

Why I support autism research

By Lisa Yang

Two of my children, now adults, are on the autism spectrum, one more profound, the other higher functioning. For me, it has been, and still is, a decades-long, emotional and sometimes physical journey. The disorder has changed my life and priorities: I perpetually worry about what is going to happen to my children after I am gone; their safety, their quality of life and, in my son's case, the quality of his care. If this is my life, how are other families, with less resources or access to help, coping?

Autism-related disorders affect so many, not only in the United States, but globally. The search to understand the nature of the disorder, tracing its origins and making breakthroughs in therapeutics to better manage quality of life for those most severely affected is dismally underfunded, spearheaded by the passionate few, with researchers fragmented at different locations.

I want to help move the needle. I want increased focus on autism research for all of the above reasons. I want the people with autism to be recognized, and accepted, for their unique talents and differences, as individuals and in the workplace. I hope that through research we can understand the spectrum disorder and discover real-world therapies that improve quality of life for those who most need help.

By co-founding the Center for Autism Research at MIT, and recently setting up a sister center at Harvard, I hope to put Cambridge-Boston on the map as the nexus of cutting-edge research in autism. Who better to lead the charge than these two outstanding institutions?