

## The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Commission

### Background

The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Commission was established in 2009 and expanded in 2011 by the Colorado legislature to recommend ways of reducing prenatal alcohol exposure and its related problems, to increase awareness of the consequences of drinking alcohol while pregnant and to promote early diagnosis and appropriate interventions for affected individuals throughout their life span. (C.R.S. 27-80-116)

### Why Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are important

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy is the leading preventable cause of intellectual and developmental disabilities and birth defects. Data published this year show that 2.4 - 4.8% of first-graders in a Midwestern U.S. city are affected by prenatal alcohol exposure and have evidence of a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (May, et al Pediatrics, Vol 134, Number 5, pp. 855-866, Nov 2014). This means that as many as 3,000 babies born in Colorado each year may be affected to some degree. The effects of FASDs place a tremendous burden on families' and society's resources and are an economic burden to the state. FASDs include physical, cognitive, mental, behavioral, and learning disabilities. Only a small percentage are identifiable by the physical features of full Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Most affected individuals are more difficult to recognize, but, nevertheless, suffer from life-long cognitive and behavioral disabilities. In a landmark study of long term effects on individuals with FASDs, Dr. Ann Streissguth, et al (Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, Vol 25, Issue 4, pp.228-238, Aug. 2004) found that 60% had been suspended, expelled from or dropped out of school; 60% of those over 12 years old had trouble with the law or had been charged or convicted of a crime; and 80% of those over 21 had problems with employment. These characteristics all add to the economic burden of the educational, social service, and justice systems.

The Commission continues to foster increased awareness and cooperation among the medical, educational, social services and justice systems to address the issues of prevention, early diagnosis, intervention to reduce related disabilities, and support throughout childhood and adulthood.

### FASD Commission Activities

Since the Commission was formed in 2009 it has

- Promoted and coordinated FASD prevention efforts and services in partnership with state agencies and organizations including, NOFAS Colorado, COFAS, Families First, The Arc, The Colorado Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (DEC) and others

- Recommended policy and program initiatives as illustrated in this report
- Developed signs warning about drinking during pregnancy and made them available on the web at [www.nofascolorado.org](http://www.nofascolorado.org)
- Evaluated the use of the health warning signs as described in the 2011 FASD Commission Report
- Distributed hundreds of posters, brochures, and drink coasters developed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), COFAS and other organizations
- Promoted the use of electronic and web based materials such as those developed by CDC [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas/default.htm) and The Arc <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/bu58460xo8ajdr6/AABdG2h9PvZ9MuiGB8hkpRyBa>
- Adapted four Public Service Announcements (PSAs) from the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Prevention Program at the University of New Mexico for Colorado available at the Department of Education website <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/fasd>.
- Recommended the formation of and participated in a multiagency work group to address the state's inadequate capacity for multidisciplinary evaluations for children with FASDs and other developmental delays
- Participated in a task force that led to inclusion of functional disabilities in eligibility criteria for services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Was instrumental in an increase in Medicaid reimbursement for multidisciplinary developmental evaluations for children
- Participated in the GAP Analysis Project (funded by the 2013 General Assembly) to conduct an analysis of gaps in the service and crisis response systems for children and adults with co-occurring behavioral health disorders and intellectual/developmental disabilities
- Trained educators on best practices for educating students with FASDs
- Conducted numerous training and educational presentations across Colorado, in partnership with other organizations