

Community Health and Unity: Collaboration Strategies

American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians may have different cultures and histories, but they share many values related to cooperation and the importance of family and community. They also have some health-related problems in common. Some Native communities have higher rates of alcoholism, tuberculosis, and diabetes than the general population. Women in communities with higher rates of alcoholism may also be at higher risk for exposing their babies to fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD).

What Is FASD?

“FASD” is a term that describes a range of lifelong effects that can occur in someone whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. Children whose mothers drank during pregnancy may need surgeries to fix physical problems. They may also have brain damage that can make it hard to remember things or solve problems. They may not be able to follow simple instructions or form friendships. These challenges may make it difficult to focus in school or follow everyday routines. Children with an FASD may require ongoing medical attention and special programs and schools. The impact of these additional services can strain family and community resources. Every year, at least 40,000 babies are born with an FASD.*

Facts To Remember and Share

The following are important facts to remember and share about FASD and drinking alcohol during pregnancy:

- ❖ FASD is permanent. It cannot be cured.
- ❖ FASD is 100 percent preventable. If a woman doesn't drink when she's pregnant, her baby will not have an FASD.
- ❖ There is no known safe time, safe amount, or safe type of alcohol to drink while pregnant. Beer and wine are just as harmful as hard liquor.
- ❖ If a pregnant woman stops drinking as soon as possible, she can improve her chances of having a healthy baby.



Who Can Help?

Community groups can help with FASD prevention and treatment by using collaboration strategies to educate members of their community and to provide treatment options for children and adults with an FASD. Communities benefit when tribal and community leaders, educators, health care providers, and others share information and resources. Collaboration is particularly important to Native groups who may place greater trust in information and care coming from a community source rather than from the “outside.” Collaborations may include many types of partners. Potential partners in addressing FASD include:

- ❖ Tribal and community leaders
- ❖ School systems
- ❖ Indian Health Service, tribal, and other clinics and medical providers
- ❖ Social service agencies
- ❖ Behavioral health providers and programs
- ❖ Alcohol and drug treatment centers
- ❖ Head Start and other early intervention programs
- ❖ Local churches and faith-based organizations
- ❖ Legal and law enforcement organizations
- ❖ Nutrition programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Ways To Collaborate

Begin by identifying individuals and agencies in your tribe or community who can assist in planning, developing, and doing FASD outreach and prevention activities and providing treatment. Develop alliances and networks with community health providers, social service providers, legal professionals, schools, and others to help with referrals and information sharing. Find out what treatment, education, and prevention activities are already being provided and which groups (e.g., school children, clinic patients) are benefiting from them. Consider ways to reach more people. Here are some collaboration strategies that can help get the word out about FASD and strengthen your tribe or community:

- ❖ Designate a tribal or community FASD coordinator to coordinate and develop community education and prevention activities. Provide the coordinator with adequate resources, training, and support.

American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Initiative
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

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(Ways To Collaborate Continued)**

- ❖ Provide a consistent, simple message about drinking during pregnancy and FASD that community partners can use.
- ❖ Create a list of FASD resources that are available in the community. Include health care and treatment options for children, adolescents, and adults with an FASD.
- ❖ Ask medical providers, including traditional providers, to:
 - Talk with their patients about drinking before and during pregnancy
 - Provide information about FASD to women of childbearing age
 - Screen for alcohol use during pregnancy
 - Become proficient in using motivational interviewing and brief interventions—two ways of working with women who drink that help them stop drinking
 - Help women get into treatment who continue to drink while pregnant
 - Address underlying factors that may lead to maternal drinking (e.g., trauma, depression)
- ❖ Work with nutrition programs such as WIC to distribute information on drinking and pregnancy to all Native women of childbearing age.
- ❖ Work with restaurants, bars, and other places that serve or sell alcohol to reduce sales to pregnant women through signage and training for bartenders and wait staff. (For information on organizing a campaign using warning signs, see www.cspinet.org/booze/alcwarn.html, the Web site for the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Also visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration FASD Center for Excellence Web site, www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov, for printable materials ready for posting.)
- ❖ Work with treatment programs and facilities to get priority admission for women who are drinking during pregnancy.
- ❖ Help to create safe and sober living opportunities for pregnant women and women with children.

- ❖ Make sure there is support and case management for women in recovery who are pregnant.

Native Treatment and Prevention Strategies

Some Native groups have looked to their traditional ways to address FASD, emphasizing cultural values such as wellness and healing. The Wellbriety Movement, developed by an American Indian nonprofit organization, is a recovery process that uses the healthy principles, laws, and values of traditional American Indian culture. It assists participants in their recovery from alcohol and drugs and encourages lives of wellness and wholeness rooted both in their own tribal cultures and in the mainstream world. Similarly, many Alaskan programs stress the importance of families in the recovery process and include practices such as the steam bath, the Alaska Native version of the sweat lodge. In Hawaii, a treatment program teaches Native Hawaiian clients about their ancestors, history, and culture to help them see that they are connected to something larger than themselves. The name of the program is *Ho’o Mau Ke Ola*, which is Hawaiian for “to perpetuate life as it was meant to be.”

Native groups have always looked to nature for inspiration and understanding. They have studied the cycles of life and nature—watching how all of nature works together to create a perfect balance. Like the balance of nature, educators, community leaders, health care providers, and others can work together to achieve greater harmony and better health in their tribes and communities by spreading the FASD prevention message and providing systems of care to meet the needs of individuals with an FASD.

* May, P.A., and Gossage, J.P. 2001. Estimating the prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome: A summary. *Alcohol Research & Health* 25(3):159-167.

Pregnancy is Sacred

For more information, visit fasdcenter.samhsa.gov or call 866-STOPFAS.
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov