

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **National award winner for research on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder announced**

*(April 16, 2020)* A doctorate candidate from McGill University and the Montreal Clinic Research Institute (IRCM) has won the national Sterling Clarren FASD Research Award for his research on how fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is portrayed in Canadian media.

FASD is a lifelong disability that affects the brain and body of people who were exposed to alcohol during fetal development. The Canada FASD Research Network (CanFASD) created the Sterling Clarren Award in 2015 to celebrate the achievements of students and early career researchers working to address the complexities of FASD in Canada.

John Aspler is a PhD student at McGill University and IRCM. He won the 2020 Sterling Clarren Award for his research studying how fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), alcohol, and pregnancy are portrayed in Canadian print media, and how members of the FASD community feel about that coverage.

The media can play a key role in shaping Canadians' knowledge and understanding of important topics. With approximately 4% of the population impacted by FASD, this is a key public health concern. However, the majority of Canadians do not have a strong understanding of this disorder.

This lack of knowledge can perpetuate negative stigma surrounding alcohol, pregnancy, and FASD. Aspler's research explored how the media talks about these topics and how this portrayal could contribute to stigma and stereotypes associated with FASD, alcohol, and pregnancy. He also spoke with individuals with FASD, their families, and their health and support providers to better understand their daily experiences with stigma.

The award was named after Dr. Sterling Clarren to honour his contribution to and leadership in the field of FASD. Dr. Clarren is one of the world's earliest researchers in

the field of FASD and a former member of the CanFASD Research Network. With this publication, Aspler is following in his footsteps metaphorically, and leading the charge to make a positive impact in the lives of individuals with FASD and their families.

**Quotes:**

*“There were many amazing research projects that we had to choose from, but this work stood out to the selection committee because of its ability to help us understand the complexities around stigma and how society contributes to that stigma. It is very powerful work.”*

**Audrey McFarlane, CanFASD Executive Director**

*“I am so honoured to have won the Sterling Clarren FASD Research Award from CanFASD and delighted to have the opportunity to share my work, not just with academics and clinicians, but directly with family members and individuals with FASD. My work aims to understand the FASD community's concerns and priorities about stereotypes and stigma, with the goal of finding strategies to improve communication around FASD, alcohol, and pregnancy.”*

**John Aspler, Sterling Clarren Award Winner**

**About CanFASD:**

*CanFASD is Canada's first national Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) research network. CanFASD works collaboratively with researchers and partners across the nation to address complexities of FASD. Our mission is to produce and maintain national, collaborative research for all Canadians, leading to prevention strategies and improved support services for people affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.*

**To speak with a CanFASD expert regarding the Sterling Clarren Award, please contact:**

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**For more information on CanFASD, please visit:**

<http://www.canfasd.ca/>