

FA fetal
SD alcohol
spectrum
disorders

talk about it for better action

 **ASPQ**
ASSOCIATION POUR LA SANTÉ
PUBLIQUE DU QUÉBEC

Winning strategies for raising awareness about the risks of prenatal alcohol exposure

Foreword

Directed by Marie-Alexia Masella for the Association pour la santé publique du Québec, this synthesis of knowledge, written by Dr. Katharine Dunbar Winsor, a sociology and anthropology student at Concordia University, presents the literature research carried out on prevention campaigns on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in Quebec, Canada and the world. This synthesis also provides a history of the prevention of FASD in Quebec by Isabelle Létourneau, project manager at ASPQ.



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01.

Development context of awareness campaigns

Research into and awareness-raising about FASD began in the 1970s in Canada and has intensified since the 1990s,¹ particularly in the western provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba).

The purpose of awareness or prevention campaigns is to educate a specific population or the general public about public health issues such as alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

However, some studies question the effectiveness of certain awareness campaigns and messages, stating that they can have unintended consequences, particularly in pregnant women.^{2,3} Some prevention efforts can unintentionally add to the stigma or shame felt by pregnant women

or people with FASD. In particular, this stigma can prevent women from disclosing their alcohol use or from asking for medical care related to their pregnancy substance use.²

The collective acknowledgement of the stigma and judgment that could result from such messages and campaigns, which sometimes did more harm than good,³ led to a slow shift toward messages that were more informed, inclusive, and non-stigmatizing, and that triggered fewer angry reactions while at the same time put more emphasis on women's health in general.⁴

However, these campaigns face a major hurdle, which is the lack of readily available, recent conclusive data. The fact that little information is available about the prevalence rate of FASD,

which rarely corresponds to the self-reported rate of alcohol use during pregnancy^{1,3} can prevent or alter the effective promotion of women's health¹ and have a detrimental effect on women's autonomy,⁴ by failing to promote adequate awareness and management of the issue.

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1. Poole, N. (2003), Mother and child reunion: Preventing fetal alcohol spectrum disorder by promoting women's health. British Columbia Centre for Excellence for Women's Health.
 2. Bell, E., Zizzo, N and Racine, E. (2015). Caution! Warning Labels About Alcohol and Pregnancy: Unintended Consequences and Questionable Effectiveness. *American Journal of Bioethics*, 15, 1-20.
 3. Zizzo, N. & Racine, E. (2017). Ethical challenges in FASD prevention: Scientific uncertainty, stigma, and respect for women's autonomy. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 108(4), 414-417.
 3. Poole, N. (2008), Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) prevention: Canadian perspectives. Agence de la santé publique du Canada.
 4. Poole, N. (2003). Mother and child reunion: Preventing fetal alcohol spectrum disorder by promoting women's health. British Columbia Centre for Excellence for Women's Health.

02. Approaches to avoid and favour

Based on an analysis of previous awareness campaigns, two reports^{5,7} outlined the winning conditions for awareness campaigns to be effective and respectful of personal autonomy :

Favoured approaches

- Provide information about the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy
- Recommend alternate solutions
- Provide locations or resources where help is available
- Encourage participation by the women's network and community by increasing awareness about and actions related to FASD

Avoid the following messages

- FASD can be 100% avoided
- If you are pregnant, drink less or not at all
- Just don't drink for nine months
- Choose not to drink alcohol while pregnant
- One drink is all it takes
- Pregnant women never drink alone

5. Poole, N. (2008). Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) prevention : Canadian perspectives. Agence de la santé publique du Canada.

The images used also carry weight in the desired prevention message. The following table lists the advantages and disadvantages of some of the images used in previous campaigns : ⁶

Image	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pregnant woman	Clearly indicates that the problem is related to pregnancy	Can imply that the problem concerns pregnant women only
Pregnant woman and her male partner	Indicates the father's role	Does not include single women or women with a female partner
Pregnant woman drinking alcohol	Clear visual message	Negative approach to the problem
High-risk woman	Can encourage high-risk women to seek help	Can reinforce the myth that FASD affects only "high-risk" women
Brain of a baby with FASD	Shows the harmful consequences on a developing brain	Not representative of the problems commonly seen in the brains of people with FASD
Headless pregnant woman	Focuses on the pregnancy	Can objectify the woman
Nude pregnant woman	Clearly illustrates the pregnancy	Can be considered inappropriate in some cultures or can objectify the woman
Fetus floating in alcohol	Powerful image	Can alienate the target population
Babies drinking alcohol	Powerful image	Can alienate the target population
Person in jail	Represents the higher risk of getting in trouble with the law	Does not convey hope and can give wrong ideas about future expectations of people with FASD
People with FASD	Positive images of people with FASD can serve as models and illustrate the quality of life that is possible with appropriate support services	Images of people with serious physical impairments can create confusion about FASD as only a small proportion of people affected have serious and obvious physical impairments

6. Burgoyne, W. (2006). What we have learned: Key Canadian FASD awareness campaigns. Public Health Agency of Canada.

03.

