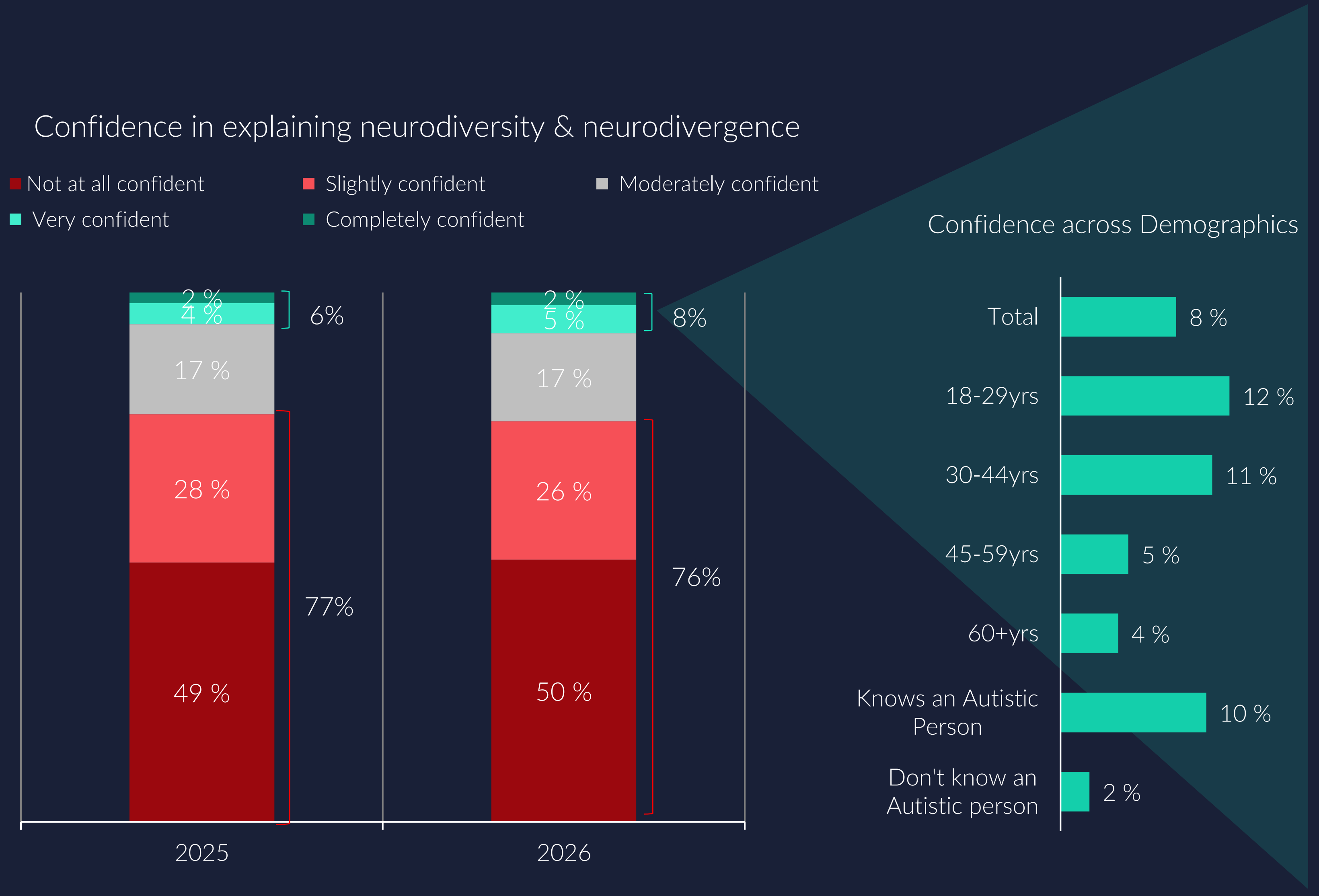

Heard/not heard x demographics

Q. Have you heard the term “neurodiversity”? Q. Have you heard the term “neurodivergence”?
Base: 1000

Note: Q about neurodivergence was not asked in November wave

Recognition does not translate into confidence.

Confidence in explaining neurodiversity remains very low and largely unchanged year-on-year. In 2026, 76% are not at all or only slightly confident, similar to 77% in 2025.

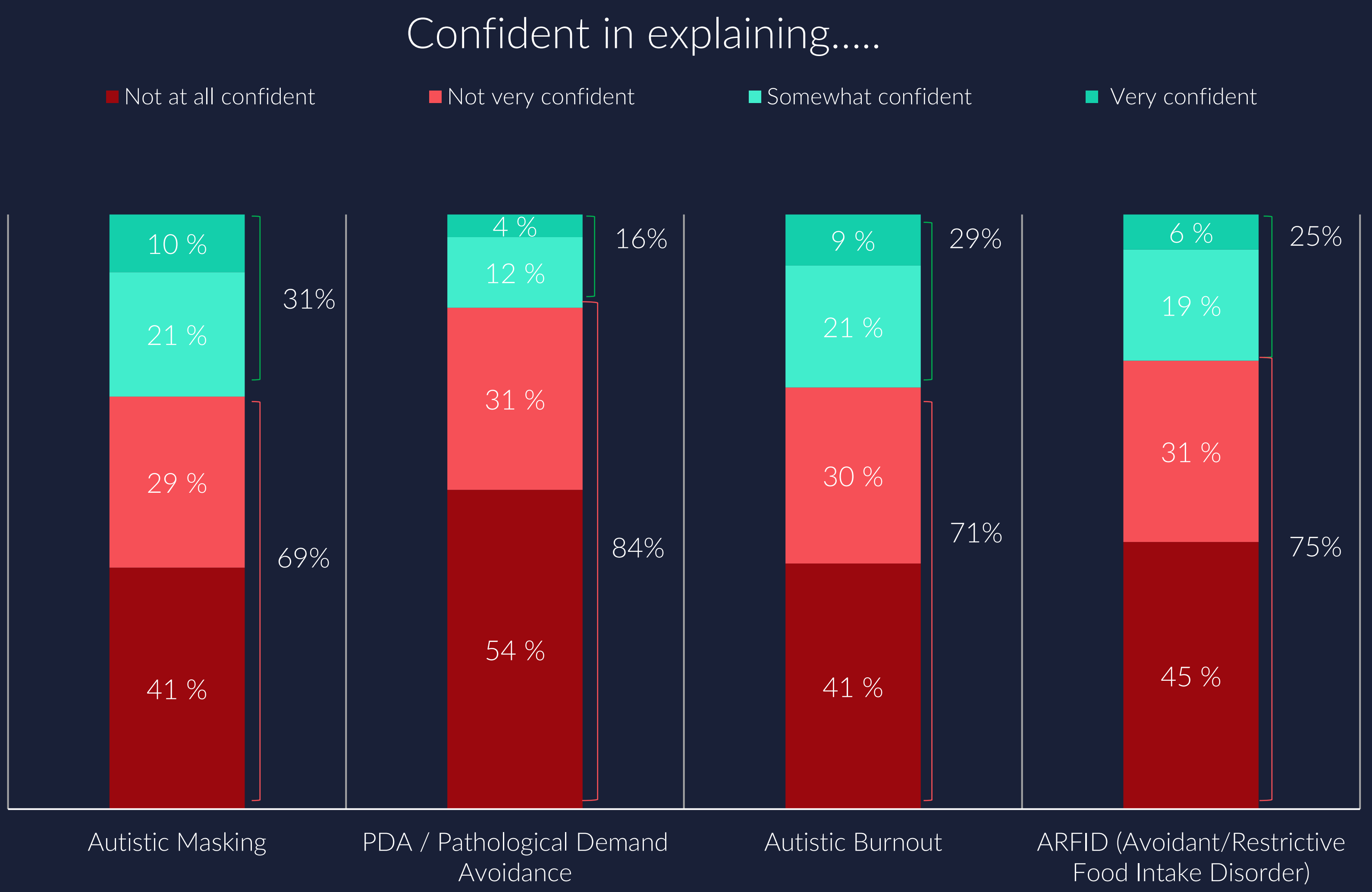


Q. How confident would you feel in explaining the difference between neurodiversity and neurodivergence?
Base: 1000

Confidence in explaining these terms is generally low, particularly for PDA, where 84% say they are not confident.

Around seven in ten are not confident explaining Autistic Masking or Autistic Burnout, rising to three in four for ARFID and over 8 in 10 for PDA.

This suggests that while some of these terms may be recognised, most people still do not feel equipped to explain what they mean.



Q. Thinking about the following terms, how confident would you be to explain them.
Base: 1000

Explaining Neurodiversity: Strong Awareness, Limited Understanding, and Early Signs of a Shift Toward Lived Experience

Compared with 2025, 2026 shows little change in the overall structure of understanding: neurodiversity is still mainly understood as a difference in how the brain works, and it remains strongly associated with Autism, ADHD and other diagnoses. The key gap also remains the same, with many people recognising the term but still unable to explain it clearly.

2026 shows early signs of a more progressive understanding, with some respondents framing neurodiversity as a natural variation and through lived experience. The direction of travel is positive, but understanding remains broad rather than deep, with familiarity with the terminology often exceeding confidence in explaining what it means.

Q. Could you please explain neurodiversity to the best of your knowledge?
Base: 693; Those who have heard the terms neurodiversity

Explaining Neurodiversity: Strong Awareness, Limited Understanding, and Early Signs of a Shift Toward Lived Experience

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1- Neurodiversity as Different Brain Functions

Most respondents continue to define neurodiversity as a difference in how the brain works, thinks or processes information. This remains the dominant framing, with many describing it in simple terms such as "thinking differently" or "being wired differently". While this reflects broad awareness, it often lacks depth and remains functional rather than conceptual understanding

2- Neurodiversity as a Range of Diagnoses

Many responses continue to link neurodiversity to Autism, ADHD, dyslexia and related diagnoses, reinforcing its understanding as a spectrum or umbrella term. This indicates stable awareness of neurodevelopmental diagnosis but also suggests that neurodiversity is still strongly tied to diagnosis-based thinking.

3- Neurodiversity as a Disability or Deficit

A smaller but notable group still frames neurodiversity as a disorder, illness or impairment, often referencing brain problems, imbalance or dysfunction. While less dominant, this highlights that deficit-based perceptions have not fully shifted.

4- Neurodiversity as Natural Variation (Emerging Understanding)

A smaller but important group describe neurodiversity as a natural and valid variation in how human brains work, explicitly rejecting deficit-based views. This aligns with modern framing ("different, not less") and indicates a gradual shift towards more inclusive understanding.

5- Neurodiversity as Lived / Social & Sensory Experience (New Layer)

Some define neurodiversity through real-life experience, including differences in social interaction, sensory sensitivity and feeling overwhelmed. This reflects a more applied and empathetic understanding, moving beyond abstract definitions to how neurodiversity is experienced in everyday life.

6- Lack of Knowledge / Uncertainty

A significant proportion still report being unable to explain the term, despite recognising it. This suggests that while awareness has increased, understanding remains shallow and fragmented, with many holding only partial or vague interpretations.

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Q. Could you please explain neurodiversity to the best of your knowledge? Base: 693; Those who have heard the terms neurodiversity

Explaining Neurodiversity: Strong Awareness, Limited Understanding, and Early Signs of a Shift Toward Lived Experience

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1- Neurodiversity as Different Brain Functions

"A difference in processing and expression because of different thought processes"

"A different way of processing things and looking at the world"

" Brain works differently to societal "norms", no apparent disability but will find social situations, day to day situations difficult"

"You think differently to others and find certain situations can be overwhelming but it's not medical condition your brain processes things differently but not completely opposite to the real event"

"Someone whose brain functions differently to what would be considered neurotypical"

2- Neurodiversity as a Range of Diagnoses

"Any other neurotype than neurotypical. It's an umbrella term which includes loads of different neurotypes like Autism, dyspraxia etc"

"A range or spectrum of different states of mind. Differences in how people process and react to the world around them"

"Neurodiversity is the concept that differences in human brain function—such as Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, are natural variations rather than deficits"

"A different set of processing pathways in the brain"

3- Neurodiversity as a Disability or Deficit

"A mental condition that alters how someone thinks or behaves"

"Some kind of neurological issues like poor perceptions"

"Someone who struggles to process emotions, people, things, someone who may see things differently"

"Those with mental disorder/that do not fit the status quo for what is perceived as normal behaviour"

"A person who is not neurotypical. They have a neuro developmental disorder such as Autism or Dyslexia or ADHD"

" Abrain malfunction"

4- Neurodiversity as Natural Variation (Emerging Understanding)

"Brain process different, not wrong, different"

"Neurodiversity means people's brains work in different ways, and that's normal."

