

**EMBARGOED UNTIL JUNE 10, 2025 @ 2:30PM**

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## **Vancouver's North Shore Tourism Association Launches Inclusive Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Loan Program**

**North Vancouver, B.C.** – Today Vancouver's North Shore Tourism Association (VNSTA), with the operational support of the Museum of North Vancouver (MONOVA) announced the official launch of the Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Loan Program. This new VNSTA initiative provides sensory-friendly resources to ensure that visitors with autism or other neurodiversities can comfortably experience the North Shore's unmatched natural beauty and local attractions.

The neurodiverse sensory backpack, available to use at no cost from MONOVA's visitor services counter at The Shipyards district, includes noise-canceling headphones, sensory toys, earplugs, and a guide highlighting sensory-friendly attractions across the North Shore. Visitors can borrow the backpack to explore local museums, galleries, events, parks, and community spaces and return to MONOVA or the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce office when they have finished their visit to the North Shore.

"Vancouver's North Shore has always prided itself on being welcoming and inclusive," said Jennifer Belak, Executive Director of VNSTA. "With the Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Loan Program, we are excited to lead by example in making tourism on Vancouver's North Shore even more accessible. Our hope is that every visitor, regardless of different levels of sensory sensitivities, can comfortably experience the natural beauty and attractions of our community. We believe it is one of the first of its kind in Canada and we hope to provide a model for other communities to understand and better support visitors with neurodiverse needs."

"Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in the way people experience and interact with the world," explained Farah Steen, Director of Marketing for the VNSTA. "This includes autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD, sensory processing differences, and other neurological variations. For our team, it is so important to create inclusive tourism experiences for visitors with these sensitivities. We want this program to make Vancouver's North Shore accessible and enjoyable for everyone."

Mayor Linda Buchanan applauded the initiative, noting, "In the City of North Vancouver, we are deeply committed to fostering a welcoming and inclusive community for all. The Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Loan Program stands as a powerful example of collaboration in action as it will break down barriers and create meaningful access to local attractions for neurodivergent residents and visitors alike. This program brings us one step closer to our goal of being a healthy and vibrant city for everyone."

“At MONOVA, we believe that access to culture, history, and learning should be inclusive and welcoming to all” said Zoe Mackoff de Miranda, Director of MONOVA. “We are proud to work in partnership with Vancouver’s North Shore on the Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Program which aligns beautifully with our mission to foster accessibility and belonging. Together with VNSTA we are helping to build a more inclusive experience for anyone visiting the North Shore.”

District of North Vancouver Mayor Mike Little also commended the program, stating, “We want our community to be barrier free for everyone, and the Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Loan Program is a positive step in ensuring all feel welcome.”

This initiative aligns with other accessibility efforts across the North Shore, including sensory accommodations at attractions like the New Blue Grouse Gondola, Lynn Valley Ecology Centre, and Capilano Suspension Bridge Park. Outdoor activities like hiking and kayaking also naturally provide calming experiences beneficial for neurodiverse individuals.

According to recent statistics from the Government of Canada, approximately 1 in 50 Canadian children and youth (2%) aged 1–17 are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, with the prevalence among adults (aged 15 and older) at around 1%.

District of West Vancouver Mayor Mark Sager shared his support: “I am proud to support the Neurodiverse Sensory Backpack Program as the first program of its kind in Canada. As Canada's pioneering initiative, this program represents a major advancement in our shared goal of transforming Vancouver’s North Shore into a more inclusive and accessible destination. It aims to break down barriers and create opportunities for everyone, regardless of their abilities. This not only enriches the community but also sets a precedent for other regions to follow, showcasing the power of inclusivity to drive positive change.”

Backpacks are now available at MONOVA during regular operating hours. For more information on inclusive travel and the Neurodiverse Backpack Loan Program, visit:

<https://www.vancouvernorthshore.com/neurodivergent-backpack-loan-program/> and <https://www.vancouvernorthshore.com/neurodiverseoptions/>

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[LINK TO VISUAL RESOURCES](#)

### About [Vancouver's North Shore Tourism Association \(VNSTA\)](#)

Vancouver's North Shore Tourism Association is a collaboration between the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and District West Vancouver. We gratefully acknowledge that we all work, live and play on the traditional, shared and unceded territories of the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples. We acknowledge and express deep gratitude to these peoples, on whose territory that the Vancouver's North Shore Tourism Association Operates. Vancouver's North Shore Tourism Association is the destination marketing organization that promotes Vancouver's North Shore as a unique four-season tourist destination. VNSTA works with local stakeholders and businesses to showcase the North Shore's natural beauty, diverse activities, and welcoming community spirit to visitors from around the world.

### What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity recognizes and values the range of natural differences in human cognitive functioning and neurological variations. This includes, but is not limited to conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory processing disorders, and other neurological conditions.

- Approximately 1 in 50 Canadian children and youth aged 1–17 are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.
- An estimated 1% of Canadian adults aged 15 and older identify as autistic. Comprehensive data on adult neurodiversity continues to emerge, highlighting the importance of inclusive programs for both diagnosed and undiagnosed adults.

People with neurodiverse challenges commonly face sensitivities that can significantly affect daily experiences and interactions, this can include:

- Sensory Sensitivities:
  - Loud or sudden noises
  - Bright or flashing lights
  - Strong smells or tastes
  - Certain textures, including clothing and food
- Environmental Sensitivities:
  - Crowded or chaotic environments
  - Unpredictable routines or situations
  - Changes to familiar environments or schedules
- Social Sensitivities:
  - Challenges interpreting social cues or body language
  - Difficulty engaging in or initiating social interactions
  - Feeling overwhelmed or anxious in social settings