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Culturally Tailored FASD Prevention Programs.

NEAFAN

Northeast Alberta FASD Network

Cultural Sensitivity in Action.

This study focused on the challenges and solutions around Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. These communities experience higher rates of alcohol-exposed pregnancies than the general population. The reasons are complex and often connected to social and historical factors like poverty, colonization, loss of traditional culture, and limited access to healthcare. Recognizing this, the researchers looked at whether culturally tailored prevention programs rooted in tribal values could make a measurable difference.

They found that programs designed specifically with Indigenous culture in mind were more likely to succeed. When prevention strategies included traditional values, community involvement, and respect for cultural practices, they had a better chance of reaching people and creating real change. For example, community members were more likely to trust and participate in education sessions when they were led by familiar faces and framed through local customs or beliefs. This helped to break down stigma around alcohol use in pregnancy and fostered open, judgment-free dialogue.

Another key part of the study highlighted the need to involve the community in planning and delivering these programs. Rather than imposing solutions from outside, researchers emphasized the importance of listening to Indigenous voices and building partnerships. Programs that worked best were the ones that gave communities a sense of ownership, pride, and responsibility. Women were more likely to seek prenatal care and support when the services reflected their own values and experiences.

The study also pointed out that these kinds of culturally grounded approaches don't just help reduce FASD—they can also strengthen communities overall. By reconnecting people with traditions and empowering them to take charge of their health, these programs offer hope for long-term change. However, the researchers warned that funding and support for these programs need to be consistent. Short-term or pilot projects aren't enough to address an issue as deep-rooted as FASD in Indigenous communities.

In conclusion, preventing FASD in AI/AN populations requires more than just information. It takes culturally respectful programs that are developed with, not just for, the communities they serve. These strategies offer a powerful reminder that cultural understanding can be the foundation for real progress in public health.

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A Lifeline for Families and a Call for Prevention.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) developed a public-facing guide to help families, caregivers, and expecting parents better understand Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The guide is part of a national effort to spread awareness about the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and to support people who live with FASD. SAMHSA's message is clear: there is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink at any time during pregnancy, and avoiding alcohol entirely is the safest course for both mother and baby.

FASD is not a single diagnosis but rather a group of disorders that can include physical issues, learning problems, emotional challenges, and difficulties with behavior.

These effects can vary widely from person to person, but they are all linked to alcohol exposure before birth. SAMHSA emphasizes that FASD is more common than many people realize. It's estimated that as many as 1 in 20 school-aged children in the U.S. may have some form of the disorder. Despite this, many people—including healthcare providers—do not realise how common FASD is.

This lack of awareness can lead to children being misdiagnosed or overlooked, missing out on services that could help them succeed. That's why the guide aims not only to prevent FASD through education, but also to provide families with tools and resources to navigate life after a diagnosis. It explains in simple language how FASD affects brain development, what kinds of behaviors may appear, and how to work with schools and health professionals to get support. The guide also acknowledges the emotional impact a diagnosis can have on families and offers practical coping tips.

Importantly, SAMHSA doesn't place blame. Instead, the guide takes a compassionate and practical approach, offering real-life advice and encouragement for those who are trying to do their best.

It encourages open conversations between patients and healthcare providers about alcohol use and pregnancy, which can reduce stigma and lead to better prevention. It also highlights the importance of early intervention, noting that with the right support, children with FASD can thrive.

In summary, this guide serves as both a warning and a lifeline. It urges prevention through total alcohol avoidance in pregnancy while also empowering those affected by FASD to seek out the support they need—a message of hope grounded in understanding and practical action.

> *"Open conversations between patients and healthcare providers about alcohol use and pregnancy can reduce stigma and lead to better FASD prevention.*

Training Professionals to Recognize FASD.

A 2022 study explored how well professionals in sectors like healthcare, education, and justice understand and manage Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). This disorder, caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy, can lead to a wide range of developmental and behavioral challenges that last a lifetime. Although FASD is relatively common, many professionals are not fully prepared to recognize or address it. The study found that this lack of understanding often results in misdiagnoses, missed opportunities for early intervention, and ineffective support for individuals who need specialized care.

