Issue
04
May 2026

NORTHEAST ALBERTA
FASD NETWORK

NEAFAN Newsletter

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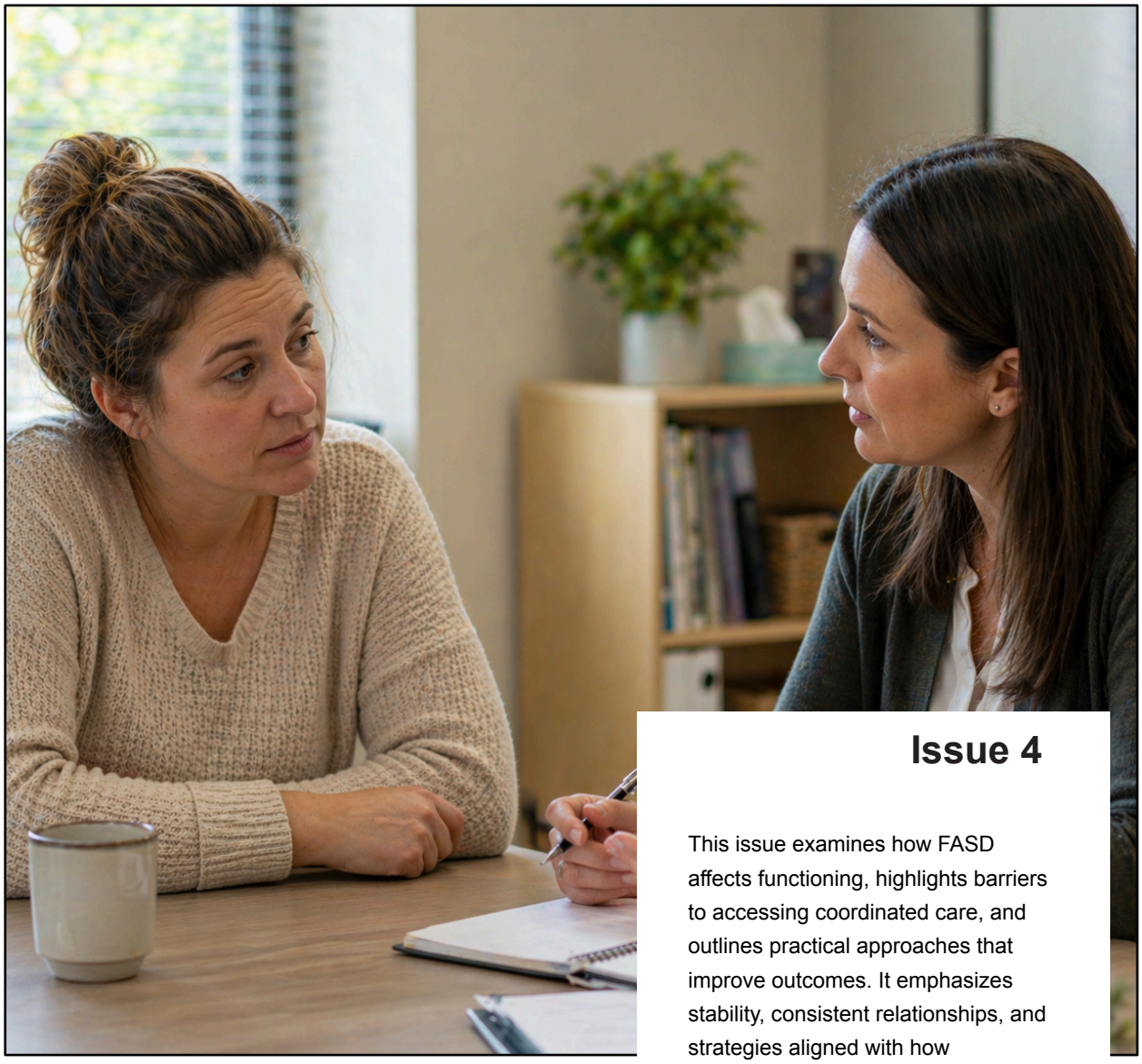

Issue 4

This issue examines how FASD affects functioning, highlights barriers to accessing coordinated care, and outlines practical approaches that improve outcomes. It emphasizes stability, consistent relationships, and strategies aligned with how individuals process information, while reinforcing the importance of system design in making supports usable and effective.