Examples of recent campaigns here and elsewhere

It is also important to examine the campaigns carried out in Québec, in other Canadian provinces, and around the world, in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

Québec

The sixth Éduc'alcool campaign launched in October 2019 has the advantages of:

- Taking an online approach to relay key messages,
- Using an educational approach by creating quizzes and games,
- Suggesting mocktails recipes,
- This campaign particular emphasis was on pregnant women, targeting the websites they visit, while largely overlooking the role of her community and partner



@ Éduc'alcool, 2019 campaign, see <https://educalcool.qc.ca/en/about-educalcool/advertising/pregnancy-and-drinking/>

Northwest Territories

The campaign organized by The Foster Family Coalition of the NWT has been praised for its positive preventive approach: inclusive messages, concrete suggestions for supporting pregnant women in their decision not to drink, free telephone help service, and bright, colourful posters.

Website: <https://www.ffcnwt.com/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder>



@ Girls, Women, Alcohol, and Pregnancy, 2019 campaign, see <https://fasdprevention.wordpress.com>

Alberta

In 2018, the Dry9 campaign was launched as a way for women who had made the decision not to drink during their pregnancy to connect with one another (information and peer support).

The Prevention Conversation (website) recognizes that preventing FASD is a shared responsibility and provides information and resources related to FASD in Alberta.

Website: <https://dry9.drinksenseab.ca/>

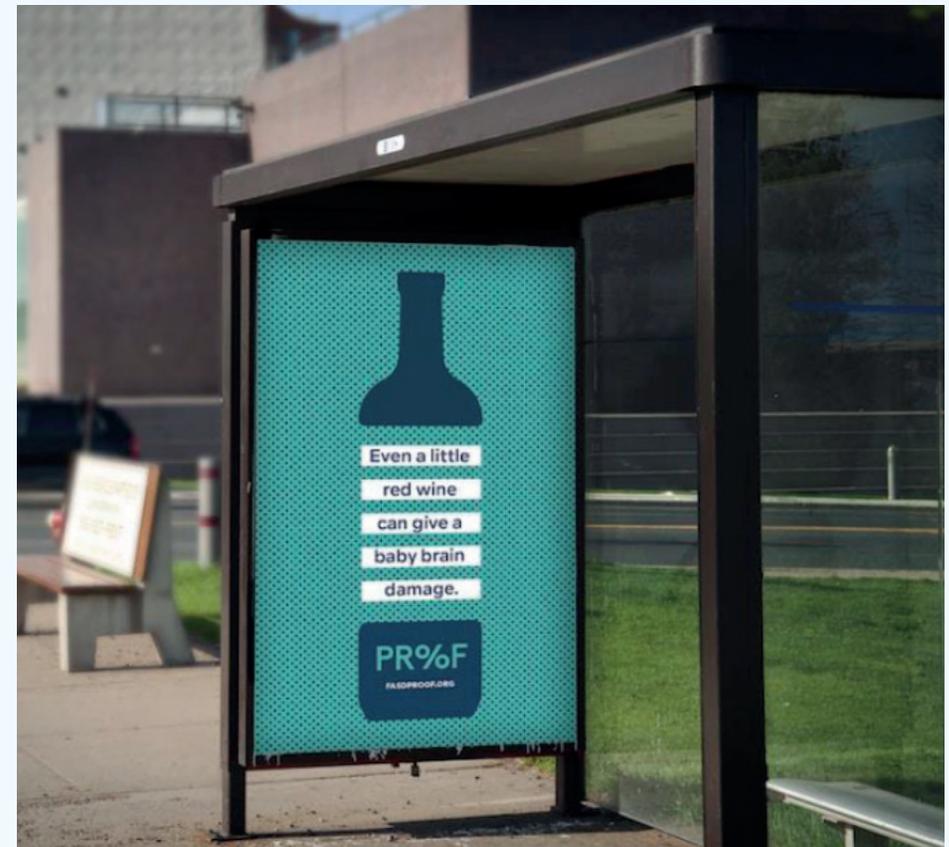


@ Dry9, Campaign 2018, see <https://dry9.drinksenseab.ca/facts/>

United States

In 2019, Proof Alliance launched a campaign to dispel the myths and misunderstandings surrounding pregnancy and alcohol. The interactive website focuses on messages about how there is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy. However, it uses messages such as “FASD is 100% preventable” and provides little information about how to avoid drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Website: <https://drinkingwhilepregnant.org>



@ Proof Alliance, Campaign 2019, see <https://drinkingwhilepregnant.org>

France

The *Conseil national de l'Ordre des sages-femmes* (order of midwives) and *Santé publique France* (public health France) ran a campaign with the theme “As a precaution, zero alcohol during pregnancy,” which featured images (including an ultrasound). Their campaign placed the onus mostly on the woman and did little to address the importance of her network and community.

