

FASD: A QUICK GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS



People with FASD visit healthcare settings regularly — yet many providers have never received formal training on FASD. Small changes can make a big difference in providing supportive healthcare services for people with FASD and their loved ones.

1 in 25

Canadians are estimated to have FASD

400+

Co-occurring conditions associated

FASD

is often underdiagnosed and misunderstood in healthcare

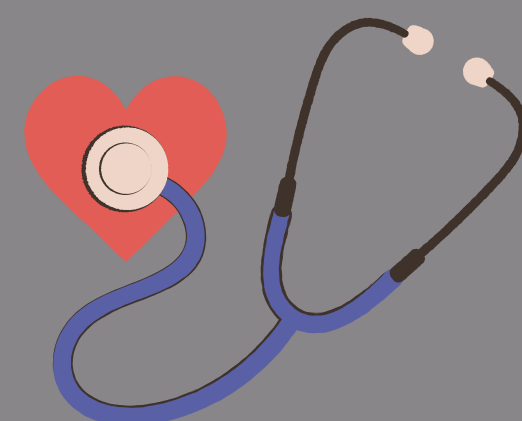


WHAT IS FASD

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. FASD is a whole-body disorder, affecting both physical and mental health.



FASD IS NOT ALWAYS VISIBLE



Many people with FASD have no visible physical features. Brain-based differences are the defining feature — not physical appearance.

DO NOT WAIT FOR VISIBLE SIGNS BEFORE CONSIDERING FASD.

EVERY PERSON WITH FASD IS UNIQUE

If you have met one person with FASD, you have met one person with FASD. Cognitive profiles, strengths, and challenges vary widely. Avoid assumptions.



**DEVELOPMENTAL AGE
≠ CHRONOLOGICAL AGE**

Assess the individual, not the age.

ALL BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION.



Pay attention to non-verbal cues, — silence, restlessness, may signal overwhelm. When asking about health history, know that confabulation (unintentionally filling memory gaps with inaccurate details) is possible.

HOW YOU CAN HELP.

People with lived and living experience of FASD have identified many things healthcare providers can do differently to make healthcare experiences more positive.

HOW CAN YOU REMOVE BARRIERS?

Before the appointment

Ask for consent to have the system send reminders to the person and their support person.

Ask in advance what accommodations would help.

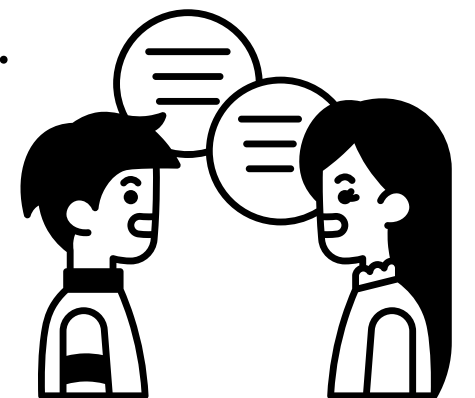
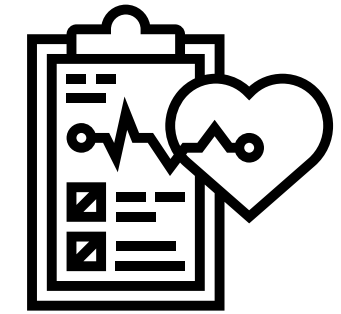
During the appointment

Allow extra time. Reduce sensory overwhelm. Welcome support persons without question.

After the appointment

Provide written follow-up instructions. Offer follow-up appointments in different formats (phone, virtual) based on the person's needs, if no physical exam is needed.

Check understanding.



EXPLAINING MEDICATIONS

Always explain what is being prescribed and why in plain language. Provide **written instructions**; do not assume the person will remember verbal instructions or read the label.



For prescribing guidance visit CanFASD's Medication Algorithm at canfasd.ca/algorithm or download the free SimpliFASD app.

SENSORY SENSITIVITIES AND TRAUMA

Medical environments can be overwhelming for people with FASD. Where possible:

- Reduce bright overhead lighting and loud background noise.
- Ask about sensory sensitivities before the appointment.
- Offer a quiet space if the person becomes overwhelmed.



Many people with FASD also carry past medical trauma. A calm, predictable appointment helps them feel safe.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES THAT WORK

- Use **simple, clear, short, and direct** language.
- Ask **one question at a time** and wait for a response.
- Give **written or visual instructions**.
- **Allow extra time** for the person to process and respond.
- **Avoid complex medical jargon**.
- Do not interpret **silence or nodding** as understanding.

FOLLOW THROUGH AND FOLLOW-UP

At the end of every appointment, confirm what happens next. What does the individual need to do? What will you do? When is the next appointment? Involve the person's wider care team where possible.

For more information and resources on supporting individuals with FASD visit:

www.canfasd.ca