Autistica and the Alan Turing Institute are building a citizen science platform to explore how autistic people navigate different environments. The project should help answer some of the questions that autistic people, families and researchers have highlighted as top research priorities.

These include:

- **Over 9 in 10 autistic people process sensory information differently to their non-autistic peers.** For example, this could mean finding everyday sounds and textures overwhelming, difficulty recognising pain and where the body is in space, or seeking out lights and needing to move around. Someone can be both hyper- and hypo-reactive to different sensory stimuli as well as experiencing sensory-seeking traits.

- **Autistic people’s sensory experiences are diverse and sometimes conflicting.** Some autistic people are most comfortable in stimulating environments which other autistic people find overwhelming. Rather than trying to fit one stereotyped idea of ‘autism-friendly’, we should focus on ensuring access to a range of environments to meet different needs as well as providing accurate information to allow autistic people to make informed decisions.

- **Difficult sensory environments can prevent autistic people from accessing public spaces and services.** This ultimately has a knock-on effect on wider outcomes, entrenching existing inequalities. For example, autistic people regularly struggle to make the most of medical appointments due to difficulties communicating in inaccessible environments.

- **Differences in sensory responses can also impact autistic people’s health.** Multiple studies have found links between sensory reactivity, uncertainty and anxiety, which affects over half of autistic adults and 4 in 10 autistic children. Sensory reactivity is also associated with distressed behaviour and difficulty sleeping and eating.

Autistica and the Alan Turing Institute are building a citizen science platform to explore how autistic people navigate different environments. The project should help answer some of the questions that autistic people, families and researchers have highlighted as top research priorities. These include:

- **Which particular environments are more or less challenging for different groups of autistic people?**

- **What are the perceived physiological and behavioural indicators of sensory experience for autistic people? Do these change over time or in different contexts?**

- **What strategies do autistic people already use to cope with difficult environments? What strategies positively impact sensory wellbeing?**

- **How can we effectively create environments which people can adjust as they use them to account for their needs?**
Autistica and the Alan Turing Institute have partnered to create a citizen science initiative exploring how autistic people navigate environments they find difficult. At present, the funding and potential reach of this platform is limited.

Public research funders such as UK Research and Innovation and National Institute for Health Research should consider providing funding to expand the citizen science programme to provide further insight into different areas of public life. Employers, GP practices, schools, Jobcentre Plus services and other local public services should consider encouraging people to become citizen scientists and share their own experiences. Individuals who wish to take part should sign up to the project mailing list for updates.

The citizen science project will help build an evidence base about how to make environments more accessible to different groups of autistic people.

When data becomes available, Primary Care Networks, hospital trusts, local authorities and other public services should apply for access and ask their own research questions to gain insight into improving their own environments.

The “priority challenges for action” underpinning the most recent Adult Autism Strategy in 2014 included: “I want the everyday services that I come into contact with to know how to make reasonable adjustments to include me and accept me as I am.” Rather than implementing one idea of ‘autism-friendly’, we now need to find out on what works for different groups of autistic people.

The Government’s next Autism Strategy should encourage all Government departments and public sector bodies to join the citizen science initiative and help build our understanding of how to support the diverse needs of autistic people.

Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships, Integrated Care Systems, local authorities and others involved in planning public services should work with autistic people to carry out regular sensory audits of their own environments as part of wider assessment of accessibility for autistic people. This should then be compared against the citizen science initiative to account for the needs of a range of autistic people.

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