Website: <http://www.ordre-sages-femmes.fr/actualites/alcoolisation-foetale-nouvelle-campagne/>

Un verre de vin

sera le fruit d'un lent travail mais pas celui de votre amour, n'aura jamais autant de corps qu'un nouveau-né dans vos bras, ne deviendra pas votre portrait en grandissant et ne vous réchauffera jamais autant le cœur que les 37°C. de votre enfant tout contre vous.

Alors pendant 9 mois, même au mariage d'une amie, demandez-vous si ce "petit verre" en vaut vraiment la peine.

Parce qu'aujourd'hui, personne ne peut affirmer qu'un seul verre soit sans risque pour le bébé:

par précaution, zéro alcool pendant la grossesse.

Besoin d'en savoir plus ? Parlez-en à un professionnel de santé ou contactez Alcohol-Info-Service: 0980 980 930 de 8 h à 2 h, appel anonyme et non surtaxé.

Logos: Ordre des sages-femmes, Santé publique France

@ Santé Publique France et Ordre des sages-femmes, 2018, see <http://www.ordre-sages-femmes.fr/actualites/alcoolisation-foetale-nouvelle-campagne/>

United Kingdom

The *Too Young to Drink* multi-year campaign provides answers to frequently asked questions about FASD and encourages partners to support pregnant women. However, it also conveys problematic messages such as “100% preventable” and describes several negative outcomes for people with FASD. Emphasis is placed on the risks and negative consequences. But this campaign is less controversial than the previous one, which portrayed babies inside beer and wine bottles.

Website: <http://2017.tooyoungtodrink.org>

BETREMOBA '17

ALCOHOL

@ European Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Alliance, see <http://2017.tooyoungtodrink.org/>

04. Recommendations

Examples of campaigns carried out in Canada and elsewhere illustrate the challenges involved in designing and running an FASD awareness campaign. Canada is a recognized leader in FASD work and research. Future campaigns in Québec and elsewhere need to integrate the promotion of women's overall health (alcohol, mental health, chronic diseases, etc.). They should also take into account the social determinants of health (environment, housing, access to health care, access to food sources and quality support, etc.). Lastly, they should not place the responsibility solely on women, but also on their network and community which play an active role in guiding and social support given to pregnant women. As such, it is especially important to use **non-stigmatizing messages** that avoid blaming or shaming, notably to avoid harming the women most in need of support and resources during their pregnancy. Opting against problematic or shocking messages can also be an opportunity **to educate the public about FASD**, and to help and support pregnant

women and those living with FASD. A study⁷ conducted by several researchers around the world and published in the U.K. presents, for various target populations (pregnant women, adolescents, partners), the best strategies for maximizing the likelihood of an awareness campaign being effective. These strategies are presented in the following table. ▶



7. Deshpande, Sameer, Michael Basil, Lynn Basford, Karran Thorpe, Noella Piquette-Tomei, Judith Droessler, Kelly Cardwell, Robert J. Williams, et Alexandre Bureau. « Promoting Alcohol Abstinence among Pregnant Women: Potential Social Change Strategies ». *Health Marketing Quarterly* 23, no 2 (2005): 45-67. https://doi.org/10.1300/J026v23n02_04.

Target audience

Recommended approach

Women who drink during pregnancy

Professional, educated and older women

- Know the risks but continue to drink out of a desire to socialize and conform to social norms
- **Implementation of social marketing and proposal of alternatives to alcohol** (non-alcoholic beverages) to meet the need for social interaction

Younger, unemployed or depressed women with low self-esteem or who use other substances

- Use of **community programs** (personalized, multidisciplinary consultation services)
- **Encourage behavioural change** through exposure to reinforcement and understanding

Women who do not know they are pregnant

- **Develop awareness campaign** featuring a variety of messages informing them before and during their pregnancy of the **possible consequences** of drinking alcohol while pregnant

Adolescents under age 18

Light drinkers

- Exposure to a variety of **communication campaigns** (school network, media) to **convince them of the beneficial effects of abstinence** and to strengthen their resolve to stay healthy by drinking responsibly

Social drinkers

- Develop **awareness campaigns that propose alternative ways of socializing** (extracurricular activities, sports, etc.)