"The idea that people's brains work differently, and those differences are normal and natural."

"There is no single or correct way for a brain to work"

"Differences in our brain that makes us act, think differently. There isn't a right nor a wrong way."

5- Neurodiversity as Lived / Social & Sensory Experience (New Layer)

"Neurodiversity refers to those who process thought and emotion differently and can become overwhelmed by noise, light or social situations"

"It's when a person gets overwhelmed and needs to take time out, doesn't like large crowds"

"Social interactions can be very difficult and require a lot of preparation"

"Different ways of processing information and communicating whether verbal, sensory, emotional or visual"

"Someone who may struggle with social situations or understanding others"

6- Lack of Knowledge / Uncertainty

"Don't know how to explain but I heard that "

"I am not sure what neurodiversity means but I have heard of the term before"

"I have heard of neurodiversity, but I don't have enough knowledge to explain about it"

"I just know the name, but I am not sure what exactly is"

"No idea, probably just another label people use so their kids can behave badly and not be reprimanded"

"Someone who is different but not sure how"

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Q. Could you please explain neurodiversity to the best of your knowledge? Base: 693; Those who have heard the terms neurodiversity

While most respondents had a general understanding of neurodiversity and neurodivergence, some were unclear about the distinction between the two.

Concept vs individual

Neurodiversity was broadly identified as a concept of neurological difference that includes a spectrum/range of disabilities/diagnoses and *neurodivergence* as the individual experience of that concept.

" I think neurodivergent refers to one individual and their disorder as opposed to neurodiversity which refers to groups, spectrums, etc. "

"Neurodiversity-the whole group, neurodivergence-the individual "

"Neurodiversity = The idea that brains are diverse. Neurodivergent = A person whose brain differs from typical development "

"Neurodivergence is how an individual acts and thinks differently and Neurodiversity is a much broader term encompassing a wider scope of differences "

Typical vs different

Neurodiversity identified as the broad range of different brain types and neurodivergence as an individual difference from neurotypical norms.

"Diversity covers all the different neuro needs whilst divergence is away from the norm "

"It's related to brain function n it's function outside the norm "

" Neurodiversity refers to the variety of ways in thinking and doing whereas neurodivergence is not "neurotypical "

" Neurodiversity is the acknowledgment that there are different ways a brain works. Neurodivergence is a brain that works differently from what is considered normal/standard "

Unawareness & disorders

Few responses described both as disorders or diagnoses. This highlights people's lack of awareness, even though they believe they are aware. There are also people who are completely unaware about the difference.

"Mental disorders"

"I am not sure, but they fall under the same bracket "

"Both irrelevant names for the same disorder"

"Neurodivergent is someone with a brain with some sort of mental difficulty"

"Neurodiversity meaning the conditions are large but similar at one part, like Autism spectrums or ADHD. Neurodivergence talk about more serious neurological issues like other medical conditions like Alzheimer "

Q. Could you please describe the difference between 'neurodiversity' and 'neurodivergence' to the best of your knowledge? There are no right or wrong answers, just type what comes to mind.
Base: 123; Those who feel confident in explaining the difference between neurodiversity and neurodivergence

Autism is…

The most common themes highlight the general awareness of Autism as a neurological difference followed by differences in communication, social interaction, and sensory sensitivities. Other responses reflect varying levels of understanding as a spectrum, disability or disorder and around misconceptions to associations with intelligence and unique abilities.

Autism as a Neurological Difference

"A neurotype difference that presents with social difficulties, sensory difficulties and perception difficulties "

" Is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference affecting how people perceive the world, interact socially, and communicate "

"A development difference in someone's brain resulting in communication difficulties and sensory overload "

Communication, Social Interaction & Sensory Sensitivities

"It is neurodevelopmental condition characterised by challenges with communication, interactions and repetitive behaviours"

"Autism is when someone's brain works a bit differently, which can change how they communicate, socialise, and experience things "

"A different brain with development delays along with stimming, problems with fine motor skills and communication and sensory difficulties "

Autism as a Spectrum & Individual Variation

"A type of neurodivergence which has large spectrum from struggling to communicate to sensory processing it can look very different from person to person "

"Autism is a spectrum, there are many different kinds, some people are nonverbal "

"A spectrum of how the brain the brain works differently to 'normal' people "

Autism as a Disability or Disorder

"A neurological disorder that changes the way someone acts, interacts and is perceived "

" A neurological disorder that makes the person with it have multiple different problems depending on what form they have "

" It's a disability which affects how persons react to other persons and how they learn "

Stereotypes, Misunderstandings & Limited Awareness

"Caused by vaccination and also can be passed down parents should test first to see if kids can even handle some vaccines or not give at all "

"In many cases, it's a parent's excuse for bad behaviour"

"A mental disorder that could be mild or severe and impacts people in many different way "

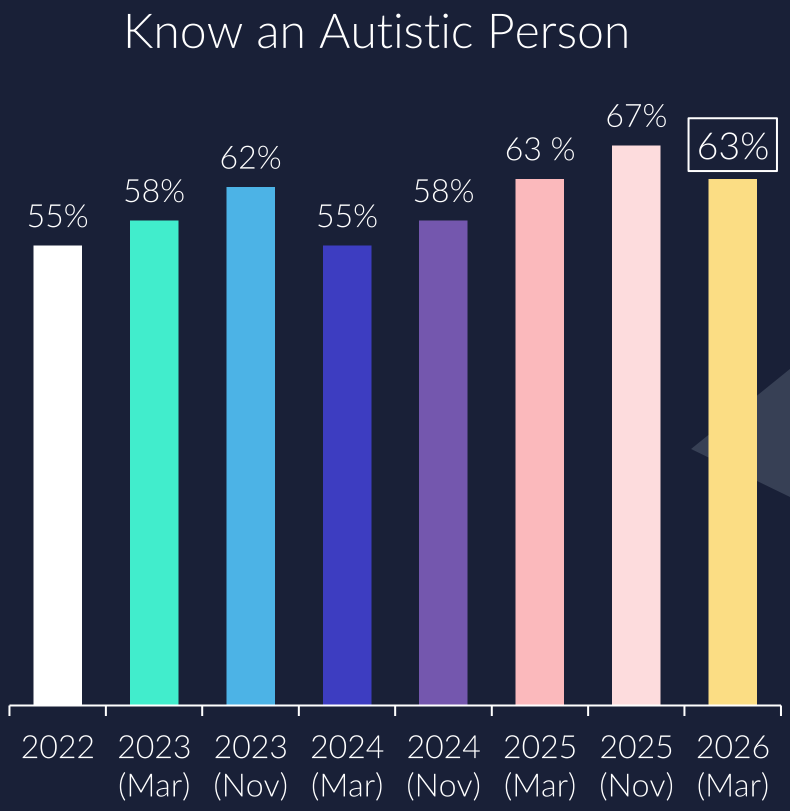
Q. Could you please explain Autism to the best of your knowledge?
Base: 1000

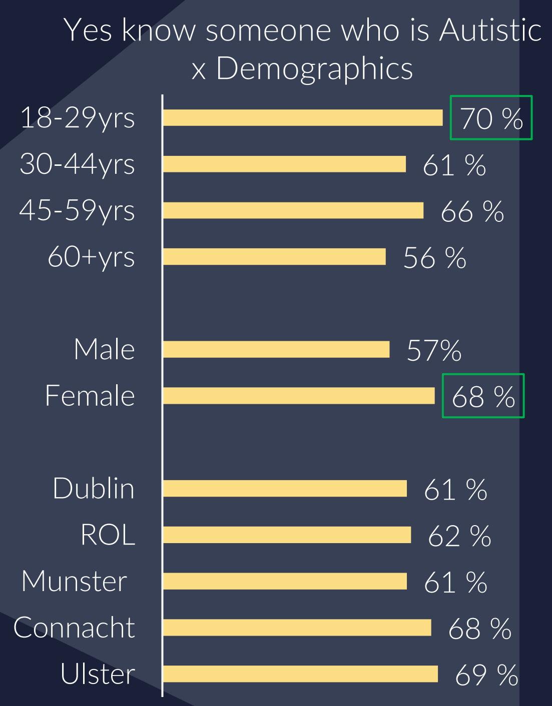
Relationship with people who are Autistic

63% personally know someone who is Autistic.

Almost 2 in 3 people personally knows an Autistic person

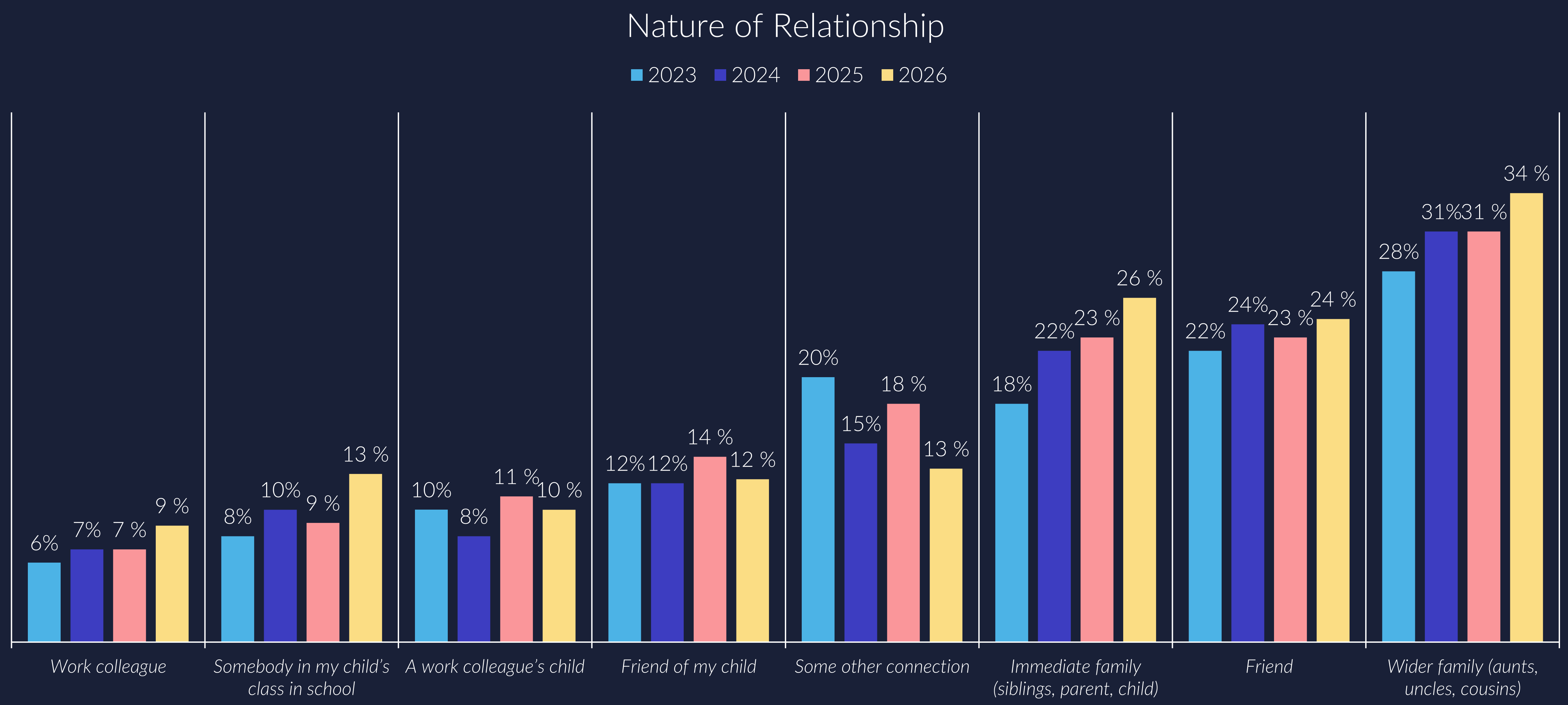
63% say they personally know someone who is Autistic, which is 4pp lower than last wave.
Females and those aged 18-29 yrs are more likely to know someone Autistic.





Q. Do you personally know anybody who is Autistic? Please choose one answer.
Base: 1000

1 in 4 have a personal connection with an Autistic person; being part of close family or a friend



Q. What is your relationship to or connection with this Autistic person/people? Please choose all that apply
Base: 628; all those know who know an Autistic person

core™ Research

Attitudes towards Autistic People

51% think that Autistic people are treated differently

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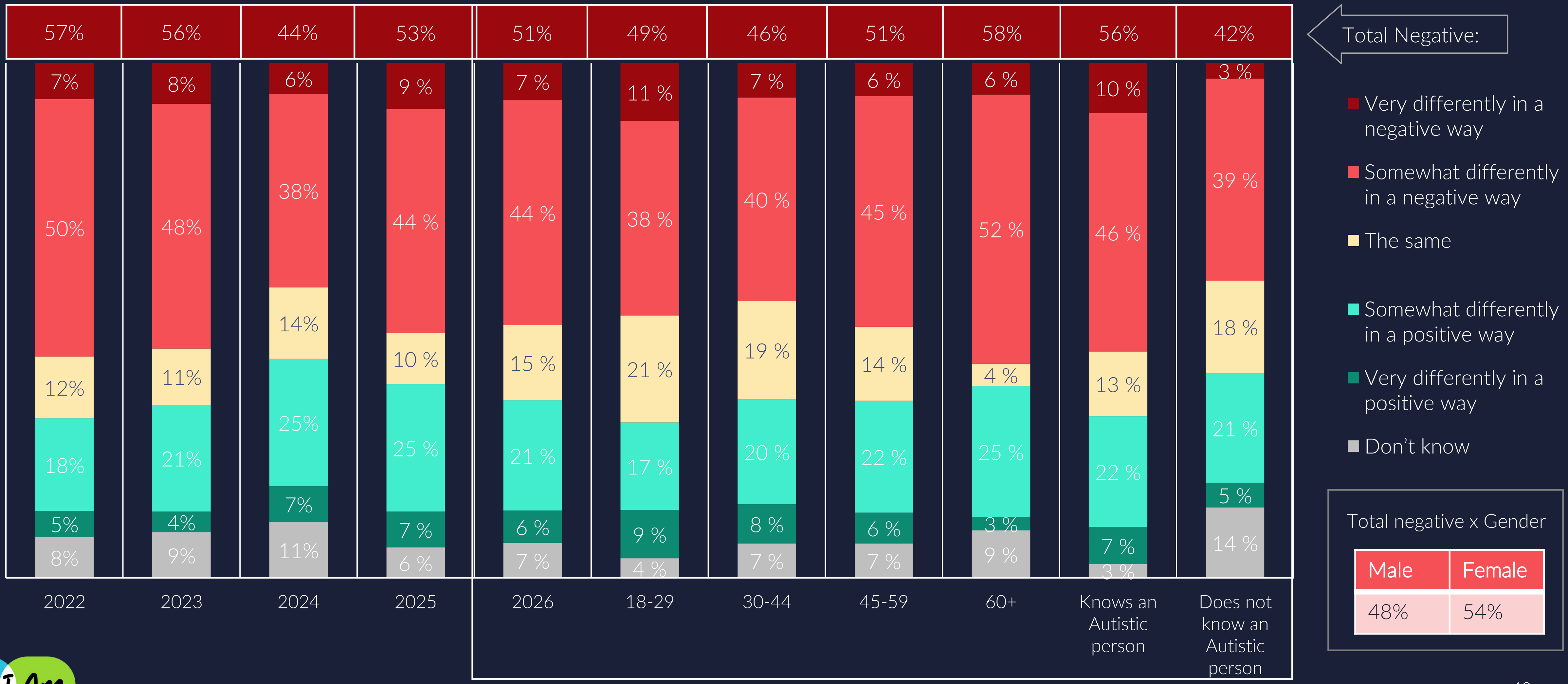
Those who know an Autistic person feel they are treated more negatively than those who don't know anyone who is Autistic. Overall half believe Autistic people are treated negatively

core™ Research

The public perception that Autistic people are treated negatively has decreased by 3 pp compared to last year. Males (48%) and those who aged 30-44 yrs (46%) are least likely to report negative treatment towards Autistic people. Although those aged under 30 yrs are more likely than any other age group to personally know someone who is Autistic, they show relatively low acknowledgement of negative treatment.



Total negative x Gender

Male	Female
48%	54%

Q. In society, how do you feel Autistic people are treated compared to non-Autistic people?
Base:1000

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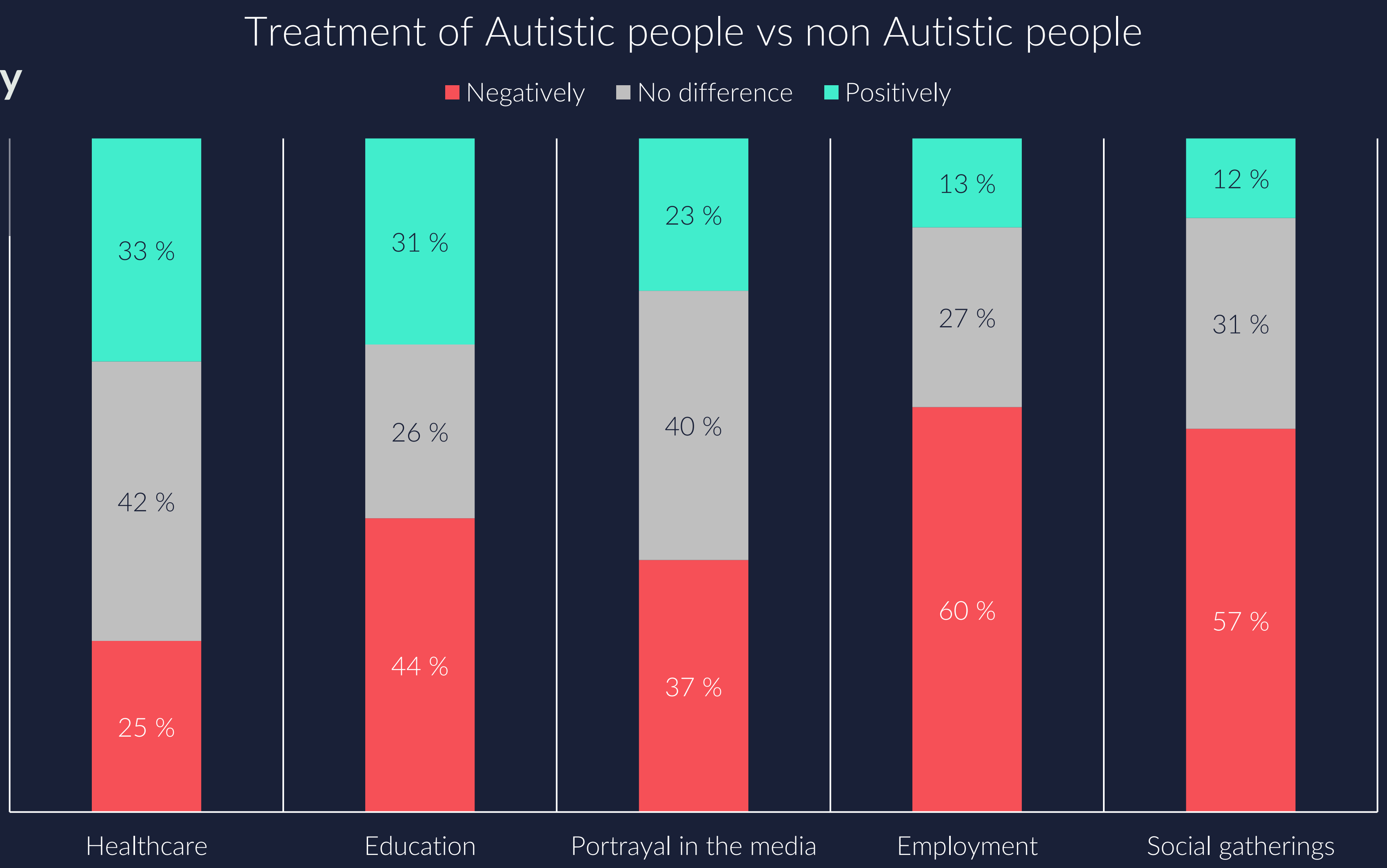
3 in 5 says Autistic people are treated more negatively compared to non-Autistic people in the workplace

Autistic people are seen as receiving the most positive treatment within healthcare (33%) settings, with education (31%) ranking second.

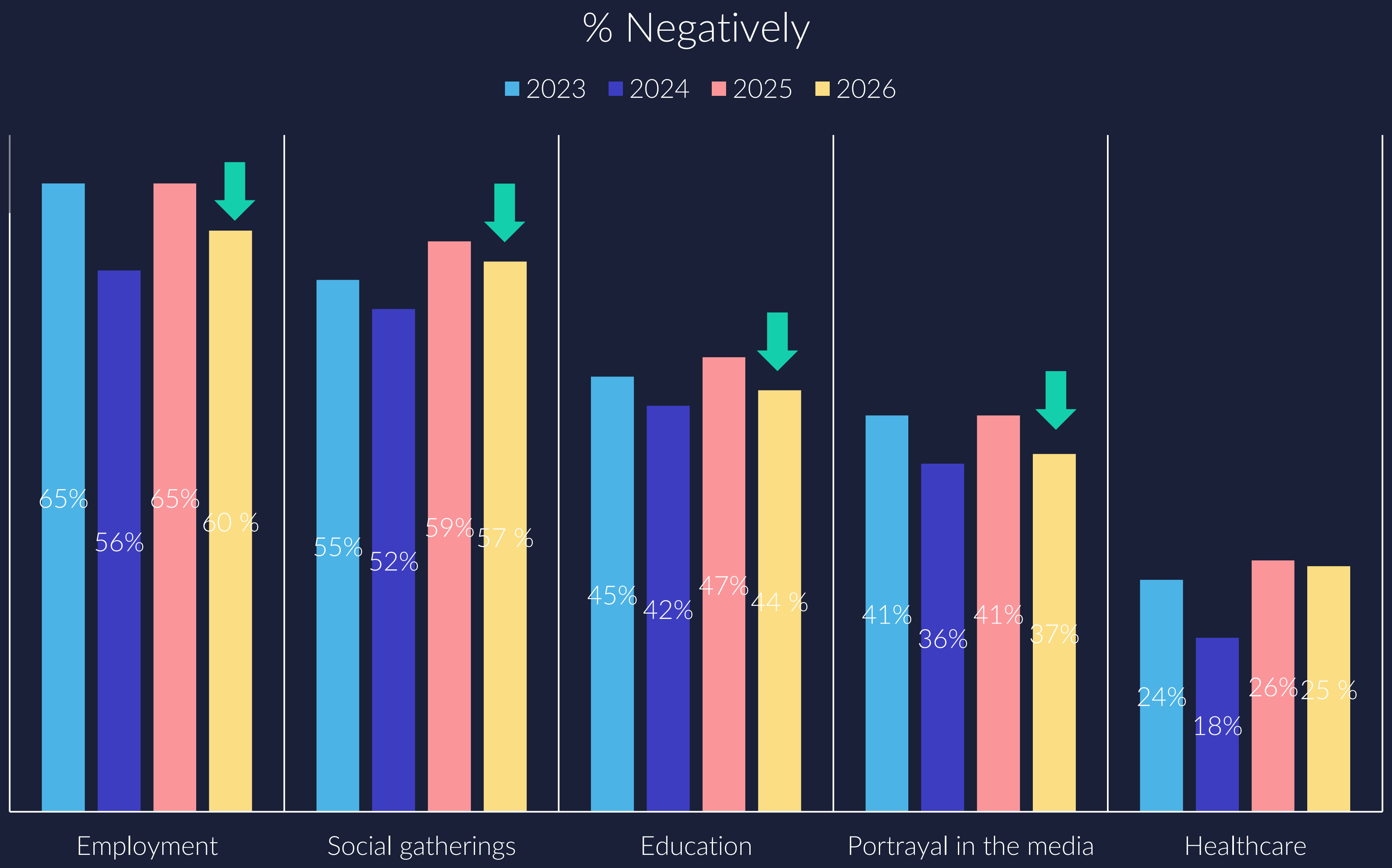
Males and those aged between 30-44 yrs are most likely to report there is no difference in treating Autistic and non-Autistic people in Education.



Q. In the following areas, how do you feel Autistic people are treated compared to non-Autistic people?
Base:1000

Perceived negative treatment of Autistic people relative to non-Autistic people has decreased this year

Perceptions that Autistic people experience more negative treatment than non-Autistic people have declined significantly in employment and portrayal in the media compared to last year.

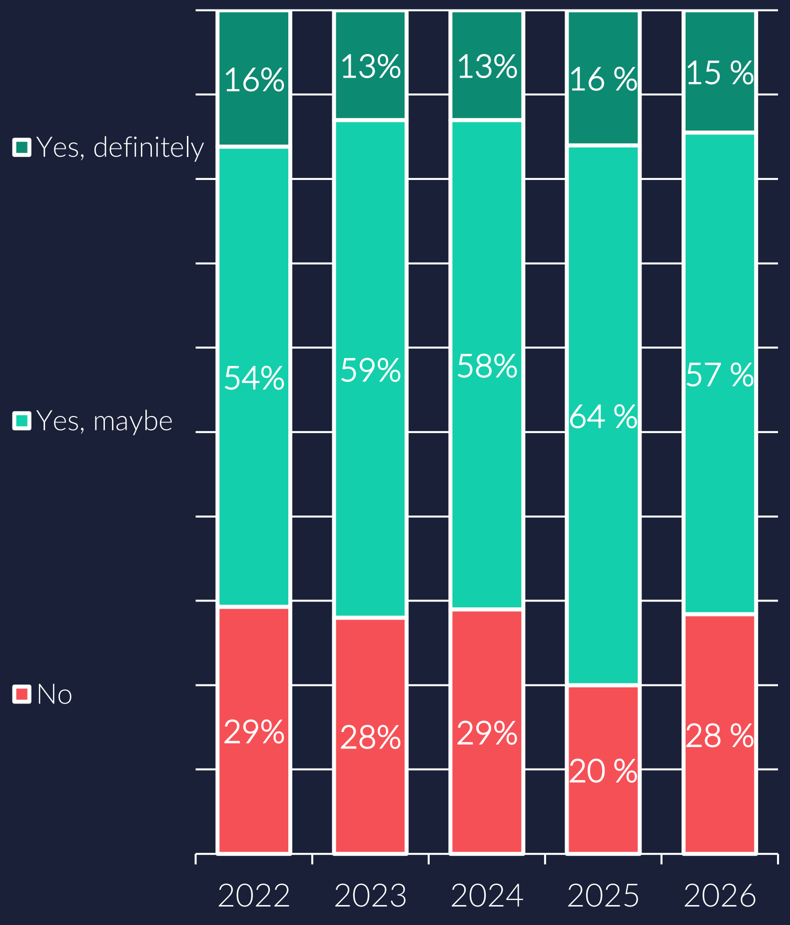


Q. In the following areas, how do you feel Autistic people are treated compared to non-Autistic people?
Base:1000

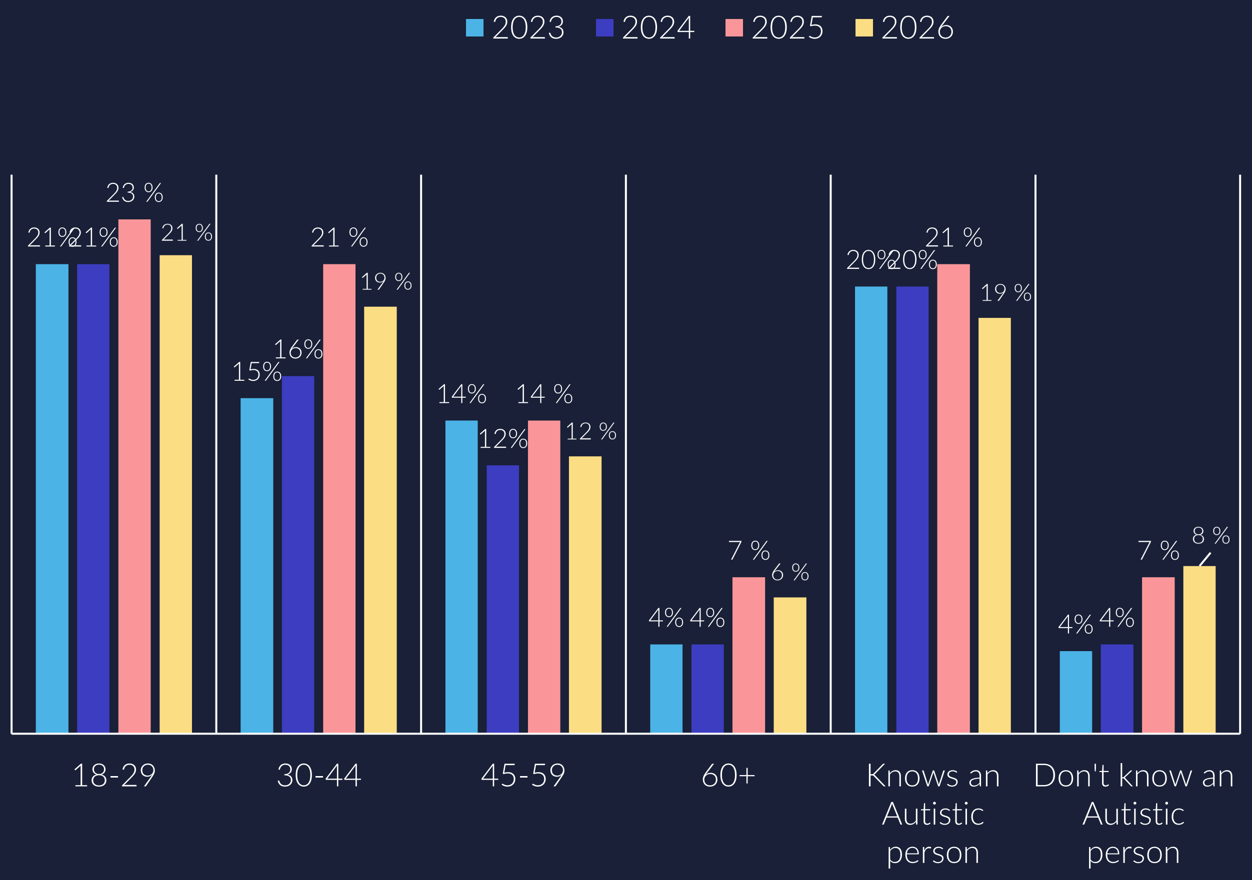
Fewer people now believe they can recognise Autism in someone they have never met; highest drop among those aged 30-44 & those who know an Autistic person

coreResearch

Would you know if a person is Autistic...



% Yes, definitely



Q. Do you think you would know if a person is Autistic, having never met them before? Please choose one answer.
Base:1000

3 in 4 says there is no difference in appearance of an Autistic person relative to non-Autistic person

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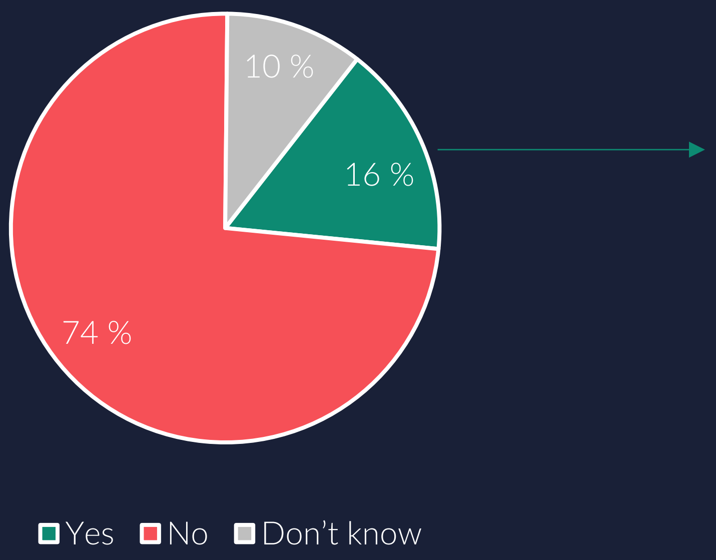
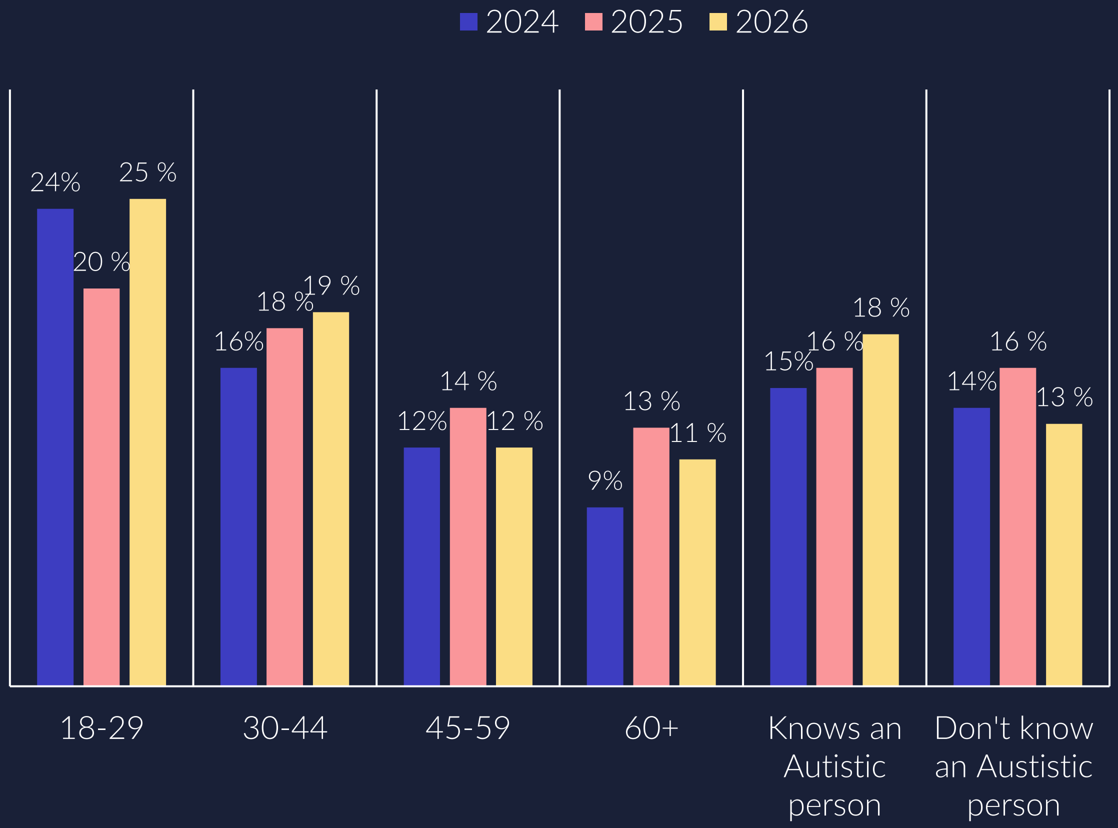
Perceptions that Autistic people ‘look different’ have grown across all age groups under 45, but have decreased among participants aged above 45 yrs. This view has also increased slightly among those who know an Autistic person.

Difference in appearance



% Yes

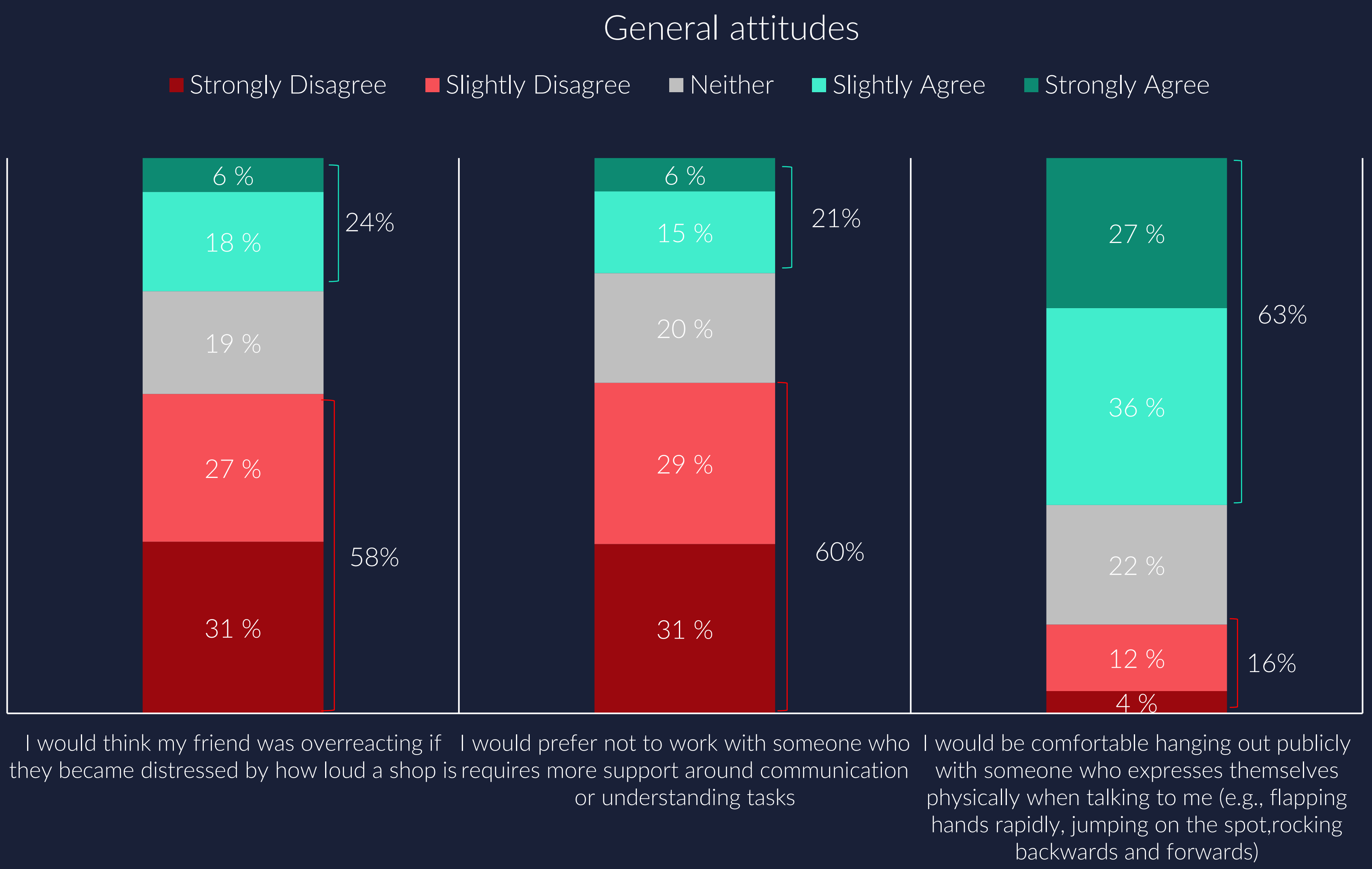


Q. Do you think people who are Autistic look different to people who are not Autistic? Please choose one answer.
Base:1000

Broadly accepting response to Autistic differences in everyday life.

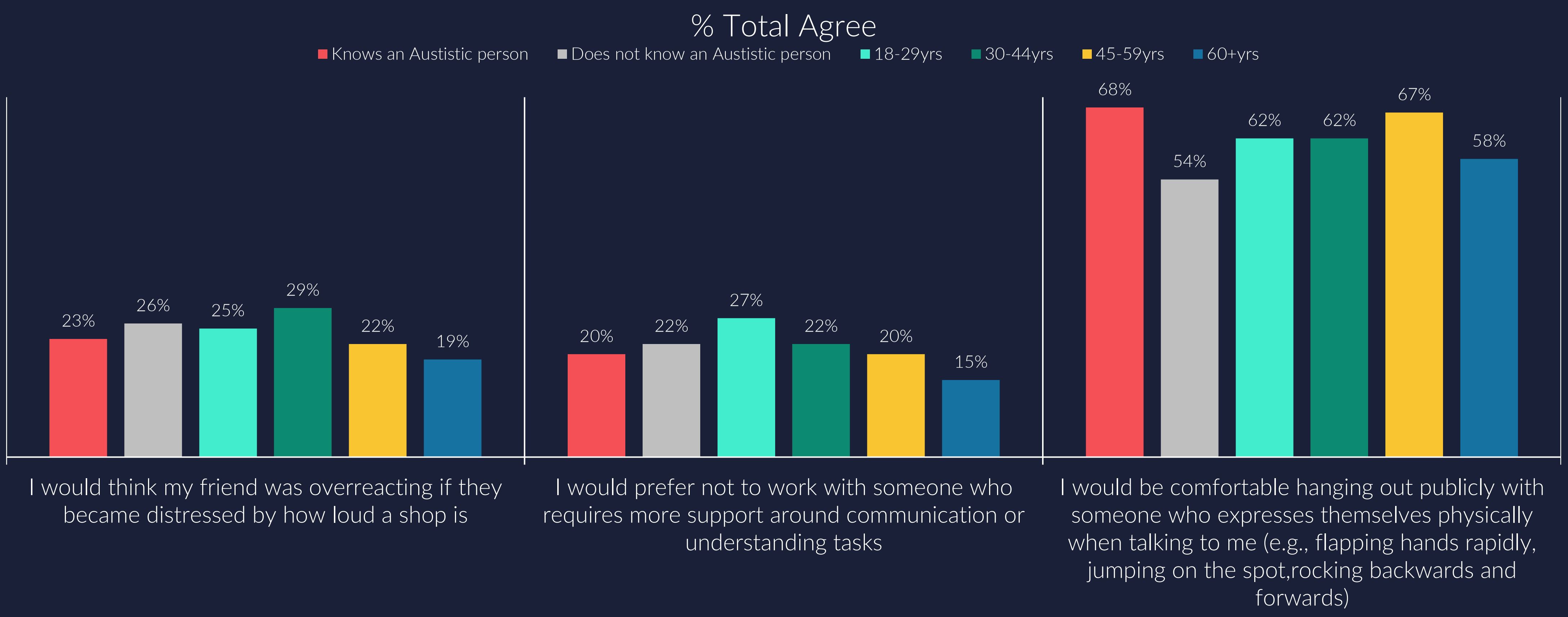
3 in 5 disagree that a friend is overreacting if they become distressed by noise in a shop and also reject the idea of avoiding someone at work because they need more support with communication or understanding tasks.

This acceptance is also reflected socially, with almost 2 in 3 saying they would be comfortable being seen in public with someone who expresses themselves physically when speaking.



Q. Now we would like to ask you opinions on some of the statements below. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

Those who know an Autistic person are more comfortable socialising publicly, while younger respondents are more likely to feel uneasy about workplace support needs



General attitudes

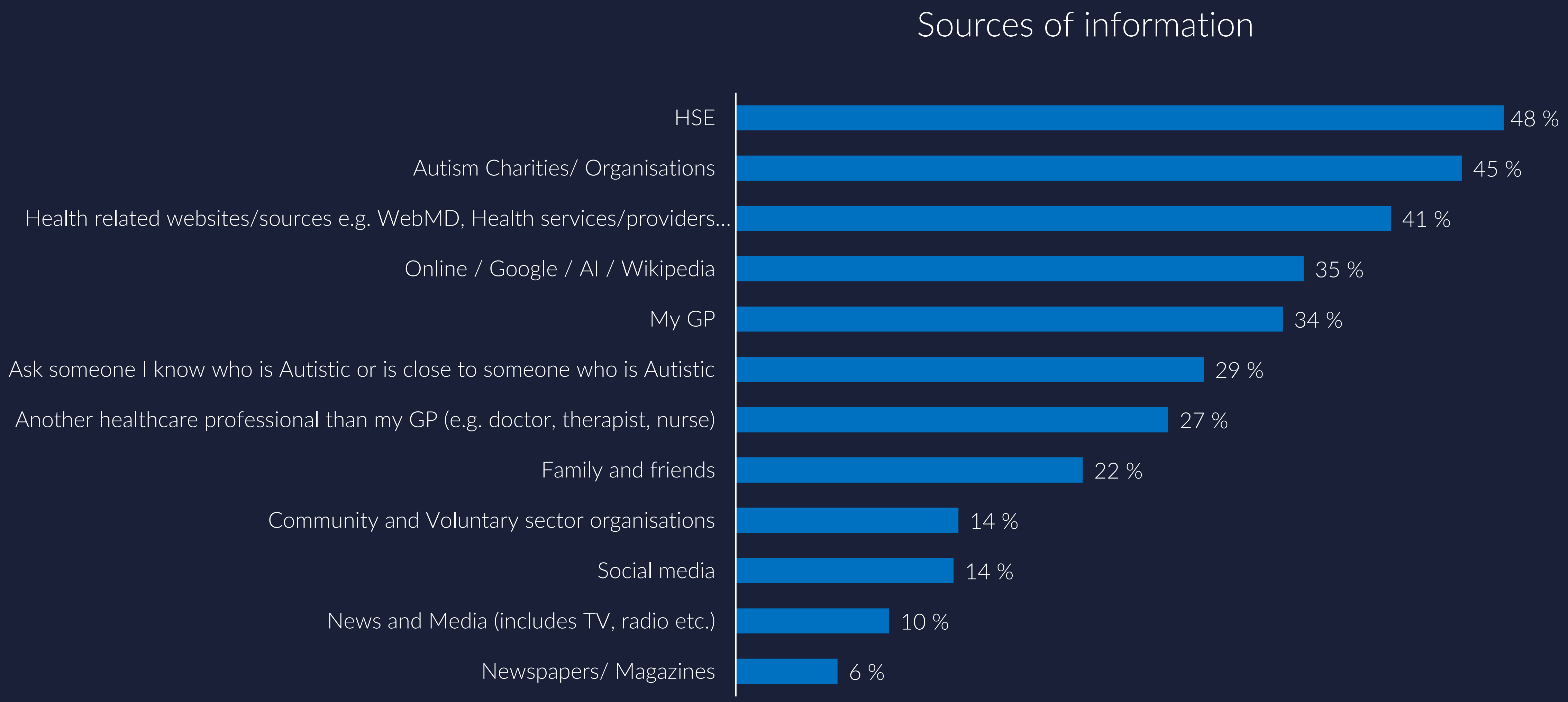
% Total Agree

Q. Now we would like to ask you opinions on some of the statements below. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: 1000

Sources of Information

61% rely on Autism charities/organisation for Information on Autism

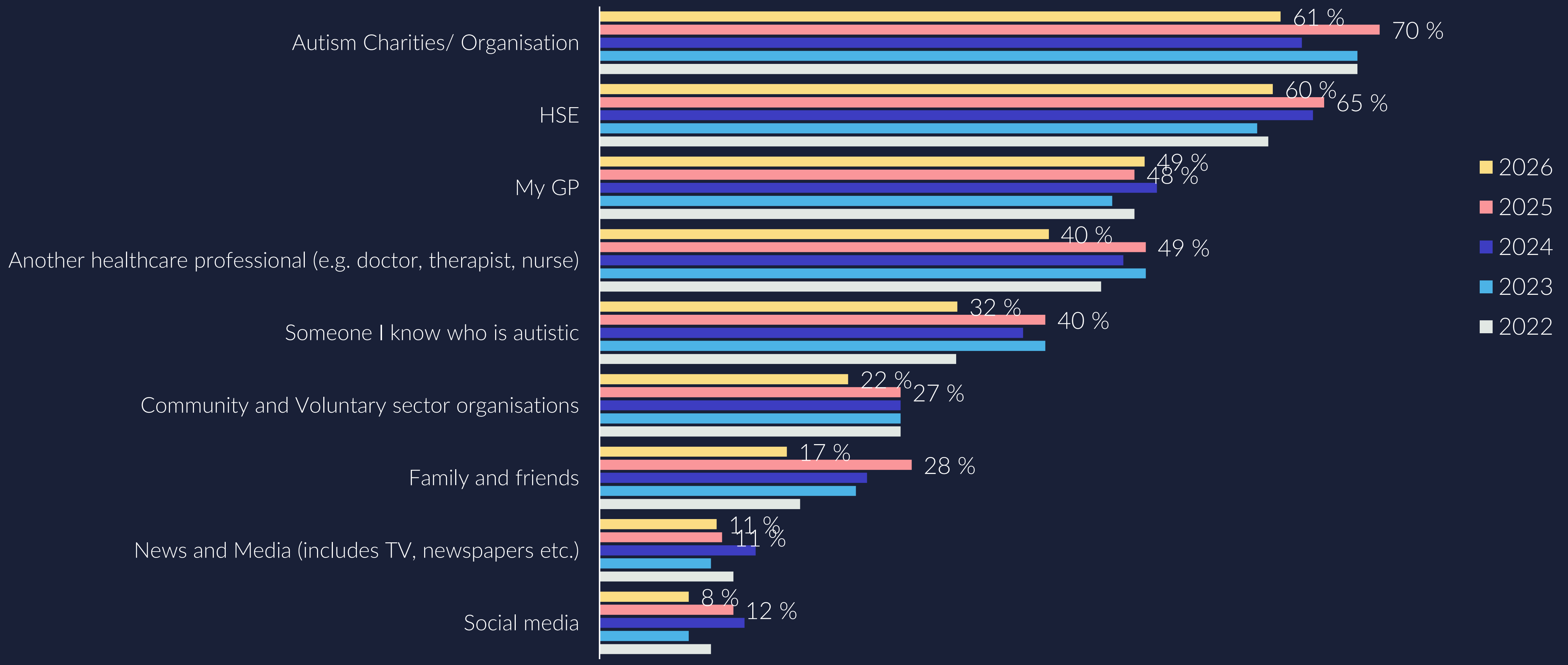
The HSE, Autism charities and health related websites are the main access points and sources of information about Autism. As many people ‘google’/use AI as ask their GP.



Q. Where would you go to access to information about Autism? Please choose all that apply.
Base:1000

Autism charities and organisations along with the HSE are viewed as the most reliable sources of information on Autism, followed by GPs. Media / social media not seen as reliable

Reliable Sources of Autism Information



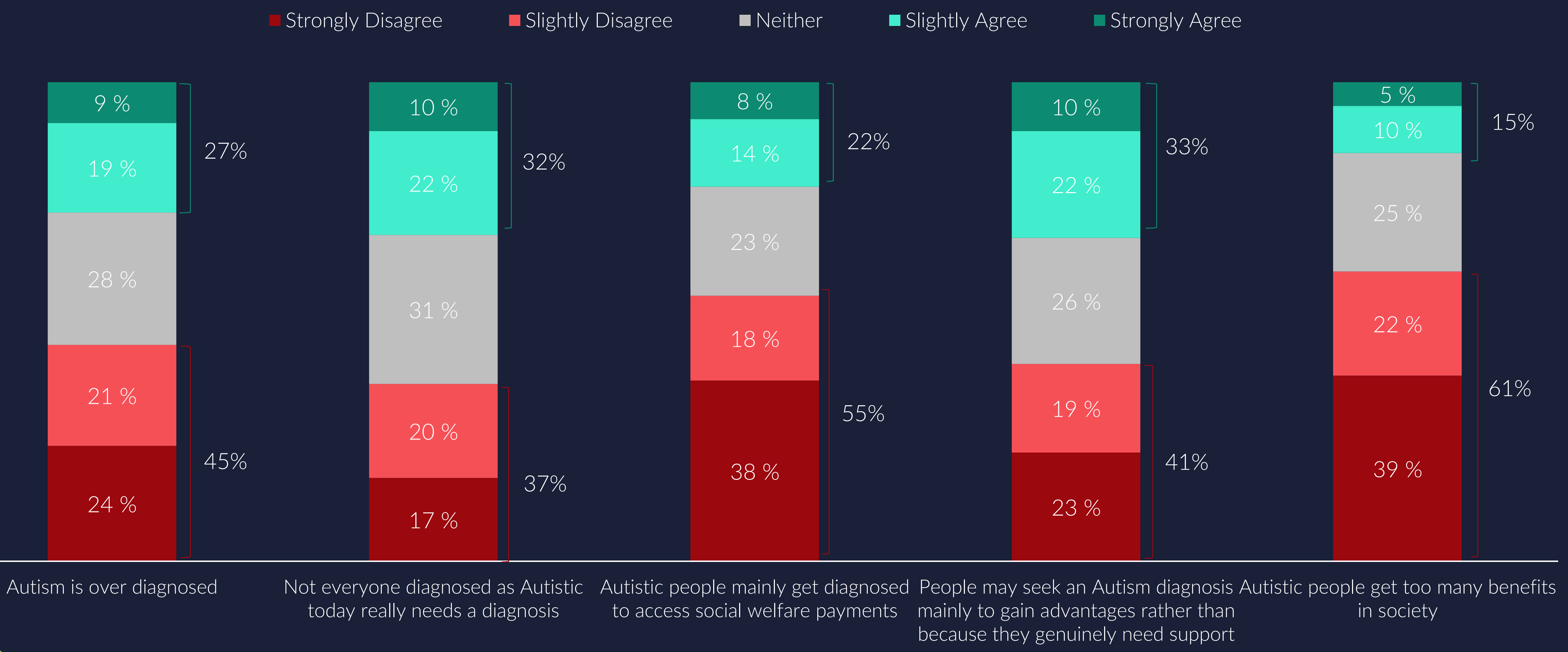
Q. What do you think are reliable sources of information on Autism? Please choose all that apply.
Base:1000

Public Perceptions & Beliefs about Autism

Public attitudes toward Autism are not one-dimensional — they reflect a complex mix of support, scepticism and social acceptance.

Contested understanding of Autism: Legitimacy & Entitlement

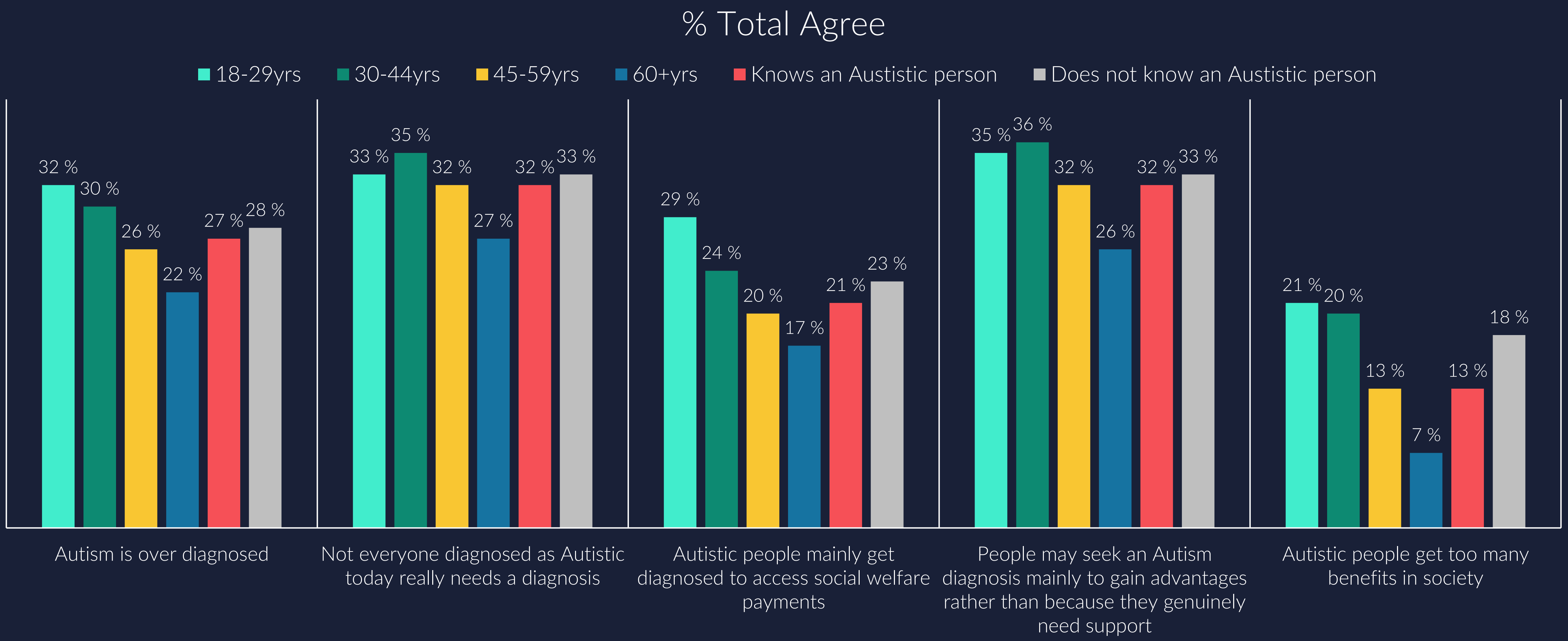
While most reject the idea that Autism diagnosis is driven mainly by access to benefits or welfare, uncertainty is higher when it comes to the legitimacy of diagnosis itself. In particular, 31% neither agree nor disagree that not everyone diagnosed as Autistic today really needs a diagnosis, while 28% are also unsure whether Autism is over diagnosed.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Contested understanding of Autism: Legitimacy & Entitlement

Scepticism about Autism diagnosis is more pronounced among younger respondents, while agreement with these statements generally decline with age.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Contested understandings of Autism: Causes, Framing & Stigma

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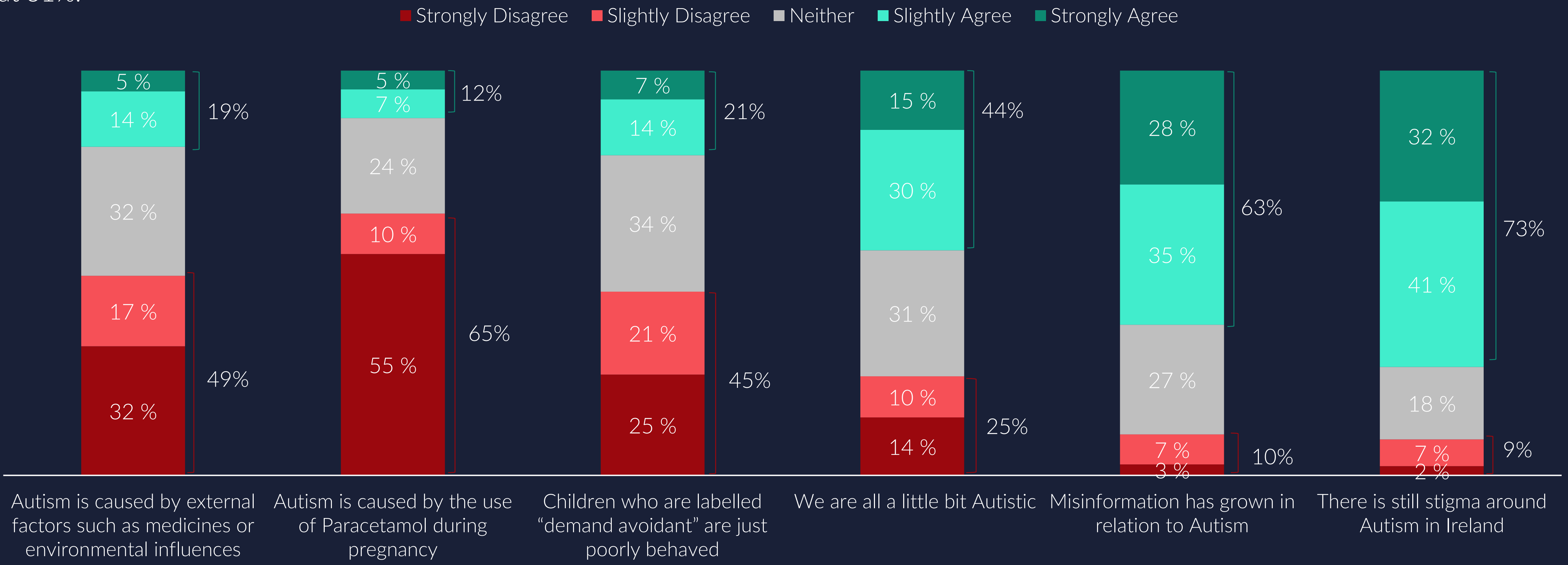
The findings point to a public that recognises Autism stigma and misinformation but is still not fully clear on where misunderstanding ends and misconception begins. While strong majorities agree that stigma remains in Ireland (73%) and that misinformation has grown (63%), uncertainty is still evident around a number of beliefs about Autism, including its causes and how actions such as demand avoidance should be understood. The statement that "we are all a little bit Autistic" attracts more agreement than disagreement (45% vs 24%), though uncertainty remains high at 31%.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

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Contested understandings Autism: Causes, Framing & Stigma

