NEAFAN CHRISTMAS

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Northeast Alberta FASD Network

A Whole-Picture FASD View.

This narrative review pulls together what we know about the many forces that shape alcohol use in pregnancy, showing how past trauma, poverty, gendered expectations, mental health concerns, stigma, and the availability—or absence—of supportive services all influence the choices people make. Rather than framing alcohol use as an individual decision made in isolation, the authors emphasize how broader structural issues such as housing instability, income insecurity, and alcohol policy interact with personal stressors, daily pressures, and relationship dynamics. These layers create a context in which substance use may feel like a coping strategy rather than a deliberate risk, especially when people lack access to safe, consistent support.

The review stresses that effective FASD prevention must be relational, trauma-informed, and violence-informed. Services need to be welcoming, non-judgmental, and flexible enough to meet people where they are, rather than imposing expectations or relying on punitive or shaming approaches. This includes creating environments where individuals feel safe disclosing concerns, asking questions, and seeking help without fear of blame. The authors highlight the importance of culturally grounded practices, consistent provider relationships, and systems that prioritize dignity and autonomy.

The paper also points to promising directions for practice, including strengthened peer support programs, integrated service models that combine health, social, and community resources, and alcohol policies that reduce harm without increasing surveillance or criminalization. These approaches recognize that support must address both immediate needs and the broader social conditions that influence health. For networks, the review reinforces the message that prevention is a shared responsibility across public health, mental health, substance use services, housing providers, and child- and family-serving systems. It underlines the idea that meaningful prevention occurs not through isolated interventions but through coordinated efforts that address root causes and provide ongoing, compassionate support.

> "Alcohol use in pregnancy is shaped by personal, social, & structural forces."

Hybrid Pathways to Care.

This pilot study tested a virtual FASD diagnostic model across several paediatric clinics in Alberta during 2020–2021, exploring how well key components of the assessment process could be adapted to secure video platforms.

The full assessment—intake, caregiver interviews, neurodevelopment testing, team case conferences, and feedback sessions—was redesigned for online delivery, with careful attention to privacy, technology requirements, and the comfort of families participating from home. Both clinicians and caregivers generally found the virtual approach acceptable and feasible, noting that it worked particularly well for cognitive, academic, and adaptive assessments, and significantly reduced the travel burden for families who live far from diagnostic clinics or who face transportation, financial, or weather-related barriers.

At the same time, the study identified important limitations. Certain elements, such as detailed physical and facial assessments or observations of more complex behaviours, were more difficult to complete online and continued to require in-person appointments to ensure accuracy.

These findings reinforced the idea that virtual assessment should complement—not replace—traditional methods. The study concludes that hybrid models combining virtual and in-person components can extend diagnostic reach without compromising quality, provided teams receive adequate training, have access to reliable technology, and follow clear, standardized protocols. The results suggest that blended approaches may help improve provincial capacity and reduce wait times, especially in regions where access to multidisciplinary teams is limited.

A Look Back at

NEAFAN
Northeast Alberta FASD Network

FASD EVENTS 2025

AN is attending the International Day of Pe
isabilities event today at Syncrude Sports
ss Centre, being hosted by Keyano Colleg
MWB.

NEAFAN is attending the Pregnancy Health Information Fair at Public Health.

AN is attending the Station-to-Station
ween event in Janvier today. Service provid
ate their booths with a Halloween theme, a
community members stop by for a treat a
information.

AFAN Team at the Canada FASD Conf
Toronto. The 2025 theme is Shaping
of FASD: From Evidence to Action.

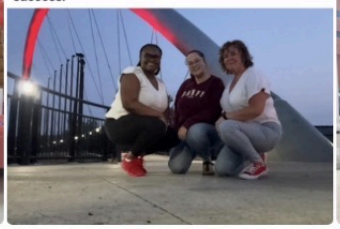
today, Friday, Oct. 10 at McDonald Island.

formation on display during Septembe
ess Month 2025, at Wood Buffalo Regi
Mac Island.

team is hosting an FASD Awaren
Murray 468 First Nation today fro
m at the Health and Wellness Buil

AN at FASD Awareness Event Janvier Multi
esday Sept. 10th - 11am-3pm.

NEAFAN capped its International FASD Awareness Day 2025 celebrations at the well-known Fort Mcmurray landmark Saline Creek Bridge, which is lit red as a symbol of FASD support and awareness from Sept. 9th to Sept 10th. Thank you to all who played a part in making this year's activities and events such a success.



