

Alberta Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Clinical Stakeholders

July 6, 2006

Psychologists' Association of Alberta

The Alberta FASD Clinical Stakeholders are requesting your assistance in distributing the following materials to your membership: a copy of this letter, the enclosed Canadian Diagnostic Guidelines for FASD and the Alberta Clinical Stakeholders' response to the Guidelines. The Alberta FASD Clinical Stakeholders are an informal group of clinicians specializing in FASD who are working together to address the complex issues related to this disability. Psychologists are an important part of the FASD diagnostic team and even though Alberta has the most FASD multi-disciplinary diagnostic teams in Canada, it is important for all Psychologists to recognize the diagnostic criteria, the process, and the direction Alberta clinicians are taking.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are very complex to diagnose for several reasons. The following are few of the difficulties:

- ▶ This is a diagnosis for two people, the child and the mother. The intention of the diagnosis has been to link the birth mother to supports from the clinical setting.
- ▶ The diagnosis is important but the assessment information is what will drive any future services. The assessment needs to be conducted by a number of professionals including but not limited to psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists.
- ▶ Collecting the birth history can be a challenge especially if the mother is no longer in the child's life or if the mother is herself affected by FASD, then the information may not be reliable.
- ▶ Simply because a child has been pre-natally exposed to alcohol does not necessarily result in the child being affected.
- ▶ Much research still needs to be completed in each of the diagnostic criteria categories which means that clinical judgment is required and a team of people certainly ensures that all issues are taken into consideration.

The new Canadian Guidelines for Diagnosis of FASD recommend a teamwork approach which helps to deal with these diagnostic difficulties.

At this time, the prevalence of FASD is estimated that 9 in 1000 births and a recent study found that the annual costs of raising this child is about \$25,000. It is therefore prudent

to have early diagnosis in order for these children to have appropriate programming and supports. Early diagnosis will also reduce the secondary disabilities of homelessness, trouble with the law, addictions and mental health issues and their costs on society,

A list of diagnostic teams is attached to this letter to make referrals to or to access more information about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

Thank you for your assistance in distributing these materials to your membership.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gail Andrew
Co –Chair

Audrey McFarlane
Co Chair