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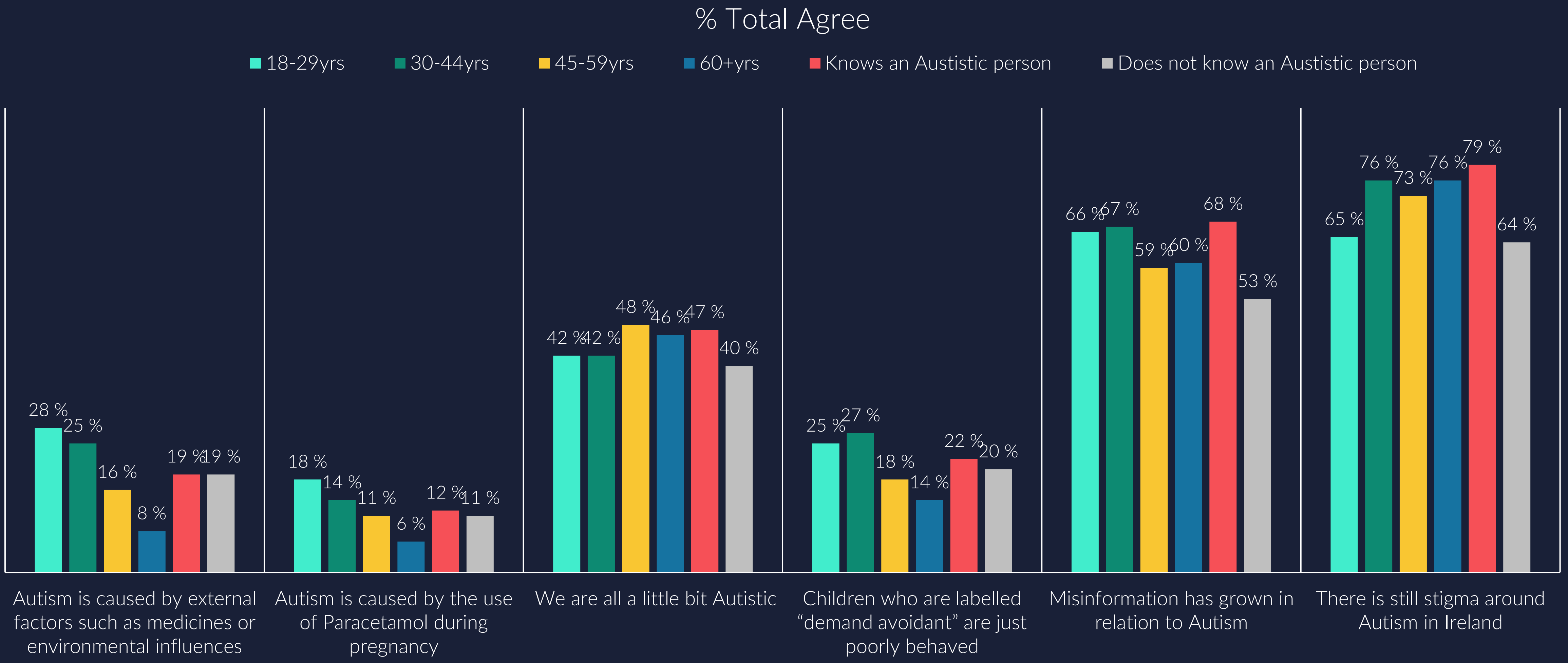
Younger respondents are more likely to endorse misconceptions about causes and actions, while those who know an Autistic person are more likely to recognise that stigma and misinformation remain issues.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

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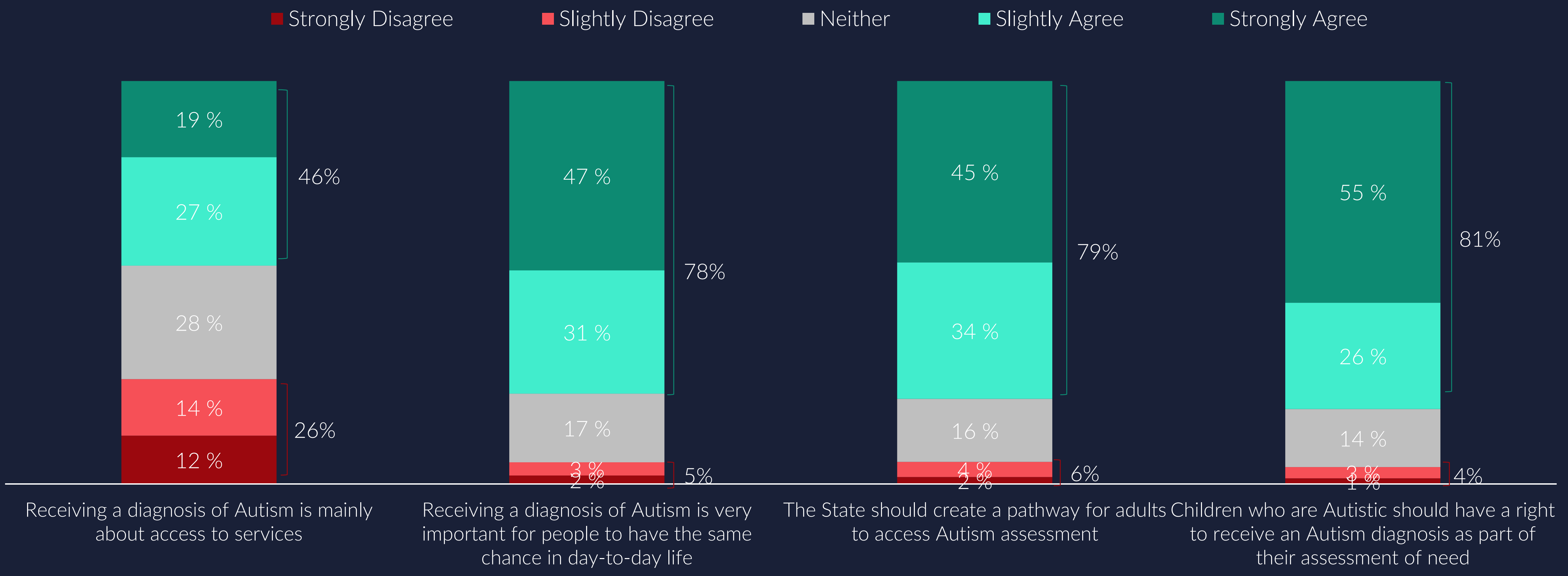
Diagnosis: Purpose, access & rights

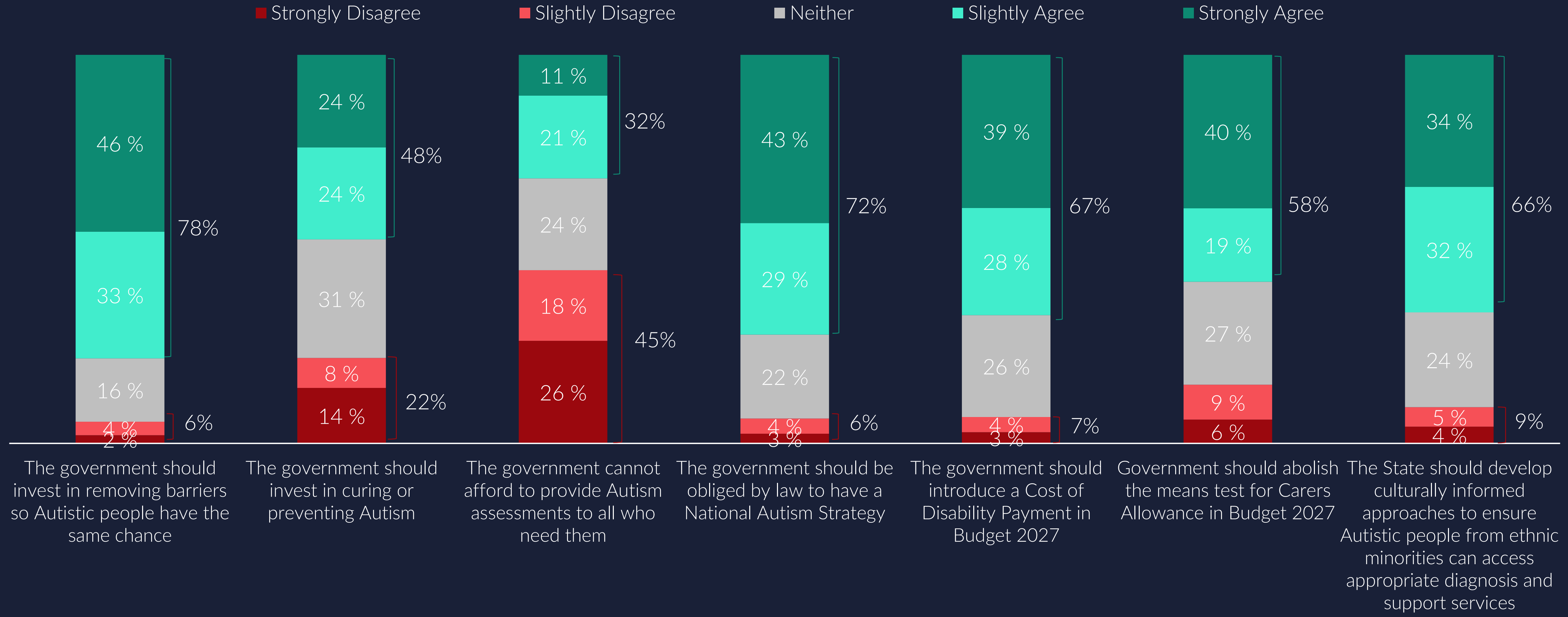
Public support for access to Autism diagnosis is very strong. Almost 4 in 5 agree that diagnosis is important for giving people the same chance in day-to-day life, that the State should create an adult assessment pathway, and that Autistic children should have a right to diagnosis as part of their assessment of need. By contrast, views are more mixed on whether diagnosis is mainly about access to services, with almost half agreeing and 28% unsure.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Government responsibility & Public investment

There is strong public support for government action to improve outcomes for Autistic people. Around 4 in 5 support removing barriers so Autistic people have the same chance in society, while around 7 in 10 support a National Autism Strategy being placed in law. 2 in 3 support introducing a Cost of Disability Payment, and around 3 in 5 support abolishing the means test for Carer's Allowance. By contrast, views are more mixed on investing in curing or preventing Autism, with around 3 in 10 unsure.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Education & School Environment

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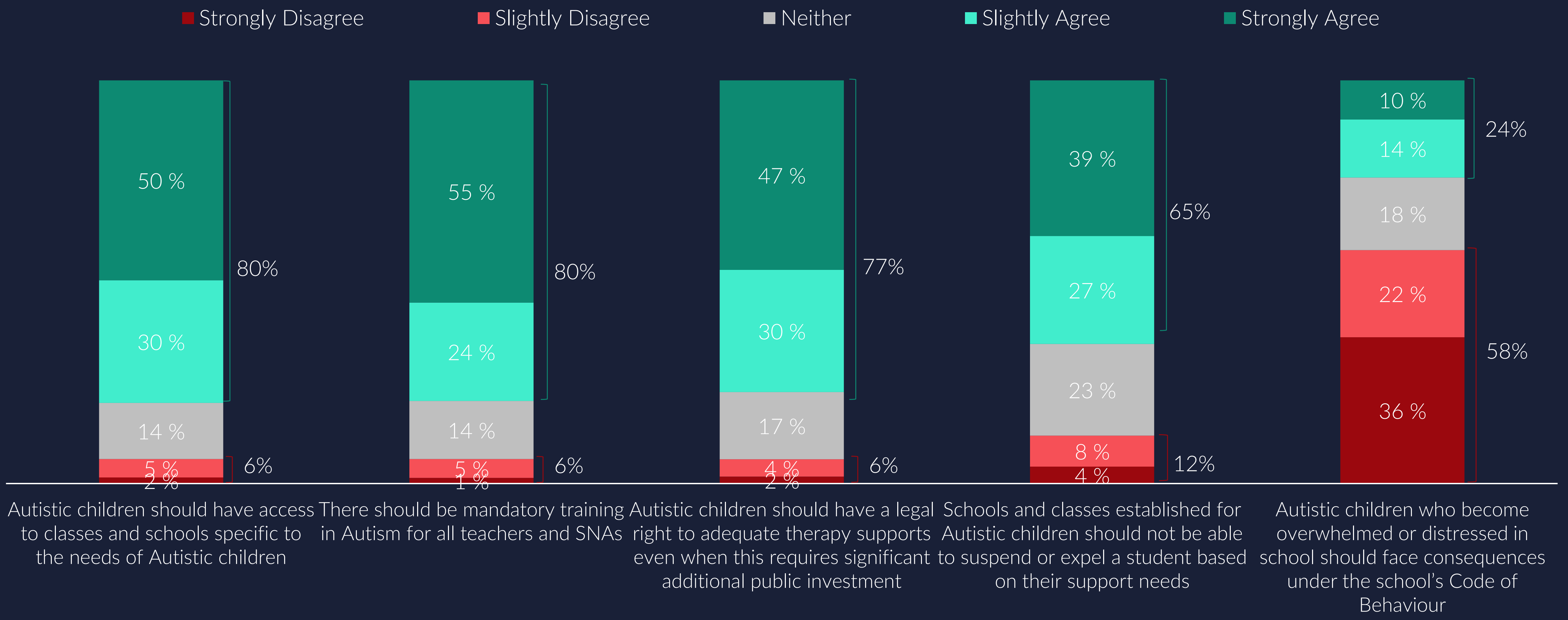
Around 4 in 5 support mandatory Autism training for teachers and SNAs and access to specialist classes for Autistic children. Around 3 in 4 support a legal right to adequate therapy supports, even where this requires significant public investment. At the same time, around 3 in 5 reject the idea that children who become overwhelmed in school should face consequences under the Code of Behaviour, indicating a preference for support over punishment.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

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Workplace, Economic & Legal Inclusion:

