



A collaboration between



**United Nations | World Autism Awareness Day**  
**2 APR 2026**

**For immediate release**

## **Autism in Hong Kong SAR and Mainland China under the Spotlight**

**HONG KONG, 6 March 2026** - The Hong Kong Autism Institute (HKAI)<sup>1</sup> has announced a landmark collaboration with UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and Special Olympics East Asia (SOEA) to promote the celebration of the World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) 2026 in Hong Kong SAR.

WAAD is an observance designated by the United Nations, held annually on April 2nd. It aims to raise awareness about autism while promoting acceptance, inclusion, and quality of life for autistic individuals.

“Autism is one of the defining conditions of our times, impacting 1 in 40 children in the Hong Kong SAR and more than 2 million children in Mainland China. Crucially, autism has now overtaken cancer as the leading cause of juvenile critical illness insurance claims in the Hong Kong SAR,” said Mr. Damien Green, Founder of the HKAI.

Mr. Green is the former CEO of Manulife Hong Kong and Macau and former Asia President of Manulife. He is a prominent advocate for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) stakeholders in Hong Kong. “Through our collaboration with UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and SOEA, we aim to significantly elevate autism awareness and understanding amongst opinion leaders and policymakers in the region,” he added.

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<sup>1</sup> Hong Kong Autism Institute Limited is a non-profit organization in Hong Kong



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“Autism brings as many opportunities as it does challenges for societies and economies,” said Professor Shahbaz Khan, Director and Representative of the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and Chair of the United Nations Theme Group on Disability in China. “UNESCO is pleased to partner with the HKAI and SOEA to bring autism into clearer public focus. WAAD 2026 is about moving from awareness to participation, ensuring persons with autism are present and included in education, sport, work and community life. That inclusion benefits everyone, and it must be shaped with autistic voices and lived experience at the center.”

Freda Fung, Regional President and Managing Director of SOEA stated, “Our organization has witnessed the transformative impact of inclusion when persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism, are meaningfully engaged in unified social activities, particularly in sport. Through sports, inclusive community engagement, and leadership opportunities, individuals can build confidence, develop a strong sense of belonging, and emerge as leaders within their communities.”

The WAAD 2026 program in Hong Kong SAR includes a major plenary event, where Carlson Tong, the Chairman and Independent Non-Executive Director of Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX), will deliver welcoming remarks. The event will feature speakers and panelists with autism who will address an audience of opinion leaders, policymakers and key stakeholders. Other initiatives will include the launch of an Autism Docuseries, made in Hong Kong and awareness events conducted by major Hong Kong employers.

WAAD 2026 aligns with the Government of China’s evolving policy focus on autism, including recent national-level policy initiatives.

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### **About World Autism Awareness Day**

World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) is an observance designated by the United Nations, held on April 2<sup>nd</sup> every year. WAAD arises from a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in 2007 (A/RES/62/139) which highlighted the need to raise public awareness of autism. UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia leads the execution of WAAD 2026 activities in China. This year's WAAD theme is "Autism and Humanity — Every Life Has Value: Affirming the dignity and worth of all autistic people as part of our shared human future."

### **About Hong Kong Autism Institute Limited**

Founded in 2026, Hong Kong Autism Institute Limited aims for Hong Kong SAR to become Asia's Centre of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) — initially focused on China's Greater Bay Area (GBA) catchment — through driving innovation, leading high-impact service delivery and achieving sustainable social and economic outcomes. Its mission is to enable clinical innovation centered on diagnosis, early intervention and therapeutics; ensure access to impactful services across the socio-economic spectrum that improve outcomes and quality of life; and to operate as a multi-stakeholder platform to catalyse and enable significantly higher levels of cooperation and integration across the entire ASD service, support and R&D ecosystem.

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