

SECTION 2: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

(see also: **Warning Labels**)

(see also: **Canadian Foundation on Fetal Alcohol Research**)

Issue

A very small number of children are born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) or some effects of FASD. While substance abuse is a determining factor in FASD births, there may be other mitigating factors involved. It is not yet known how much alcohol is safe during pregnancy - if at all. The incidence is clearly higher among lower-income groups and the first nations community, although both are sensitive to being singled out.

The FASD issue has received continued political attention on a national level and is being used by special interest groups to promote warning labels and advertising restrictions. Throughout the past 15 years, some Members of Parliament have signalled their concern by tabling Bills or Motions that advocate warning labels be placed on alcohol containers. The most recent was a Motion introduced by former MP Judy Wasylyscia-Leis and a warning label Bill by MP Paul Szabo (see warning labels).

Quick Summary

- The industry believes the prudent choice for pregnant women is not to drink during pregnancy.
- Through the financial support of the BAC, the CFFAR was launched in September 2007.
- Brewers support targeted programs for those most at risk.

Background

In September 2007, after consultation with the Brewers Association of Canada's (BAC) Alcohol Issues Panel and through the support of the BAC and member companies the Canadian Foundation on Fetal Alcohol Research (CFFAR) was launched. CFFAR, an independent non-profit foundation, was created through an initial contribution from industry of \$1 million over five years to fund research projects in the study of FASD. The first round of grants were awarded in September 2008 and the first research findings were presented in September 2010. Research applications are peer-reviewed and grants are awarded on an annual basis.

The BAC continues to meet with government and Parliamentarians to explain that effective programming is in place.



Industry Discussion Points

- The industry believes any woman who finds she is pregnant or is planning to start a family, should consult her physician on all matters of health and nutrition, including the consumption of alcohol. The industry believes the prudent choice for women is not to drink during pregnancy.
- Labels have not been shown to be effective in changing attitudes and behaviours and therefore do not contribute to reducing the incidence of alcohol misuse.
- A warning label will not dissuade the minority of Canadians who have a problem with alcohol. The decision to drink alcohol has already been made before the bottle or glass has been purchased.
- The brewers support targeted programs for those at risk as the most effective intervention, particularly when delivered through the medical community.

Responsive

- The Brewers Association of Canada formed partnerships with medical groups to deal directly with those most at risk of having a problem with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Some of the partnerships include the funding of: the Canadian Foundation on Fetal Alcohol Research (CFFAR), (\$1 million over 5 years), a toll-free Helpline at the Motherisk Program (1-877-FAS-INFO) at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, and the FAS Resource Centre run by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.
- The Brewers Association also sponsors, every year, the Fetal Alcohol Canadian Expertise (FACE) Research Roundtable, where Canadian researchers share their most recent findings with respect to FASD.
- Brewers believe that these targeted programs offer a greater hope of success than band-aid solutions such as warning labels on alcoholic beverage containers. In many cases, the consumer is served an alcoholic beverage and does not get to see the bottle. The decision to drink has already been made before the bottle or glass has been purchased.
- Canadians are already aware of the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy. A 2005 Ipsos Reid poll indicates that 99% of Canadian women know of those risks.
- A September 2006 Standing Committee on Health Committee report on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) strategy called for increased targeted education and awareness campaigns, more support for individuals living with FASD and more research. The report did not recommend warning labels.
- In 2005, the Health Committee rejected a warning label bill introduced by MP Paul Szabo on the basis that the majority of witnesses appearing told the Committee that the established targeted programs currently in place would have a better chance of success than warning labels.
- Brewers have worked hard to comply with the Standing Committee on Health's recommendation by sponsoring targeted programming to help give women and communities the information they need to prevent FASD.



- The Canadian Foundation on Fetal Alcohol Research has, as of 2010, provided research funds to 9 projects, from Universities across Canada. More projects are set to be announced in September 2011. The results of the first three projects were also be unveiled in September 2010 as part of the Fetal Alcohol Canadian Expertise (FACE) Research Roundtable.

Research

While there is some research suggesting that the moderate consumption of alcohol may not pose a threat to the fetus, the accepted wisdom in Canada among physicians is that women should not consume alcohol during pregnancy and that there are no known safe levels.

