5 Things to Know About: Level 4 FASD Prevention

Postpartum Support

1. Prevention Continues after Childbirth
2. Supporting Parenting and Family Togetherness is Key
3. Linking Maternal and Child Health Improves Engagement
4. Community-Based Connections Increase Recovery and Resilience
5. Early Intervention can Help Improve Child Health Outcomes

WHAT IS LEVEL 4 FASD PREVENTION?

Postpartum Support

Level 4 of FASD prevention involves ongoing support for new mothers to begin recovery journeys or maintain healthy changes made during pregnancy.

Maternal & Child Health

Level 4 prevention offers continued support after childbirth, wrapping care around the mother-child unit.

Early Intervention

Level 4 prevention includes access to early interventions for children who may have been prenatally exposed to alcohol, which is key for optimal long-term development.

Effective Level 4 Approaches to Prevent FASD

- Keeping families together
- Trauma informed and culturally grounded wraparound services that offer relationship-based and FASD-informed support
- Continuing to provide healing and recovery services that are responsive to intersecting needs postpartum

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1. Prevention Continues after Childbirth

Level 4 FASD prevention plays a crucial role in supporting new mothers to maintain the positive, healthful changes they made during pregnancy or creates the opportunity for such changes to now begin. Level 4 FASD prevention can support people to reduce substance use while breastfeeding and take up health actions that reduce the risk of future alcohol-exposed pregnancies. These sustained changes, postnatally, are key for long-term maternal and child health and FASD prevention. Continuing to offer support in the postpartum period allows for the complex needs of postpartum women and gender-diverse individuals and their children to be met. Level 4 FASD prevention helps connect mothers to vital health resources that help improve their overall health, well-being, and quality of life.

2. Supporting Parenting and Family Togetherness is Key

Level 4 prevention advocates value keeping families together. Child welfare authorities and services working with women on alcohol and other health and social issues, can support co-planning processes where parents' strengths and rights are amplified, and children are protected. Through approaches such as family group conferencing, families can learn about and be connected to supports in their community, and make a formal plan that builds on parents' strengths and meets the family's needs. Parenting programs can be offered in community, hospital, and at-home settings or by child welfare agencies. Research on parenting interventions has found that attachment-based parenting programs that integrate interventions to reduce substance use have been effective in improving parent-child relationships and women's reflective functioning, coping skills, and mental health outcomes. Supporting families to stay together has particular importance for Indigenous families for healing and connection to culture.

3. Linking Maternal and Child Health Improves Engagement

By offering programs that are responsive to the mother, child, and the mother-child unit, service providers can help facilitate women's access and engagement in substance use treatment and recovery support in the broadest sense. Such programs can focus on maternal and child health, social, and developmental needs.

By connecting maternal health services such as postpartum care, mental health support, substance use counselling, and parenting programs, with child-focused services like developmental screenings, early intervention, and pediatric services, families receive comprehensive care in a more efficient and supportive way. Such programs have been known to increase attachment, address parenting needs, promote continuity of care, and enhance long-term health outcomes for both mother and child.

4. Community-Based Connections Increase Recovery and Resilience

There are many service models that can be used to support Level 4 FASD prevention, including community-based multi-service programs, case management, peer support, or home visiting programs that support parenting, and foster the parent-child bond and promote connections to community services. Engaging with mentors and peer support groups, community programs, and culturally grounded initiatives helps new mothers build social connections, share experiences, and access tailored resources and information. Community-based connections also create an environment of respect and understanding, validating individual experiences, and encouraging continual engagement. By strengthening ties to community, women and gender diverse individuals can navigate recovery and their overall health.

5. Early Intervention can help Improve Child Health Outcomes

For those who were unable to reduce their substance use in pregnancy, Level 4 FASD prevention services can be a bridge to early diagnosis and intervention for children with FASD. Access to early intervention services can improve health outcomes in children by identifying and addressing developmental and health challenges. For children prenatally exposed to alcohol, early access to assessments, therapies, and supportive services can help optimize cognitive, social, and emotional development. Interventions may include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, developmental assessments and services, educational supports, and family-centred support programs. Timely support helps reduce the impact of prenatal alcohol exposure, enhances learning and adaptive skills, and supports positive long-term outcomes for both children and their families. Early intervention for children has the potential to support engagement by their parents, breaking harmful intergenerational cycles of alcohol and other health problems.

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