Welcome to the SPARK Snapshot
— a window into the autism journey of SPARK participants

The findings in this report were gathered from information provided by independent autistic adults participating in SPARK. This information is self-reported.

In this report, an “independent autistic adult” is defined as an individual with autism who is at least 18 years old and who does not have a legal guardian.

SPARK uses both person-first and identity-first language. This means that we alternate between the use of the phrase “person with autism” and “autistic person.” SPARK’s language choices are determined by our community’s preferences. We learned that most autistic adults enrolled in SPARK prefer identity-first language, while some prefer person-first language. As such, we primarily use identity-first language throughout this report. We also appreciate that there are different perspectives on this topic and respect that each individual has the right to refer to themselves as they choose.
General information

**Number of independent autistic adults**

The number of independent autistic adults participating in SPARK is larger than most other autism research studies in the United States.

* For this Snapshot, a subset of 15,000 individuals with complete data were included.

**Age of independent adults**

The majority of independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK are between the ages of 18 and 44. This is similar to the composition of other large studies of independent autistic adults.

Ages of Independent Adults

- 18 - 24: 3,900 people
- 25 - 34: 5,700 people
- 35 - 44: 3,500 people
- 45 - 54: 1,550 people
- 55+: 870 people

SPARKforAutism.org
General information

Race and ethnicity

- 73% White
- 8% Hispanic
- 5% Asian
- 4% African-American
- 3% Other
- <1% Native Hawaiian

Seven percent of independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK reported more than one race.

Sex assigned at birth*

- 67% Female
- 33% Male

*We recognize a person’s gender may be different than their sex assigned at birth. When we say male/female/boy/girl, we are referring to assigned sex at birth.
Age at diagnosis

Most females in SPARK were diagnosed in adulthood, whereas a little over half of males were diagnosed in childhood. The most common age of diagnosis of independent autistic adults in SPARK is 36 years. This likely reflects the broader rise in awareness of autism in females.

Who made the diagnosis?

These percentages do not add up to 100 because participants were able to select more than one.
Anxiety and depression were the most common concerns reported by independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK. Other studies also report high levels of anxiety and depression in autistic adults.

These percentages do not add up to 100 because participants were able to select more than one of these conditions.
Lifestyle

Household income

Employment income (e.g., salaries, wages, etc.) reported by independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK is lower than the national average for employed people. Other autism studies have found this as well.

Education

Over 75% of independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK have a degree or training beyond high school, including the 10% of participants who are currently enrolled in college.
Employment

Over 50% of the independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK are employed either full time or part time.

6% of independent autistic adult participants report being full time caretakers. Of those, 94% are female.

Marital status

A little less than half the independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK are single. Many are married or in a relationship. Only 9% are divorced.
Gender identity

When asked about gender, 9% of independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK identified as a gender different than their sex at birth. This includes people whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth (transgender) and/or whose gender is not strictly male or female (nonbinary).

Sexual orientation

Many independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK do not identify as heterosexual. Other research among autistic adults has reported this as well. “Pansexual” is defined as attraction to individuals of any sex or gender.
Housing

Most independent autistic adults enrolled in SPARK live with a partner or spouse or a family member. One in five report living alone.

- 20% Living alone
- 42% Living with a partner or spouse
- 28% Living with parents or relatives
- 1% Living in a group home
- 9% Living with roommates
What Independent Autistic Adults Enrolled in SPARK Do in Their Free Time

Most independent autistic adults in SPARK report spending their free time engaged in favorite hobbies or interests. Many also spend time with their family, friends, and online communities.
Did you know that as of February 2024, approximately **145,100** people with autism are participating in SPARK?

*For this Snapshot, a subset of 15,000 individuals with complete data were included.*
Thank you to all of the participating families!

Together, we can learn so much more.