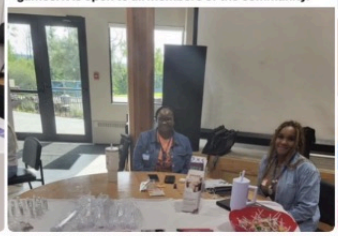
NEAFAN team group shot on FASD AWARENESS DAY
2025 at the KIYAM COMMUNITY PARK BBQ in Fort
Mcmurray to spread FASD Awareness and serve up
he burgers for a large turnout to a great event.

information session, including a community
presentation for community members from 10 am
2pm. Lunch, snacks and refreshments are being
provided

new Nikinan Community Centre.

and Fort McKay First Nation.

The fair aims to promote child wellness and early development through various activities, including health screenings, educational resources, and fun games. It is open to all members of the community.



Chard Métis Nation launched a new initiative
ove access to primary health services in the
munity of Janvier. The Adult Health Fair marl
rst step in assessing the health and wellnes
s of local residents.

the Chipewyan Prarie Teddy Be

Buffalo Pride Festival was RADICAL JOY! This is
free, family-friendly event featuring live
entertainment, community booths, arts and craft
vendors, food trucks, a beer garden, carnival gam
henna and face painting, a Two Spirit Teepee, the
Wood Buffalo Pride Leadership Awards ceremon
and more!

EAFAN attended the Fort McKay Treaty Days
pening ceremonies last week which included
drumming, dancing, a cultural village & parade!

AFAN was honoured to participate in the Missing
d Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) walk
ay at #468 First Nation, standing in remembran
ndigenous women and girls whose voices have
en silenced. We also joined the Moose Hide
mpaign—taking a stand to end violence against
men and children.

during the Women's Wellness session in Janvier—an
event marked by strong community turnout and
meaningful engagement.

Wednesday in Chipewyan prairie first nation today
where a community engagement presentation will be
offered for all community members.

AFAN at the #468 Health Fair today at Mac

Integrated FASD-informed Systems.

Although based in New Mexico, this open-access paper highlights barriers familiar to many regions, including Canada. Families often face late or missed diagnoses, stigma surrounding prenatal alcohol exposure, limited provider training, and fragmented services that are not designed with FASD in mind. Using mixed methods, the authors show how individuals and caregivers struggle to navigate systems that offer little coordination, leaving them to repeat information, advocate on their own, and often encounter misunderstanding or blame rather than support.

The study also documents how gaps in knowledge among professionals contribute to misdiagnosis and inconsistent follow-up, reinforcing how easily people can be lost in systems that do not recognize FASD as a lifelong neurodevelopment disability. These challenges mirror those reported by Canadian families and highlight the need for services that are predictable, connected, and grounded in compassion.

Promising solutions are also outlined. Targeted provider education, regional diagnostic clinics, and cross-sector care coordination help reduce the burden on families, while community-based outreach explicitly addresses stigma and strengthens public understanding. A conceptual diagram in the paper maps the typical routes families take when seeking help and identifies key points where they are most vulnerable to falling through gaps.

For Canadian networks, the paper offers a useful comparative lens and reinforces strategies already underway here, such as improving provider training, expanding diagnostic capacity, and designing services that reflect real-life experiences. It supports advocacy for more integrated, FASD-informed systems that simplify navigation and improve access to meaningful, long-term support.

" Stigma and fragmentation block care; coordinated FASD pathways can help."

Alberta's FASD Priorities.

Alberta's work on FASD focuses on strengthening awareness and prevention, improving access to high-quality assessment, and ensuring that individuals and caregivers receive practical support throughout life. Prevention efforts emphasize compassionate, non-judgmental approaches that recognize how trauma, poverty, mental health, and social pressures shape alcohol use in pregnancy. The goal is to reduce stigma, offer culturally safe services, and create supportive environments where healthy choices are possible.

Another area of focus involves assessment and ongoing support. Because FASD is complex, accurate diagnosis relies on multidisciplinary teams and trauma-informed communication, along with equitable access across Alberta, including rural regions. Once a diagnosis is made, the emphasis shifts to long-term, coordinated support that helps people succeed in school, work, relationships, and daily routines. Families and caregivers also benefit from resources, recognition, and consistent assistance. Together, these efforts help Alberta build a more compassionate, evidence-informed system for individuals with FASD.

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Links & Resources

Contact NEAFAN

Source Article Links:

Awareness & Prevention

Assessment & Diagnosis

Supports for Individuals with FASD

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 via 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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