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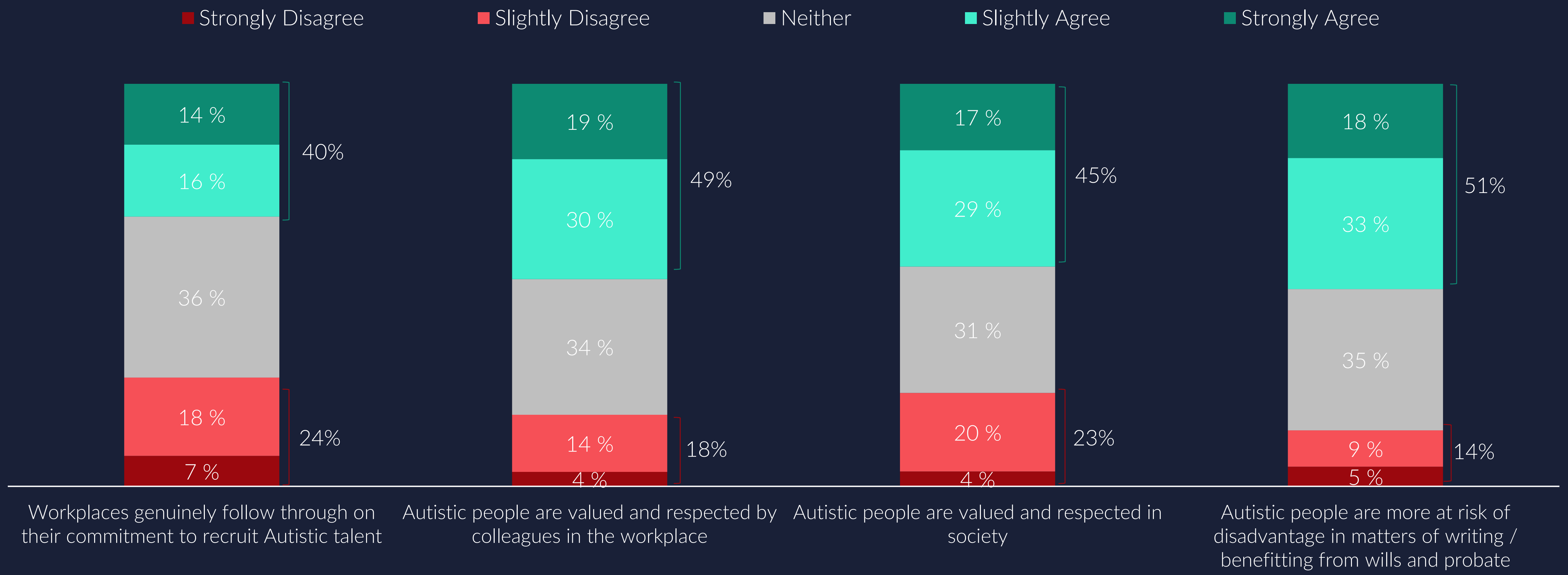
Perceptions of how Autistic people are treated are mixed, with sizeable neutral responses across statements. Around half agree that Autistic people are valued and respected by colleagues and in society more broadly.



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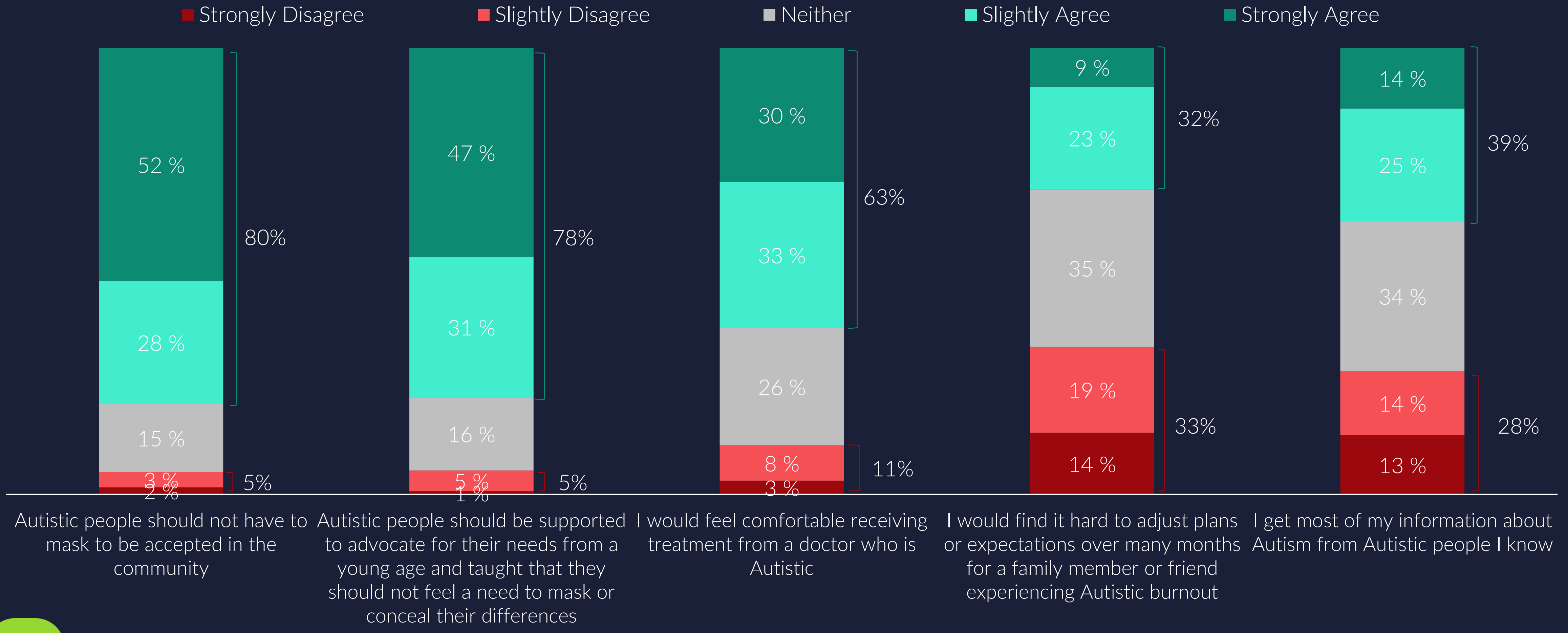
Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Inclusion in Practice: Social conduct & norms

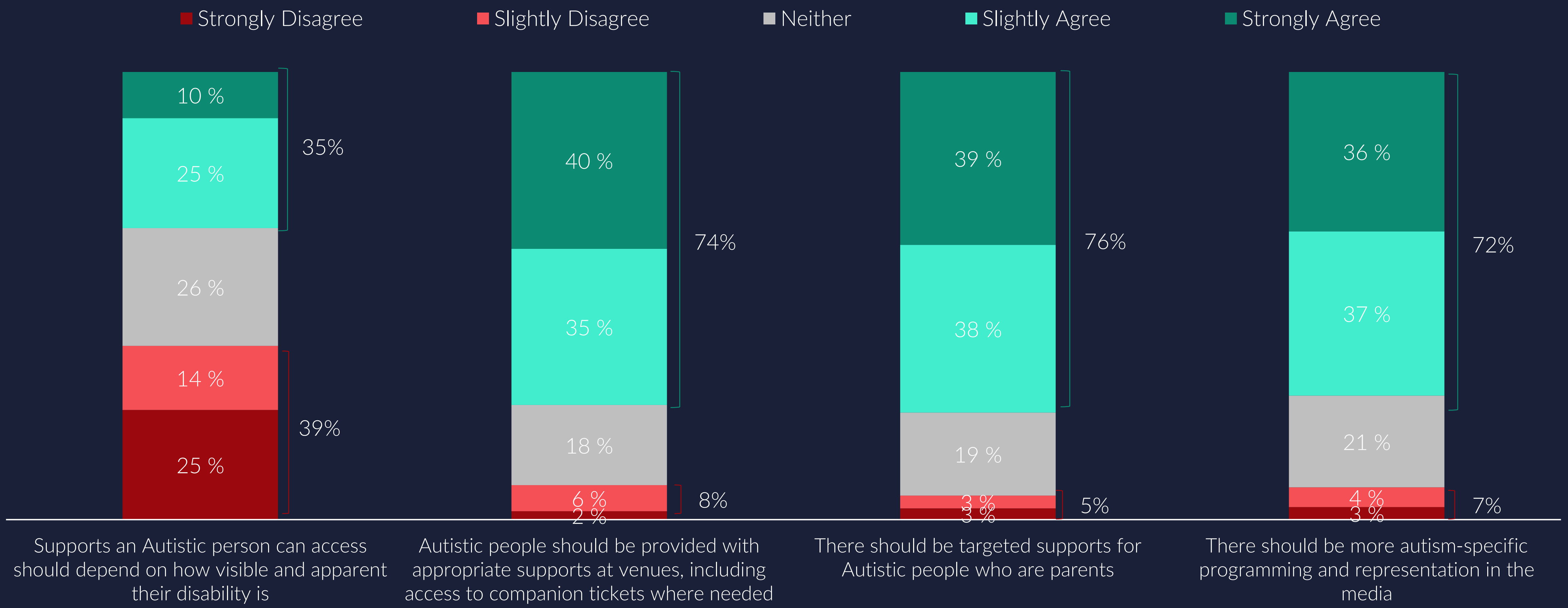
4 in 5 agree that Autistic people should not have to mask to be accepted and should be supported from a young age to advocate for their needs. More than 3 in 5 say they would feel comfortable receiving treatment from an Autistic doctor. By contrast, views are more mixed on adjusting long-term plans to support someone experiencing Autistic burnout, and many are unsure where they get most of their information about Autism, although 2 in 5 get their information from Autistic people they know.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Inclusion in Practice: Access, visibility & support

Around **3 in 4** support practical measures to improve inclusion, including appropriate supports at venues, targeted supports for Autistic parents, and more Autism-specific programming and representation in the media. While there is mixed feedback, on balance more reject the idea that supports should depend on how visible a person's disability is.



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
Base: 1000

Key Outcomes : Public attitudes toward Autism in Ireland

Understandings of Autism

Most reject claims that Autism diagnosis is driven by benefits or welfare.

However, uncertainty remains around causes and interpretations.

Nearly half agree with the statement that *"we are all a little bit Autistic"*, indicating some misconceptions persist.

Diagnosis: Purpose, Access & Rights

Around 8 in 10 believe diagnosis is important for equal life opportunities.

Similar levels support a State pathway for adult Autism assessment and a right to diagnosis for children.

Views are more mixed on whether diagnosis is mainly about access to services.

Government Responsibility & Public Investment

Around 8 in 10 support removing barriers so Autistic people have equal opportunities.

Strong backing also exists for a National Autism Strategy, Cost of Disability payment, and abolishing the Carer's Allowance means test.

Support for these measures tends to increase with age.

Education & School Environment

Around 8 in 10 support mandatory Autism training for teachers and SNAs.

Similar levels support specialist classes and legal rights to therapy supports.

Most reject the idea that Autistic children should face disciplinary consequences when overwhelmed.

Workplace, Economic & Legal Inclusion

Around half believe Autistic people are valued and respected in workplaces and society.

However, many remain uncertain whether workplaces genuinely follow through on commitments to recruit Autistic talent.

There is also recognition that Autistic people may face disadvantages in areas such as wills and probate.

Inclusion in Practice

Around 8 in 10 agree Autistic people should not have to mask to be accepted and should be supported to advocate for their needs.

Most say they would feel comfortable receiving treatment from an Autistic doctor.

Those who know an Autistic person tend to show stronger support for inclusive attitudes.

Three distinct but interrelated ways of thinking

Public attitudes toward Autism are not one-dimensional. Instead, they are organised around three key dimensions: structural support and services, scepticism about Autism and diagnosis, and social inclusion and acceptance. These operate independently, meaning people may strongly support rights and services while still feeling less certain about everyday inclusion or workplace integration.

1

Structural support and services

This dimension reflects support for services, policy action and institutional responsibility. People who score highly on this dimension tend to agree with statements about:

- Removing barriers for Autistic people
- Rights to diagnosis and therapy
- Adult assessment pathways
- Mandatory Autism training for teachers
- Government strategies and investment

2

Scepticism about Autism and diagnosis

This dimension captures doubts about the legitimacy or causes of Autism. People who score highly here tend to agree with statements such as:

- Autism is over diagnosed
- Some people seek diagnoses for advantages
- Autistic people receive too many benefits

3

Social inclusion and acceptance

This dimension reflects everyday acceptance and visibility of Autistic people in society. People scoring highly here tend to support ideas such as:

- Autistic people being respected in workplaces
- Genuine workplace inclusion
- Increased representation in media

Factor analysis was used to identify how statements align together into underlying dimensions; top three factors indicated in rank order.

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AsIAm - Autism in Ireland

March 2026

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Same Chance

As I Live, Work, Grow, Participate

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