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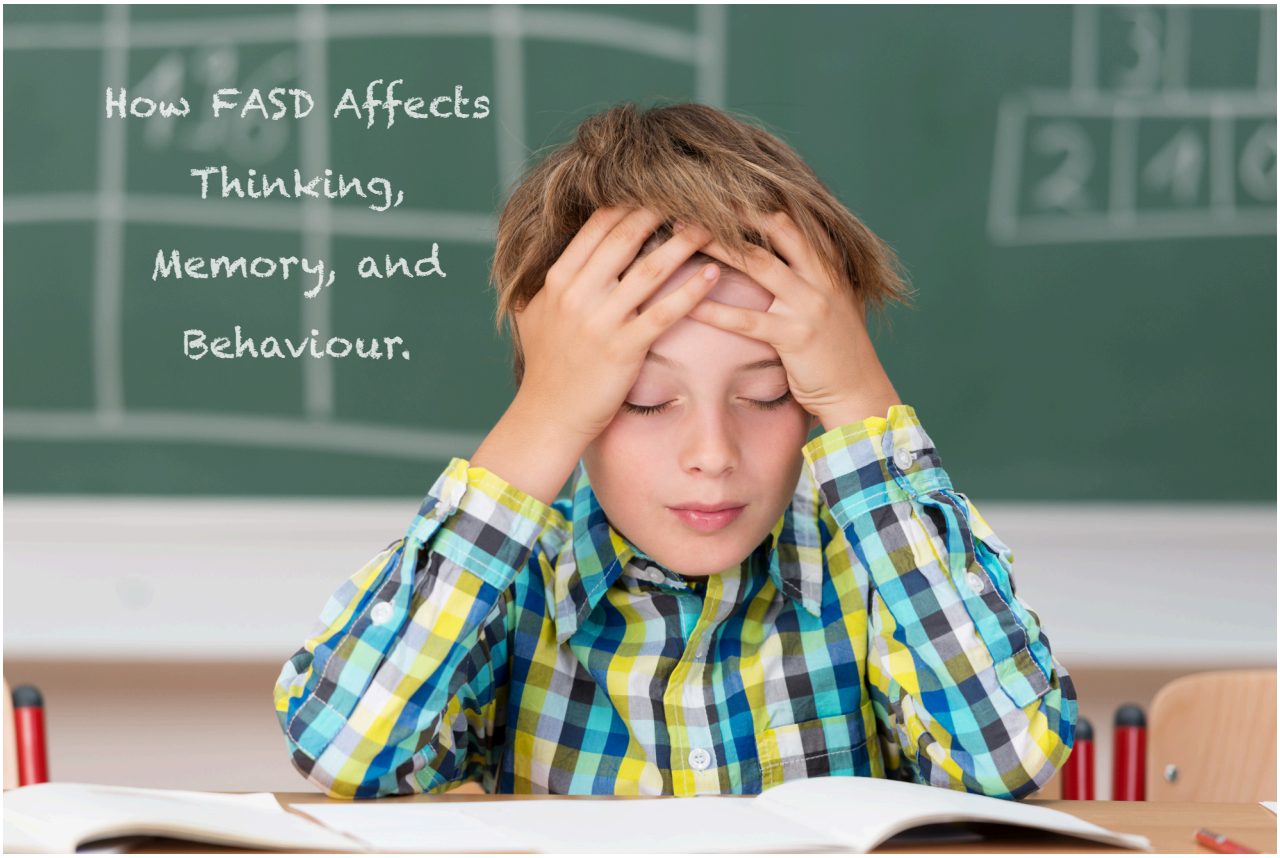

The effects of FASD are often most visible in everyday life, where individuals are expected to manage routines, make decisions, and adapt to changing expectations. Research examining daily functioning shows that tasks such as time management, organization, financial decisions, and social interaction can present ongoing difficulty, even when individuals understand what is required. These challenges are not occasional—they are consistent and often increase as demands become more complex.

These difficulties are frequently misunderstood. In the absence of visible indicators, behaviour may be interpreted as lack of effort or poor judgment rather than the result of underlying brain differences. This can lead to responses that emphasize discipline or increased expectations without addressing the root of the issue. Over time, this mismatch can contribute to instability across education, employment, housing, and relationships.

The research also highlights that these challenges accumulate over time. As individuals move into adulthood, structured supports often decrease while expectations increase. This creates a widening gap between what is expected and what is manageable, resulting in repeated setbacks that can be difficult to recover from.