In particular, the research showed that educators and healthcare providers frequently misunderstand FASD symptoms. Children with FASD may be mislabelled as simply having behavioral issues or learning disabilities, without considering the root cause. As a result, they may not receive appropriate services or accommodations. In the justice system, individuals with FASD may be penalized for behaviors that are actually symptoms of their condition. This can lead to unfair treatment, including unnecessary incarceration or lack of rehabilitation support.

The study emphasized that FASD requires a multidisciplinary approach to be properly managed. Better training and education for professionals across these sectors would significantly improve identification and support. For instance, when teachers are trained to spot signs of FASD, they can adjust their classroom strategies to help students thrive. When healthcare providers are educated about the condition, they can offer accurate diagnoses and refer families to appropriate services early. Justice professionals, too, can benefit by learning how to recognize FASD and advocate for fairer legal outcomes for affected individuals.

One of the most important implications of the study is that without this foundational knowledge, professionals may unintentionally harm the very individuals they are meant to help. The good news is that change is possible By implementing targeted training and creating accessible resources, it's possible to bridge the gap in awareness and improve long-term outcomes for people living with FASD.

The authors of the study suggest that professional development programs should be a priority, not just in specialized FASD clinics, but in schools, hospitals, and correctional institutions.

Overall, the study makes a strong case for systemic change. FASD is a complex and lifelong condition, but with better-informed professionals, the pathway to proper support, inclusion, and opportunity becomes much clearer for those affected.

> ***"Better-informed professionals mean brighter futures for FASD clients.***

Strategic Public Health Initiatives in FASD Prevention.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has taken a leading role in addressing the prevention and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the United States. FASD, caused by prenatal alcohol exposure, can result in a wide range of lifelong physical, cognitive, and behavioral problems.

Despite widespread public-health efforts, many people still do not understand that there is no safe amount or safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. This lack of awareness is one of the key barriers to preventing FASD.

The CDC's approach includes several strategies aimed at reducing the number of alcohol-exposed pregnancies and improving the care of people already living with FASD. One important focus is on surveillance and data collection. By monitoring alcohol-use patterns among pregnant women, the CDC can track trends, identify risk factors, and evaluate the effectiveness of prevention programs. These findings then guide future policy decisions and health-education efforts.

Another priority is the development and distribution of educational materials for the public and training tools for healthcare providers. The CDC recognizes that doctors, nurses, and midwives play a crucial role in prevention. When healthcare professionals ask women about alcohol use and offer support to stop drinking before and during pregnancy, they can prevent many cases of FASD.

To support this, the CDC has created programs like the "Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention" toolkit, which helps providers quickly screen women for alcohol use and deliver a brief counselling session in the same visit.

The agency also works with community organizations to spread the message more broadly. For example, it partners with FASD-focused advocacy groups, tribal health agencies, and state health departments to tailor prevention campaigns that resonate with diverse populations. These partnerships help make the message more relatable and impactful.

In addition to prevention, the CDC also promotes research and care strategies for people already affected by FASD. By supporting early diagnosis and intervention services, the CDC hopes to give children and families a better quality of life. It also funds studies on how to best support people with FASD throughout their lifespan, including in school, at work, and in the justice system.

In short, the CDC's multi-layered strategy acknowledges that FASD is not just a medical issue—it is a public-health challenge that requires community-based, evidence-informed, and compassionate solutions.

"Doctors, nurses, and midwives play a crucial role in FASD prevention.

NEAFAN works to enhance FASD services and supports for those affected by FASD and their caregivers. We operate within the Wood Buffalo Municipal area including Fort McMurray and Surrounding Communities.

The North East Alberta Fetal Alcohol Network (NEAFAN) is one of twelve (12) FASD Service Networks set up across Alberta to enhance FASD services and supports for those affected by FASD and their caregivers. These networks are tasked with developing and enhancing FASD services and supports to address the impact of FASD on individuals, families and communities in a collaborative, community-based model that engages with key stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

People with FASD are capable.

Families need support.

Women at risk of having a child with FASD also need our support.

How we talk about FASD matters.

There is HOPE.

NEAFAN
Northeast Alberta FASD Network

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Let's Talk

The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

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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 FASD Prevention among target populations including Healthcare and Social Service Providers, Women of Childbearing Age, Partners, Families, Friends and Caregivers. The Project is geared towards highlighting the importance of screening all women in child bearing age for alcohol use and the risks associated with FASD, improving supports for these women and promoting 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 knowledge of FASD through 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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