

Aga Khan Museum Launches Sensory Backpack and Social Narratives Program to Support Inclusive and Accessible Visits

The free program supporting accessibility and inclusion is now available to all visitors through the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts

Toronto, ON – November 14, 2025 – The Aga Khan Museum is pleased to announce the launch of its Sensory Backpack Program, an initiative designed to support neurodivergent visitors and those with sensory processing needs. Available free of charge at the Museum's Farida & Ally Esmail & Family Guest Services Centre, the backpacks and accompanying social narratives aim to make museum visits more comfortable, predictable, and inclusive.

Museums are vibrant and inspiring spaces, filled with sound, light, and movement. While these qualities enrich the visitor experience, they can also be overwhelming for individuals with sensory sensitivities. The Sensory Backpack Program provides practical tools and resources to reduce sensory stressors and create a more welcoming environment for all.

What's inside each sensory backpack

- Noise-reducing headphones to soften loud or sudden sounds.
- Sunglasses or a visor to help mitigate bright lighting.
- Fidget tools for calming tactile input.
- Visual supports such as "first-then" boards, choice cards, and an "I need a break" card to assist communication and transitions.
- A drawing pad for visual expression.
- A small timer to pace activities or transitions.
- A quick-use guide for each item, plus sanitation materials.

In addition to the backpacks, the Museum will also provide social narratives — step-by-step visual guides that walk visitors through the experience from arrival to departure. These guides offer clear descriptions, imagery, and notes on sensory expectations to help visitors prepare ahead of time.

The launch of the Sensory Backpack Program marks a significant step in the Museum's commitment to accessibility and inclusion. As part of this ongoing effort, the Museum will host *From Awareness to Action: Participatory Pathways to Sensory Accessibility*, an educational panel on **December 17, 2025**, bringing together experts, advocates, and leaders to explore ways to increase accessibility in museums. This free event will provide cultural institutions with an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue and help shape more inclusive public spaces.

"Accessibility extends beyond just removing barriers. It is about building spaces and experiences where everyone feels welcome and included," said Dr. Sascha Priewe, Director of Collections and

Public Programs, Aga Khan Museum. "The Sensory Backpack Program and our upcoming accessibility panel reflect our ongoing commitment to creating a cultural institution that serves all members of our community."

Visitors to the Museum can borrow a backpack by following the steps below:

- Reservations are encouraged, especially for group visits, as backpacks are issued on a first-come, first-served basis
- Reservation requests should be made at least **48 hours in advance** by emailing **learn@agakhanmuseum.org**, including the date, arrival time, and number of backpacks needed
- At check-in, visitors leave a valid photo ID or other acceptable deposit with admissions staff, which will be returned upon safe return of the backpack

All backpacks are cleaned, inspected, and restocked between uses to ensure hygiene and readiness.

The Sensory Backpack Program is supported by the **Canada Council for the Arts**, reflecting a shared commitment to accessibility and inclusion in Canadian cultural institutions.

For more information on how to borrow a Sensory Backpack or to download a digital version of the Social Narratives, visit agakhanmuseum.org/sensorybackpacks.

About the Aga Khan Museum

[The Aga Khan Museum](https://agakhanmuseum.org) in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Through permanent and temporary exhibitions, educational activities and performing arts, the Museum's mission is to spark wonder, curiosity, and understanding of Muslim cultures and their connection with other cultures through the arts. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto's Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

About the Canada Council for the Arts

The [Canada Council for the Arts](https://canadacouncilforthearts.ca) is Canada's national public arts funder, with a mandate to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts. Through its grants, services, prizes, initiatives, and payments, the Canada Council supports a dynamic and diverse arts and literary scene. These activities generate a meaningful economic, cultural and social impact for over 2,000 communities in all parts of the country and beyond. The investments and leadership of the Council help advance public engagement in the arts from coast to coast to coast while also contributing to the international recognition of artists and arts organizations from Canada.

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