5. Prevention

Short description

Preventing prenatal alcohol exposure requires accurate information, accessible healthcare, and supportive, nonstigmatizing approaches. FASD United advocates for evidence-informed prevention efforts that respect individual autonomy, improve access to reproductive and substance use healthcare, and connect pregnant and parenting people to appropriate services without punishment or blame.

Our Position

Preventing prenatal alcohol exposure is an important public health goal that must be pursued through accurate information, accessible healthcare, and respectful support. Effective prevention efforts should recognize the circumstances that influence alcohol use and access to care, including gaps in healthcare, substance use treatment, and reliable information. Public health messaging must respect individual autonomy and avoid blame, shame, or stigma toward pregnant people and birth parents.

FASD United supports prevention strategies that empower people to make informed decisions and connect them to appropriate resources. Prevention must complement, not overshadow, the need for lifelong services for people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) and their families. People who have already experienced prenatal alcohol exposure, including those with FASD, deserve recognition, support, and access to care regardless of whether exposure could have been prevented.

Our Policy Goals

1. Expand access to accurate, evidence-informed information.

Support public health education about alcohol use and pregnancy that is clear, accessible, culturally responsive, and free from stigmatizing language. Information should help people make informed healthcare decisions.

2. Improve access to supportive healthcare and treatment.

Strengthen access to prenatal, reproductive, and primary healthcare, as well as appropriate substance use treatment and recovery services. Ensure that pregnant and parenting people can seek help without unnecessary barriers or fear of punishment.

3. Promote respectful screening and brief intervention.

Encourage appropriate, evidence-informed screening, brief intervention, and referral practices in healthcare settings. These practices should prioritize informed participation, confidentiality protections, and connections to care.

4. Address stigma and punitive policies.

Oppose approaches that criminalize alcohol use during pregnancy or discourage people from seeking healthcare. Promote policies that respect autonomy and recognize that punitive responses can undermine supportive public health efforts.

5. Connect prevention efforts with lifelong support.

Ensure that prevention initiatives also provide information about FASD identification, family resources, and available services. Public health programs should acknowledge the needs and experiences of people with FASD, birth parents, and families.

Alignment with Community-Driven Policy Recommendations

The following community-driven recommendations align with this position:

- **Continuum of Care:** Connect prevention and early identification efforts to coordinated support throughout life.
- **Professional Education:** Improve professionals' understanding of prenatal alcohol exposure, respectful communication, and appropriate intervention.
- **Agency Collaboration:** Coordinate public health, healthcare, treatment, and family support systems.
- **FASD Data:** Encourage responsible collection and use of information to guide public health strategies without increasing stigma or fear of disclosure.

FASD Respect Act Alignment

Section 104 of the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act of 2025 authorizes activities related to preventing prenatal alcohol exposure, including research on prevention approaches and culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions. The law also authorizes education, identification, intervention, and services for individuals with FASD.

These provisions support a comprehensive approach that includes both prevention and lifelong support. The enacted law does not establish a nationwide system of prenatal substance use treatment, prohibit punitive state policies, or guarantee access to healthcare. Those goals require additional policy and program action.

Further Reading and References

- FASD United, Language and Stigma Guide.
- FASD United, FASD Symposium White Paper 1.1 and White Paper 1.2.
- SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act of 2025, Public Law 119-44, Section 104: https://www.congress.gov/119/plaws/publ44/PLAW-119publ44.pdf
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, information on alcohol use during pregnancy and prevention of prenatal alcohol exposure: https://www.cdc.gov/fasd/