

MEDIA RELEASE

World Health Day 2025: supporting healthy, alcohol-free pregnancies

Canada – April 7, 2025 This World Health Day, the Canada FASD Research Network (CanFASD) and the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health are bringing their voices to the global conversation by highlighting the role healthy pregnancies and FASD prevention play in the *Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures* campaign.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disabilities in Canada, impacting an estimated 4% of the population. Preventing FASD requires a supportive, compassionate approach that addresses the complex factors influencing alcohol use during pregnancy.

In Canada, it is [estimated that 10 to 15% of pregnant women use alcohol during pregnancy](#).

This is due to a number of factors, including:

- not recognizing their pregnancy at the time of drinking, or unplanned pregnancy,
- a lack of knowledge of FASD or the risks of alcohol use in pregnancy,
- level of social support, experience of stigma and pressure on women and mothers, and
- complex mental health, substance use, and other social and health-related concerns.

There is a critical need for comprehensive, compassionate, multi-sector action to support reduction or stopping of alcohol use in pregnancy, and promoting maternal fetal and child health overall.

Kathy Unsworth, Executive Director of CanFASD, highlights the urgency of advancing national strategies for FASD prevention: “Ensuring healthy beginnings means providing women with accurate information, non-judgmental healthcare, and meaningful community support. We must work together to create an environment where women feel empowered to make the best choices for themselves and their babies. Ahead of the upcoming federal election, we call on candidates to prioritize FASD prevention and support the development and implementation of a National FASD Framework.”

Dr. Nancy Poole, CanFASD's Prevention Lead and Director of the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health says: “While we are proud to have a network of community-based services,

health promoters, researchers and governments located across Canada that are committed to action, we need more collaboration and connection across all sectors to effectively prevent FASD and support women's and children's health.”

About a National FASD Framework

A National FASD Framework is essential to ensuring that policies on alcohol use, child welfare, and substance use treatment are equally supportive of both women's health and children's health. The framework would:

- Improve knowledge about the prevalence and contexts of alcohol use during pregnancy to inform effective prevention programming.
- Advance research and foster collaboration between sectors to address the complex factors influencing substance use in pregnancy.
- Promote inclusive, evidence-based healthcare practices that reduce stigma and systemic barriers to support.

By investing in FASD prevention and ensuring accessible, supportive healthcare for women, Canada can prevent FASD and create healthier, more hopeful futures for all women and children.

About FASD:

FASD stands for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It is a lifelong disability that affects the brain and body of people who were exposed to alcohol in the womb. Each person with FASD has both strengths and challenges and will need special supports to help them succeed with many different parts of their daily lives. Find out more about the disability on the [CanFASD website](#).

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