FASD Awareness, Community First.

NEAFAN
Northeast Alberta FASD Network

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Navigating Prenatal Alcohol Conversations Professionally.

In recent years, the understanding of how to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) has evolved far beyond simple slogans and public warnings. Rather than placing the burden solely on pregnant women, researchers and advocates now call for a multi-layered approach that addresses broader social, cultural, and health determinants. A more nuanced framework, a four-part model that blends public awareness with personalized, trauma-informed care delivers seamless integration of education, support, and community responsibility across all phases of a woman's reproductive life.

Prevention begins with the simplest but most far-reaching goal: public awareness. It's not enough to tell women not to drink during pregnancy. A more effective approach uses inclusive, non-stigmatizing messages, circulated through public campaigns, schools, social media, and healthcare settings. These messages normalize healthy choices and foster open conversations—ensuring that people of all genders understand the risks of alcohol exposure to developing fetuses. But more importantly, they lay the foundation for community-wide support, so that women don't feel isolated or blamed when facing substance use challenges.

Beyond general awareness lies the day-to-day reality for many women of childbearing age, who may not be planning a pregnancy—or may not even know they are pregnant when alcohol is consumed. Here, the model encourages direct support: conversations with healthcare providers that are honest, informed, and non-judgmental. Access to contraception, substance use treatment, and respectful health education can dramatically shift outcomes. These aren't just clinical interactions—they are moments of trust and agency that allow women to navigate their lives without shame or misinformation.

The framework then deepens its focus during pregnancy. Specialized care for pregnant women who use substances requires acknowledging the underlying complexities many face: histories of trauma, unstable housing, domestic violence, or mental health challenges. Standard prenatal care simply isn't enough. Instead, services must be wraparound and integrated—offering everything from trauma counseling and medical care to harm-reduction strategies and housing support. At this stage, the goal is not just preventing FASD but also protecting and supporting the mother's health and dignity.

Perhaps most revolutionary is the final, often overlooked phase: the postpartum period. After birth, a woman's life doesn't magically stabilize. Stress, isolation, and unresolved trauma can still affect both mother and child. Providing continued support—parenting resources, peer mentorship, mental health care, and addiction services—ensures that the progress made during pregnancy isn't lost. It also helps prevent future alcohol-exposed pregnancies. By meeting new mothers where they are, without judgment, society can extend compassion in one of its most crucial and vulnerable moments.

In weaving together public education, accessible healthcare, personalized support, and long-term community care, CanFASD's prevention model offers more than just a way to reduce the incidence of FASD. It charts a path toward a healthier, more just society—one that understands prevention is not a single moment in time, but a continuum of care grounded in empathy, equity, and evidence.

Prevention Begins With Respectful Conversations.

Australia has launched a major health campaign to raise awareness about the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Called Strong Born, this national initiative is led by Aboriginal organizations and was created with input from Indigenous communities across the country. The focus is on preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), which can develop if alcohol is consumed during pregnancy.

Rather than using fear or blame, Strong Born takes a supportive and culturally respectful approach. It encourages open conversations in families and communities and provides tools to help people talk about alcohol use during pregnancy in a safe, non-judgmental way.

What makes this campaign unique is that it doesn't stop at prevention. It also aims to support children and adults already living with FASD—many of whom face challenges in school, relationships, or accessing services. By including fathers, families, and community members in the message, the campaign makes it clear: everyone has a role to play.

Since its launch, Strong Born has reached more than 90 Aboriginal communities across Australia. Toolkits include posters, booklets, and social media graphics that use everyday language and reflect local culture. Some materials have been translated into Indigenous languages, and grants have helped communities tailor the campaign to their own needs.

Health workers and community leaders have praised the campaign for being respectful, inclusive, and practical. It's also helping to reduce stigma—encouraging more people to ask for support without shame.

At its core, Strong Born is about building healthier futures, not just for babies, but for entire communities. By focusing on kindness, culture, and collaboration, it offers a new model for how we can talk about tough topics and support each other through them.

"Community voices shape solutions."

Study Finds Big Gaps in FASD Awareness on Campus.

A recent Brazilian study has revealed that many university students lack critical knowledge about the effects of alcohol use during pregnancy—a concern with major public health implications. Published in Frontiers in Public Health (May 2024), the study found that nearly 44% of students had low awareness of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), and only one-third demonstrated high knowledge.

The findings point to a troubling disconnect: while general awareness about avoiding alcohol during pregnancy exists, deeper understanding of FASD—such as its lifelong cognitive, behavioral, and physical effects—is limited. Students commonly misunderstood or were unaware of the risks of heart defects, microcephaly, and developmental delays linked to prenatal alcohol exposure.

Female students, those studying health sciences, and students with children scored higher on knowledge. Yet even within health-related programs, misconceptions persisted—underscoring the need for targeted education across disciplines.

The researchers concluded that improving FASD-related knowledge among young adults is crucial, especially since this age group is more likely to engage in drinking and face unplanned pregnancies. They recommend integrating evidence-based FASD education into university curricula and public health campaigns.

A key outcome of the study was the development of the Fetal Alcohol Consequences Test (FACT), a validated 12-question tool to quickly assess awareness and identify areas where information is lacking. The FACT is now available for broader use in educational initiatives.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes that increasing knowledge is a foundational step in preventing FASD. When young people understand that no amount or type of alcohol is safe during pregnancy, they are better equipped to make informed decisions and support healthy outcomes.

“Even health students misunderstood key FASD facts. “

The Prevention Conversation (2022 edition)

This course discusses FASD prevention by providing information about the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy as well as considerations to support women in a way that promotes healthy relationships with professionals and promotes safety and health in all facets of their lives. This course was updated in the Autumn of 2022.

By completing this training course, facilitators will have an understanding of the FASD Prevention Conversation: A Shared Responsibility program; its history and evolution. They will understand the complex reasons why a woman may drink when pregnant and have the tools to support conversations with pregnant women. Facilitators will be able to apply and tailor the key messages of "The Prevention Conversation," and feel confident and comfortable to engage in brief empowering conversations to prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancy among women ages 18-45.

They will also be able to conduct universal screening for alcohol consumption with pregnant women and women of childbearing age, understand and be comfortable discussing harm reduction strategies if a woman chooses to continue drinking in pregnancy, and know how to connect with local and provincial resources.

Sign up for CSS Course

The Prevention Conversation is an online training program for front-line health and social services professionals to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage their clients/patients in a supportive and non-judgmental conversation about alcohol use during pregnancy, its lasting effects on the developing child, and resources and supports available to women of childbearing age.

Multidisciplinary Team Training for Diagnosis of FASD: An online curriculum

This online FASD curriculum is developed to assist professionals in learning the processes, procedures, and in developing the skillset needed to be effective members of a multidisciplinary diagnostic team.

The curriculum is designed for clinical and allied health professionals who are either currently working in FASD clinics or for those who will soon become members of a multidisciplinary diagnostic clinic in Canada.

The online course includes common concepts that apply to all disciplines comprising the diagnostic team and focusses on the core concepts that are required for professionals who are involved in making FASD diagnoses. The expectation is that the participants will have a working knowledge of the field, professional competency in their own area of specialty, and exposure to the relevant research literature.

Multidisciplinary Team Training for Diagnosis of FASD is discounted by 25% for residents of the jurisdictional members of CanFASD: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut, and New Brunswick.

Sign up for SGP Course

The curriculum is designed for clinical and allied health professionals who are either currently working in FASD clinics or for those who will soon become members of a multidisciplinary diagnostic clinic in Canada.

Let's Talk The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

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.

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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 program 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 program 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:

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