



October 7, 2009

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy – how to prevent it, how to deal with its effects - focus of FASD conference

Edmonton...Leading national and international experts are gathered in Edmonton at the Institute of Health Economics (IHE) Consensus Development Conference on FASD: Across the Lifespan today to examine why people continue to be born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and to develop practical recommendations on how to improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of FASD.

The Honourable Anne McLellan (former Deputy Prime Minister and federal Health Minister) is leading a distinguished jury of citizens and experts to examine this complex issue. "FASD has significant consequences for individuals, families and our society," said McLellan. "I welcome the opportunity to be involved in this exciting approach to evidence-based policy development that will make a serious difference to those trying to improve the lives of people with FASD."

The conference jury will sequester each night after hearing expert testimony in order to develop the consensus statement that will be released Friday morning. This statement will include health policy recommendations to inform future direction in prevention, diagnostic and treatment policies and practices across Alberta and Canada.

"This conference is part of the Alberta government's FASD 10-Year Strategic Plan to provide education and research opportunities on FASD. By learning about recent developments in the field of FASD, we can further our efforts to prevent FASD and support those affected," said Janis Tarchuk, Minister of Children and Youth Services.

"The best scientists from all over Canada and the US are gathered in Edmonton to present the findings from numerous scientific studies of FASD. This will help us to identify the most effective ways to prevent FASD and to improve the situation for children, adolescents, and adults living with this syndrome," said Dr. Egon Jonsson, Executive Director and CEO of IHE. "The Consensus Development Conference is a proven approach to getting research findings both known and used in policy and practice."

According to estimates, each child with FASD may require as much as \$2 million in special care, supports and/or supervision during his/her lifetime. Beyond the costs of the loss of human potential, individuals with FASD now alive in Canada will cost taxpayers about \$600 billion (*referenced from FASWorld Alliance*).

The conference runs until Friday at The Westin Edmonton.

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Backgrounder: More about the conference and FASD

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More about the conference and FASD

About the conference:

During the IHE Consensus Development Conference on FASD: Across the Lifespan experts will look at:

- What FASD is and how it is diagnosed
- Prevalence and incidence of FASD and ways to improve reporting
- Consequences of FASD for individuals, caregivers and society
- Preventing FASD
- Policy options to more effectively support people with FASD and their caregivers across the lifespan
- Further research needed on FASD

Program and speaker information are available on the conference website: www.buksa.com/fasd.

The conference is accredited by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, The College of Family Physicians of Canada, and the Canadian College of Health Service Executives.

About FASD:

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term used to describe the range of disabilities caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. Along with Spina Bifida and Down Syndrome, FASD is one of the top three known causes of developmental delay in children in Canada. Health Canada estimates that approximately nine in every 1,000 infants are born with FASD. It is a life-long condition that has no cure and is 100% preventable.

Diagnosis of an individual with FASD is critical in order to provide them with the support they require. It is also a “Diagnosis for Two” as it identifies a birth mother who was drinking in that pregnancy. Providing her with positive support is key to prevention of future FASD pregnancies. The conference will look at both sides of the issue and supports that can be enhanced and improved.

Individuals with FASD may require extensive support and services related to health, social services, education and training, justice, addictions, and family supports throughout their lives. Without supports, an individual with FASD may experience homelessness, unemployment, involvement in the criminal justice system, mental health problems, school drop out, inappropriate sexual behaviour, and family and placement breakdown. According to estimates, each child with FASD may require as much as \$2 million in special care, supports and/or supervision during his/her lifetime. Beyond the costs of the loss of human potential, individuals with FASD now alive in Canada will cost taxpayers about \$600 billion (referenced from FASWorld Alliance web site).