NEAFAN

NEAFAN

Providing FASD Supports and Services for Northeast Alberta

Shaping the Future of FASD

Language, Strengths and Policy Impact.

MARCH 2025

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Shifting the FASD Narrative.

This month's content highlights key developments in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) awareness, support, and advocacy. *The FASD United Language and Stigma Guide* explores how respectful language can break down barriers and reduce stigma. A strengths-based study reveals the positive contributions of children with FASD, shifting the focus from deficits to resilience. *The FASD Symposium White Paper* outlines strategies for improved diagnosis, collaboration, and lifelong care. *The Social Return on Investment Report* demonstrates the financial and social benefits of prevention programs, while *FASD Hub Australia's Submission* urges policymakers to expand diagnostic services and integrate FASD support across healthcare, education, and social services.

1. FASD United Language and Stigma Guide.

The FASD United Language and Stigma Guide explores the power of language in shaping public perceptions and policies related to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). It highlights how stigma surrounding FASD can create barriers to healthcare, education, and social services, discouraging individuals from seeking support. The guide emphasizes the importance of using respectful and inclusive language that avoids blame and acknowledges the dignity of people with FASD. It provides concrete recommendations for professionals, media, and policymakers, encouraging the adoption of strengths-based language that highlights individuals' abilities rather than deficits. By changing how FASD is discussed, the guide argues, society can foster more understanding and support for those affected. The document also underscores the need for evidence-based messaging that does not contribute to misconceptions or reinforce negative stereotypes. In advocating for more accurate and compassionate communication, the guide seeks to reduce stigma and improve the lives of individuals with FASD and their families.
View Guide.

2. Strengths and Positive influences of Children with FASD.

A study on the strengths and positive influences of children with FASD shifts focus from the challenges typically associated with the disorder to the attributes and contributions of affected children. Researchers interviewed caregivers to identify key strengths, including social motivation, persistence, creativity, and positive personality traits. Many caregivers reported that their children were affectionate, humorous, and eager to engage with others, often bringing joy and emotional warmth to their families. Some children displayed resilience and determination in overcoming difficulties, while others excelled in specific talents like art, music, or athletics.

The study found that these positive traits strengthened family bonds, creating a sense of unity and pride. Despite these strengths, the study acknowledges that such attributes are often overlooked in research, which tends to focus primarily on deficits. The findings suggest that by recognizing and fostering these strengths, caregivers and educators can improve long-term outcomes for children with FASD.

The study concludes that future research and support programs should integrate a strengths-based approach to complement existing interventions.
View Study.

FASD Policy and Advocacy

3. FASD Symposium White Paper.

The FASD Symposium White Paper presents a comprehensive discussion of challenges and opportunities in FASD policy and support services. Organized by FASD United, the symposium brought together experts, policymakers, and individuals with FASD to develop recommendations for improving diagnosis, care, and social integration. The paper highlights the urgent need for universal screening across healthcare settings to ensure earlier identification and intervention. It also calls for a national framework to strengthen interagency collaboration, enabling better coordination between healthcare providers, educators, and social service organizations. The report stresses the importance of long-term care, emphasizing that individuals with FASD require lifelong support tailored to their unique needs. Another key theme is the role of public education in reducing stigma and fostering more supportive environments in schools, workplaces, and communi-

The report concludes that for every dollar invested in the campaign, there was a nine-dollar return in economic and social benefits. It strongly recommends sustained investment in public education efforts, arguing that continued awareness campaigns could further reduce the incidence of FASD and its associated costs.

ties. The paper outlines actionable strategies for achieving these goals, including policy changes, increased funding, and enhanced training programs for professionals. By prioritizing these measures, the symposium participants hope to create a more inclusive and effective support system for individuals with FASD and their families in schools, workplaces, and communities. The paper outlines actionable strategies for achieving these goals, including policy changes, increased funding, and enhanced training programs for professionals. View White Paper.

4 The Social Return on Investment (SROI) Report

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) Report evaluates the economic and social impact of Australia's National FASD Program Campaign. The report estimates that FASD-related health and social costs range between $2.7 billion and $6.4 billion annually, highlighting the substantial burden of prenatal alcohol exposure. The campaign, which aimed to reduce alcohol consumption during pregnancy through public awareness efforts, was found to be highly effective. Following the campaign, the proportion of pregnant women abstaining from alcohol increased significantly, leading to an estimated 16,554 fewer cases of prenatal alcohol exposure. This reduction translated into approximately 2,002 fewer cases of FASD, along with decreases in premature births, low birth weights, and miscarriages.

The report concludes that for every dollar invested in the campaign, there was a nine-dollar return in economic and social benefits. Despite these successes, the report warns that these gains are at risk if funding is not continued beyond 2025. It strongly recommends sustained investment in public education efforts, arguing that continued awareness campaigns could further reduce the incidence of FASD and its associated costs. View Report.

> *"Prioritizing these initiatives, can improve outcomes for individuals with FASD while reducing the associated broader societal costs."*

Bridging the Gaps: Calls for Stronger FASD Diagnosis and Support Systems.

5. Policy Recommendations for FASD Prevention and Support.

The FASD Hub Australia's Submission to the Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Alcohol and Other Drugs in Australia presents a detailed overview of the current landscape of FASD awareness, prevention, and support services in Australia. It argues that while significant progress has been made, major gaps remain in diagnosis, public education, and access to care.

The submission emphasizes that FASD affects between two and four percent of the Australian population, a prevalence rate higher than that of Autism Spectrum Disorder or Down Syndrome. Despite this, FASD remains underdiagnosed and misunderstood. The document highlights the role of the FASD Hub as a crucial resource, providing evidence-based information, training programs for healthcare professionals, and a national service directory to connect families with FASD-informed clinicians.