Diagnosis provides an important shift in understanding. When daily living challenges are viewed within a neurodevelopmental framework, supports can be better aligned with actual needs. This includes structured routines, clear expectations, and consistent guidance that reflect how individuals process and apply information in real-world settings.

Daily living challenges in FASD affect independence and stability. Recognizing these as neurodevelopmental differences improves support, aligns expectations, and leads to better long-term outcomes.

Building Effective Support Systems in FASD

Support works best when it is consistent, practical, and relationship-based.

Effective FASD support depends on stability, relationships, and practical strategies. When services align with how individuals process information, outcomes improve and support becomes more sustainable

Support for individuals with FASD is often discussed in terms of availability, but research consistently shows that effectiveness depends on how well services align with individual needs. Caregiver and practitioner perspectives provide valuable insight into what contributes to meaningful and sustained outcomes in real-world settings.

A consistent finding is the importance of stability. Individuals with FASD tend to function best in environments that are predictable and structured. Sudden changes, unclear expectations, or fragmented services can disrupt progress, even when supports are technically available. Stability reduces the cognitive demands associated with constant adjustment and allows individuals to focus on applying strategies.

Relationships are also central to effective support. Trust and continuity are not secondary factors—they are essential. When individuals are supported by people who understand their needs and remain consistent over time, engagement improves and strategies are more likely to be retained. In contrast, frequent changes in providers or approaches can limit effectiveness, even when interventions are well designed.

Practicality is another key element. Supports that are concrete, repeated, and directly connected to daily situations tend to be more effective than those that rely on abstract reasoning. Aligning support with how individuals process information increases usability and long-term impact.

Improving Access to Support in FASD

For individuals with FASD, the presence of services does not guarantee meaningful support. Research examining access highlights that barriers often exist at multiple stages, from initial referral to sustained engagement. These barriers can significantly limit outcomes, even when services are available within a community. In many cases, individuals and families encounter systems that are difficult to navigate, requiring persistence, advocacy, and repeated explanations of need before support is accessed.

Common challenges include unclear referral pathways, long wait times, and limited awareness among providers. Navigating these systems can be complex, particularly for individuals who experience difficulties with organization, memory, and communication. As a result, services that are technically accessible may still be difficult to reach or maintain over time. Missed appointments, misunderstood instructions, or inconsistent follow-through can be misinterpreted as lack of engagement rather than barriers related to neurodevelopmental functioning.

Research examining service access in FASD highlights that barriers are often systemic rather than individual. The research also identifies factors that improve access. Coordinated systems, clear entry points, and providers who understand FASD can reduce barriers and improve engagement.

When services are connected and communication is consistent, individuals are more likely to access and benefit from available supports. Early identification and timely referral also play an important role in reducing delays and preventing escalation of challenges.

Importantly, access is not only about availability—it is also about usability. Services that do not align with neurodevelopmental needs may be difficult to engage with, even when they are in place. Ensuring both accessibility and appropriateness is critical to improving outcomes. When systems are designed with this in mind, support becomes not only available, but genuinely usable and effective.

Foundations in FASD is a basic training course intended for everyone that will come into contact with individuals with FASD including all sectors of work, families, individuals with FASD, spouses, and the general public. This foundational level training program provides the perspective of individuals who have FASD, is evidence-based, employs a culturally sensitive approach, and is presented in a way that is responsive to the learners needs.

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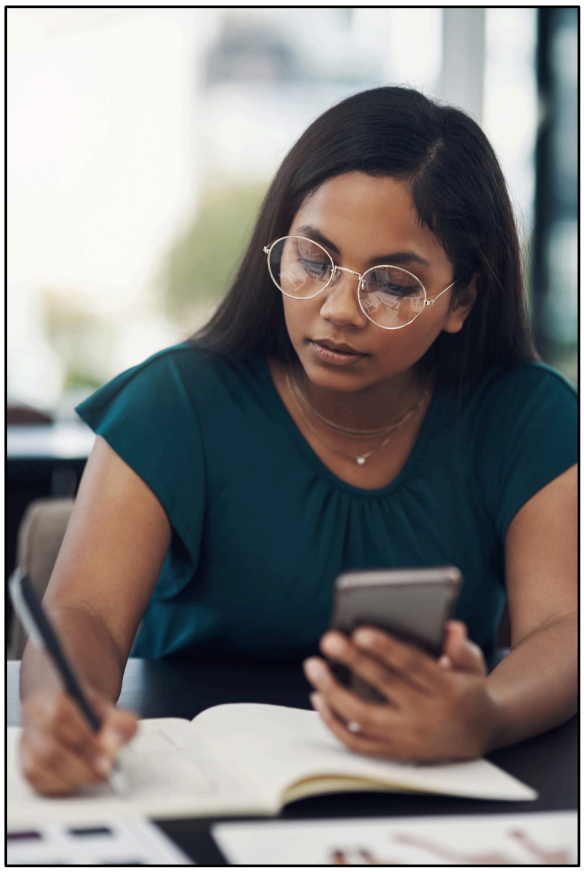
Article Source Citations
Schölin et al. (2022). BMC Public Health.
Pei et al. (2019). Journal of Mental Health.
McLachlan et al. (2020). Alcohol Clin Exp.
Roozen et al. (2016). Lancet Glob Health.

