

**Alisa B. Lipson MD FRCP (C)**  
**Oakridge Pediatrics**  
**#207 – 250 West 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue**  
**Vancouver BC V5Z 2M9**  
**Telephone: 604-266-1874; Fax: 604-266-1583**

### **HOW TO OBTAIN AN AUTISM ASSESSMENT FOR YOUR CHILD OR PATIENT**

There are two systems to choose from. The public, which in the Vancouver area is through Sunnyhill, is free of charge but there is a wait of at least 18 months, or the private system, which is quicker and which parents must pay for themselves.

#### **WHAT/WHERE?**

Sunny Hill: referral must be done through a physician. A family doctor can refer. A pediatric assessment is not necessary to make the referral (this is in contrast to the CDBC Clinic at Sunny Hill, which does require the referral to come from a pediatrician). A specific referral form is required to the BC Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN) (see below). Once referral is made, Sunnyhill will take care of everything.

1. Private: advantage is that the wait time for the assessment is about a year quicker at least.

A. Children under six years of age: parents must make sure they have the following assessments completed:

a. Pediatric assessment (the child must eventually see a pediatrician and obtain the doctor's report),

b. SLP: speech and language assessment (if the child has been seen through the public SLP system, that is adequate. Again, the report is necessary.

c. Psychology: A psychology assessment of developmental level: parents must find a private practice psychologist who can do this assessment. For children who are quite young and have language delay, the assessment is often quite targeted and brief, and does not cost over \$1,000-\$1,200.

d. Specific testing for autism: autism diagnostic interview - revised (ADIR) and autism diagnostic observation scale (ADOS). this is done by a physician or psychologist who has specific training in this area.

B. Children over six years of age: these children only need the specific testing for autism, the ADIR & ADOS.

#### **HOW?**

1. For MD's: For the Sunny Hill referral form, google: BC Autism Assessment Network, then scroll down to the table with the health authority of interest, eg "Vancouver Coastal & Fraser Regions" and click on the "BCAAN/CDBC Vancouver Coastal & Fraser Referral Form"

2. For the private system, the parent must assemble the pieces.

a. For the pediatric assessment: the family MD makes a referral to a pediatrician to

assess the child. This assures that the child has a full medical review as part of the assessment.

b. SLP: if the wait is too long in the public system for Community SLP, [arents can seek a private assessment. Speech and Hearing BC website has the list of all SLP's in the province.

c. Psychology: there are various psychology clinics where an assessment can be done. A short list: Compass Clinic, Westcoast Child Development, ABLE clinic, Fraser Developmental Clinic. There are many private psychologist as well who can do assessments.

d. Autism specific testing: Many psychologists as listed in can do the testing as well.

The problem in March 2021 is that there is such a demand for services that many have waitlists of a year for specific autism testing. There are several MD practitioners in the community who can also do the testing and must charge the patients, as it is not an MSP covered service. Usual costs are about \$1,800. Drs. Ruth Wingerin and Dr. Mandeep Mahal are available to do these assessment. "One Stop shopping": Monarch House can take care of all aspects of the assessment too, and even the pediatric assessment, much like Sunny Hill. The wait at Monarch House is about four months at this time. As mentioned above, many private psychologists can combine both the psychology assessment with the specific autism testing; some even partner with private SLP's and can help organize that part if necessary. However, the wait for the combined service is much longer than for a simple developmental psychology assessment. That is why as of this writing, I am advising parents to consider piecing the comprehensive assessment together themselves.

A final point for families who piece together the assessment through the private system: A final step in the assessment process is a professional pulling together all the pieces. This is usually quite a straightforward task. The person who does the specific autism testing is usually the one who does this. It involves completing a simple form that certifies that the child is diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

#### **COSTS:**

Sunny Hill is free, and is covered through the medical system Private assessment:

For "one stop shopping": the cost is in the order of about \$3,000 for all the pieces. Usually the parents still need to have the referral and report from a pediatrician (that part is covered by the medical system—referral to the pediatrician is through the family MD). Sometimes parents' extended benefits can cover part of the costs of psychology, which is especially helpful when the psychologist is doing both the developmental and the specific autism testing.

#### **IN THE MEANTIME:**

For children under age 2 or 3: The Baby Navigator website is an excellent for parents about normal development, language delay and what to look for if suspecting autism. Autism Navigator website is directly focused on autism, and is a companion website, applicable for all ages.