

The FASD Prevention Conversation: A Shared Responsibility

Preventing FASD one conversation at a time

Submitted by The Calgary Fetal Alcohol Network

There are a lot of stereotypes and stigma surrounding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and a distinct lack of understanding.

FASD refers to a complex range of brain injuries that can result from prenatal exposure to alcohol, including developmental, physical, learning and behavioural disabilities. FASD is preventable, but the issue is complicated. Prenatal alcohol exposure can be influenced by such factors as unplanned pregnancy, lack of information, mental health concerns and addiction.

In all cases, knowledge, education and healthy support systems are key to successful prevention efforts.

Approximately 9 out of every 1000 babies born in Alberta has FASD. Some 36,000 Albertans are affected by the life-long impacts of prenatal alcohol exposure. FASD costs the Province of Alberta an estimated \$927.5 million annually, including costs associated with health, education and correctional services, as well as losses in productivity.

However, the personal costs are much higher. The individuals and families impacted by FASD face feelings of shame, isolation, depression, as well as higher rates of poverty and abuse.

We cannot afford to ignore the issue of FASD any longer.

The Prevention Conversation is a new approach to FASD prevention that focuses on the power of relationship and conversation to inspire change. It's about translating the broad base of awareness achieved through past poster campaigns into concrete action. With funding and support from the Province, 12 Prevention Facilitators are working to engage everyday Albertans – from medical professionals and counsellors to personal trainers and teachers – in conversations about alcohol and pregnancy.

The Prevention Facilitators know that talking about alcohol and pregnancy is not easy. Even for trained professionals like Social Workers, it can be an uncomfortable topic to bring up. Knowing this, The Prevention Conversation focuses on how to normalize the conversation and invite open, honest dialogue.

“We want to reduce anxiety and provide practical strategies for talking with women about the use of alcohol during pregnancy,” says Madelyne Porter, Prevention Facilitator with the Calgary Fetal Alcohol Network. “That no alcohol is safest during pregnancy is a message that all women – regardless of social, economic status – need to hear.”

Capri Rasmussen BSW RSW, Clinical Administration Manager with Aventa Addiction Treatment for Women, says The Prevention Conversation has been a worthwhile training opportunity for Aventa staff and partners.

“The Prevention Conversation education and printed materials are practical resources to share with others who work women,” she says. “We utilize the materials as a resource at community education booths and with staff and practicum students.”

Prevention Facilitators offer a variety of engagement opportunities that can be tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences, including one-on-one discussions, lunch-and-learns, professional development workshops and more. To learn more about **The Prevention Conversation** and how you can get involved, contact the Prevention Facilitator in your area.

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