

Health and human services providers role in preventing fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)

Julie Seibert, PhD¹, Carol Council, MSPH¹, Elysha Theis, BA¹, Kristina West² and Mir Ali, PhD³
(1)RTI International, Research Triangle Park, NC, (2)Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Washington, DC, (3)Washington, DC

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Issue: Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is a significant public health concern that can affect cognitive, behavioral, and mental health functioning of individuals with FASD. Approximately half of pregnancies are unplanned, and the number of women who binge drink remains high. Prenatal alcohol exposure may be most detrimental to the fetus in the earliest weeks of pregnancy when women may not be aware of their pregnancies. FASD is preventable, and incidence may be reduced by health and human service providers implementing effective prevention approaches; however, studies suggest a significant proportion of providers do not screen women for alcohol dependency due to lack of training in behavioral health services or the belief that only heavy drinking can result in an FASD-related pregnancy.

Description: To understand effective approaches to prevent FASD, we conducted a literature review of FASD prevention approach efforts by various health and human services providers and convened a technical expert panel (TEP) comprised of national experts on FASD. We synthesized findings to present current paradigms on prevention approaches and suggest specific strategies that can be used by health and human service providers to reduce the incidence of FASD.

Lessons Learned: Results found a variation between studies on the role of age, race, and education level as risks factors for an alcohol exposed pregnancy (AEP). Identifying risk factors may be instrumental to target prevention for women at greatest risk of an AEP. Findings also suggest universal prevention approaches reduce disparities in screening and increase prevention by capturing women not targeted due to preconceptions of risk factors for AEP. Challenges and opportunities were identified in both approaches.

Recommendations: Strategies include a multifaceted approach of various health and human services collaborating on a continuum of healthcare services, such as initial screenings, in-depth assessment, specialized treatment, and relapse prevention.

Implementation of health education strategies, interventions and programs
Planning of health education strategies, interventions, and programs
Public health or related laws, regulations, standards, or guidelines
Public health or related nursing
Public health or related organizational policy, standards, or other guidelines
Public health or related public policy