Vulnerable drinkers

- Develop **multidisciplinary programs** that involve parents, teachers and support staff

Partners/spouses

- Raise awareness among partners through **educational campaigns that focus on the effects of alcohol on the fetus** and that emphasize **the importance of the partner's support** in helping pregnant women to stop drinking, including marketing campaigns that promote **alcohol-free activities for couples**

Healthcare professionals

- Power to influence these target audiences. They can help by **supporting, influencing or representing the educational campaigns created**

Appendix

Historical overview of prevention initiatives related to FASD and prenatal alcohol exposure in Québec

The review presented herein is not exhaustive. There may be some unidentified elements. We would like to thank our collaborators for allowing us to gather the available information.

Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

- 1979** Ministère des Affaires sociales (republished in 1980 by the MSSS) *La femme enceinte et l'alcool* brochure
- 2000** The MSSS was a partner in pregnancy and alcohol awareness campaigns with the Collège des médecins du Québec and Éduc'alcool.
- 2009** *Enceinte? Alcool et drogues, ce qu'il faut savoir*. In collaboration with SOS grossesse, a guide was published for resources working with pregnant women or women of childbearing age.
- 2016** *L'Avis de santé publique de 2016* is the most recent document published on the subject by the MSSS, in collaboration with the Direction de santé publique de la Capitale-Nationale, for professionals in the health and social services network.

Collège des médecins du Québec

- 1987** Production and distribution of the *Neuf mois pour la vie* pregnancy booklet.
- 2005**
- The various messages about drinking while pregnant were :
- 1987** : «Abstain completely from alcohol, cigarettes, coffee and drugs»
- 1992 et 2000** : «Reduce your alcohol intake (including wine and beer) to a minimum»

Public Health Agency of Canada

- 1989** Creation of the Réseau TSAF-QC
- Throughout the years, Public Health Agency of Canada provided financial support for various projects and publications in Québec and Canada. Some are listed herein.

Éduc'alcool (created in 1989)

- 1992** 1st edition of the *La grossesse et l'alcool en question* brochure, which was inserted in the pregnancy booklet up until 2005. 7th edition of the brochure published in 2008
- 2002** Mass media and radio advertisement about drinking during pregnancy
- 2007**
- 2013** Production of a video on pregnancy and alcohol
- 2019** 6th campaign about drinking during pregnancy

SAFERA (created in 1998)

- 2000** Creation and distribution of a poster on FAS
- 2001** Awareness campaign on FAS in conjunction with Health Canada Initiative (posters, 4 series of pamphlets, 1 DVD, 12 newsletters, international French-language conference in December 2004), publication of the book *Enfants de l'alcool*
- 2005**
- 2016** Organization of a provincial conference at which the public health director of the CIUSSS de la Capitale-Nationale announced and explained the public health notice signed by the Directeur national de la Santé publique du Québec
- 2018** Mini posters for bars and restaurants; two posters, one for women and one for men.
- 2019**

Institut national scientifique du Québec

- 2004** Scientific publication *État de situation sur le syndrome d'alcoolisation fœtale au Québec*
- 2008** The *Mieux Vivre* guide for future parents is now given out at the start of pregnancy and contains a section on alcohol, drugs and tobacco
- 2010** Scientific publication *Représentations sociales et consommation d'alcool pendant la grossesse*
- 2011** Scientific publication *Regards sur les activités en matière d'ETCAF au Québec, de 2004 à 2010*
- 2017** Information for healthcare professionals
Information sheets about alcohol
Prenatal information document

Literature review, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada

- 2007** Guide, CD, English and French kits *This is me Salut c'est moi*, produced by the Clinic for Alcohol and Drug Exposed Children and by the FASD justice program, Manitoba
- 2008** *Cornichon/Pickles* brochure, in French and English, produced by the CLSC Sherbrooke (local community service centre)

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

- 2009** Review of the recommendations by The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada regarding alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Reminder in an article in *La Presse*, in 2009, about the existing message in the *pregnancy booklet* that advocates abstaining from drinking during the preconception period, while specifying that no one should make a pregnant woman feel guilty for deciding to have the occasional drink, a message that was unheard of at the time in English Canada.

<https://www.lapresse.ca/vivre/santefemmes/200903/31/01-841922-nouvelle-campagne-contre-lalcool-durant-la-grossesse.php>

Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

2009 *Alcohol use during pregnancy: a dangerous cocktail* (updated in 2015)

Montreal Diet Dispensary, documentation funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada

For parents

2016 *Pregnant? No alcohol is the safest choice*
(note: update of publication)

2016 *Pregnant? Don't mix it with alcohol (juice and mocktail recipes)*
(note: update of publication)

For health and social services professionals

2016 Explanatory Guide for the FASD Prevention
Collaborative Practices Checklist

2016 Checklist for professionals on FASD Prevention
Collaborative Practices



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