Understanding Barriers to FASD Care.



For many individuals and families, the hardest part is not simply living with the effects of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It is trying to access systems that are often fragmented, inconsistent, or difficult to navigate. Delays in recognition, lack of provider awareness, stigma, and limited services can all stand in the way of meaningful support.

A 2025 article in Frontiers in Pediatrics looks closely at those barriers. The authors describe how underdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis can interfere with access to healthcare and social supports. The paper also points to low awareness among healthcare providers, educators, and social workers as a factor that can delay intervention and increase the risk of poor outcomes over time.

The article connects service barriers with real-life consequences. When people do not get timely diagnosis or informed support, difficulties can ripple outward into education, social participation, housing, employment, and involvement with the justice system.

The authors note that specialized FASD clinics are important but not sufficient on their own. Schools, primary care, mental health services, social programs, and disability supports all need to become more FASD-informed.

The paper concludes that improving awareness, coordination, and service pathways may be one of the most important steps communities can take to support individuals living with FASD.

Access depends on coordination, clarity, and appropriate system design.

NEAFAN EVENTS

Pregnancy Health Information Fair

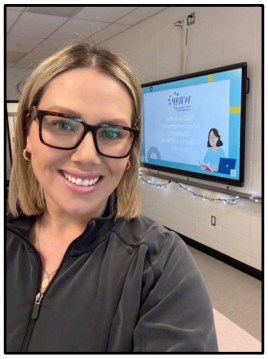
NEAFAN staff participated in the bi-annual Pregnancy Health Information Fair hosted by Public Health in Fort McMurray, an event designed to support expectant and new parents with accessible, reliable information. Held at the Community Health Services site, the fair brought together healthcare professionals and community partners to provide one-on-one guidance on pregnancy, birth, and early childhood development. Attendees had opportunities to learn about prenatal care, infant feeding, safety, and mental health, while also connecting with local programs and services. NEAFAN's presence helped raise awareness of FASD prevention and supports, contributing to informed, healthy outcomes for families in the region.

Fort McKay Health Fair

NEAFAN staff attended the Fort McKay First Nation Community Health Fair, held at the Band Hall in recognition of World Health Awareness Day. The event brought together community members, healthcare professionals, and local organizations to promote overall well-being in an accessible and welcoming setting. A highlight of the day was the teddy bear health clinic, where children could have their bears "treated" by nurses, creating a positive and engaging introduction to healthcare. NEAFAN connected with families and shared information on FASD prevention and supports, contributing to a broader effort to strengthen community awareness and access to local health resources.

The Inclusion Fair

NEAFAN attended the Inclusion Fair at Christina Gordon Public School in Fort McMurray, an event bringing together local vendors, disability services, and community partners. The event focused on strengthening community connection and fostering an inclusive environment. A range of organizations participated, offering information and support related to disability services, including ASL options, recreational programming, and broader community supports. The fair provided an opportunity for families and individuals to connect directly with service providers in an accessible and welcoming setting. Overall, the event was well attended and served as a successful community gathering, promoting engagement and awareness of available resources in the region.



Alberta Teacher Association

NEAFAN FASD Instructional Coach had a great day presenting to the Alberta Teacher Association staff at Fort Mcmurray Public School Division's district-wide Professional Development Day. All sessions were full.

Let's Talk

The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

NEAFAN.CA

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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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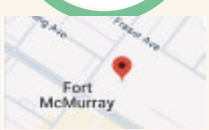

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