The submission calls for increased government funding to expand diagnostic services, improve early intervention programs, and maintain public education campaigns that encourage alcohol-free pregnancies. It also stresses the importance of cross-sector collaboration, urging better integration of FASD support within the healthcare, education, and justice systems.

By prioritizing these initiatives, the submission argues, Australia can improve outcomes for individuals with FASD while reducing the broader societal costs associated with the disorder.
View Submission

The Identifying Best Practices for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Course is designed for use by professionals working in the substance use, mental health, housing, employment, justice, and other service delivery fields.

Identifying Best Practices

The aim of Identifying Best Practices is to provide a course for a range of service providers that is multidisciplinary, works across the spectrum of FASD, and supports individuals across the lifespan. The course will provide tools and strategies to support individuals who have or are at risk of having a child with FASD and/or may have FASD themselves.

The course includes four modules designed to provide you with:

- An overview of FASD and its various manifestations and implications
- Information about current approaches and strategies for FASD prevention
- Resources on how to screen for FASD
- Strategies to support individuals with FASD to achieve healthy outcomes

In the case study, you will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from this course in a common scenario involving a fictional character with FASD in a variety of questions.

A certificate will be provided to each participant upon completion.

Identifying Best Practices for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is discounted by 20% for residents of the jurisdictional members of CanFASD: British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut, and New Brunswick.

With the support of the AGLC (Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis) this course is free for residents of Alberta.

Sign up for Course

Best Practices Guide for Serving Individuals with Complex Needs.

The Best Practices for Serving Individuals with Complex Needs Guide and Evaluation Toolkit, outlines evidence-based approaches for optimizing service delivery, integrating evaluation tools to measure effectiveness, and supporting the long-term well-being of individuals and families.

At its core, the guide emphasizes a systems approach, recognizing the interconnected nature of services needed to support individuals with complex needs. The development of best practices within this document was guided by rigorous literature reviews and consultations with field experts. While initially focused on FASD, the framework evolved to address broader populations with multifaceted needs. The document outlines four aspirational practice principles that underpin effective service delivery: consistency, collaboration, responsiveness, and proactivity. These principles stress the need for stable, well-coordinated services that anticipate challenges and adjust to meet evolving needs.

One of the guide's primary objectives is to establish standardized evaluation metrics for assessing program effectiveness. It introduces an Evaluation Toolkit, which comprises various checklists and surveys designed to assess how well agencies adhere to best practices. These tools measure factors such as staff training levels, the integration of trauma-informed care, interagency collaboration, and adherence to client-centered service models. By leveraging these evaluation tools, agencies can not only monitor their current service delivery but also identify areas for improvement and advocate for continued funding.

Another crucial aspect of the document is its emphasis on interdependence over independence. Recognizing that many individuals with complex needs require lifelong support, the guide recommends shifting service models away from unrealistic expectations of self-sufficiency. Instead, it promotes a framework of structured, ongoing support systems that ensure stability across different life stages. Furthermore, early diagnosis and intervention are identified as essential strategies for preventing secondary conditions such as mental health challenges, substance use, and justice system involvement.

The guide also highlights the importance of workforce development, advocating for comprehensive staff training programs that equip professionals with the skills to navigate the unique challenges of supporting individuals with complex needs. This includes specialized training in brain-based disabilities, adaptive behavioral strategies, and sensory processing disorders. The importance of caregiver support is similarly emphasized, with recommendations for respite services, peer mentorship, and accessible educational resources to reduce caregiver stress and enhance family stability.

Ultimately, this document provides a structured and adaptable roadmap for organizations seeking to enhance their service delivery models. By integrating evidence-based best practices, ensuring continuous evaluation, and fostering interagency collaboration, service providers can create more effective and sustainable support systems for individuals with complex needs. The guide serves not only as an operational framework but also as an advocacy tool, empowering agencies to push for systemic improvements and long-term policy support.

Get the Guide & Evaluation Toolkit.

Let's Talk The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

Amy Tobin B.Ed

FASD Prevention Conversation Facilitator

amy.tobin@mcman.ca

780-750-9729

Amy Tobin, B. Ed, is the FASD Prevention Conversation Facilitator with NEAFAN (Northeast Alberta FASD Network) and an adoptive mother of two. Prior to motherhood, she was an elementary school teacher with the Fort McMurray Public School District for six years. Her passion for FASD, and its prevention, began nine years ago when she became a mother through adoption and was introduced, personally, to the beauty and perplexity of parenting those with prenatal alcohol exposure. Since then, she has dedicated much of her time to learning about, and educating others, on the effects of alcohol during pregnancy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Her approach is one that takes into consideration the complexities that adoption, generational, and cultural trauma can play within FASD.

Prevention Conversation

The Prevention Conversation program aims to raise awareness of FASD and Prevention among target populations including Healthcare and Social Service Providers, Women of Childbearing Age(18-45), Partners, Families and Friends.

The Project is geared towards highlighting the importance of screening all women in child bearing age for alcohol use and risks associated with FASD, improve supports for these women and promote involvement of community members and primary care providers.

The Prevention Conversation is aimed at encouraging a community wide awareness of FASD and prevention, developing the skills within the community to engage in non-judgmental, empathetic conversations about alcohol use during pregnancy. The Prevention Conversation is centered around increasing our knowledge of FASD, training service providers on the use of screening tools to engage women in the Prevention Conversation.

To book a Prevention Conversation presentation, please contact:

Amy Tobin
FASD Prevention Conversation Facilitator

McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Assoc.
Fort McMurray, AB

amy.tobin@mcman.ca
780-750-9729

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