



# **Fetal Alcohol Exposure: Time to Know, Time to Act**

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## **Alcohol Policy: FASD Prevention**

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# **STEPS TO INCORPORATING POLICY IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

“Policy” refers to a rule, strategy, plan, procedure, or course of action. It alone will not solve the identified issue or challenge of FASD prevention, but is an important first step in establishing practice guidelines for valuable service provision.

Generally speaking, developing feasible and effective policies is a complex task. It raises fundamental issues regarding the relationship between a service provider and its recipient; underscoring the difficulty of finding the right balance between protecting an individual from harm and respecting their freedom to exercise personal choice.

Ideally then, a sensible approach to policy development is one of harm reduction. This is particularly appropriate in consideration of policy development for secondary and tertiary FASD prevention initiatives.

For the purpose of clarity, secondary and tertiary FASD prevention activities are defined by Health Canada as follows:

- Secondary Prevention activities include outreach, screening and referral for women who are pregnant or of childbearing age, and using substances.
- Tertiary prevention activities target individuals in whom the condition has already developed and include providing substance abuse treatment or birth control services for women who are at risk of having a child affected by prenatal substance use.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF POLICY ISSUES FOR THE SERVICE PROVIDER:**

A policy is a statement that asserts the position of the organization on a matter of current public policy and serves as the foundation for action, and/or standard of practice for service provision.

Policy issues may originate from a variety of sources, including:

- ❖ Government proclamation
- ❖ Research findings
- ❖ Trends within a Professional Field
- ❖ Anecdotal experience
- ❖ Community/Stakeholder initiatives

Consideration of policy issues and its subsequent adoption by an agency may include the following criteria:

- The pertinence of the issue to the agency’s mission or mandate
- The relevance of the issue to the clients of the agency
- The importance of the issue to improving health status or quality of life in the community

- The ability to clearly communicate and substantiate the concerns of local Public Health Departments
- The potential for achieving the objectives of the policy
- The extent to which there is a non-duplicative, useful and feasible role for the agency to play with respect to the issue.
- The potential for building positive partnerships with other agencies or service providers
- The amount of resources required and available to sustain a strategic effort.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:**

Once a policy issue has been identified, FASD prevention in this case, the process of policy development begins. Determining the steps of the process itself is essential, however, there are also some useful principles to keep in mind when initiating the process:

- The development and implementation of effective policies can occur only when there is strong commitment to the issue.
- A comprehensive approach to substance use that takes into account the interplay of individual, family, and community factors that affect the scope and consequences of the problem, promotes policy development that is meaningful.
- Creating comprehensive and integrated policies requires an organized and participatory process. Involving a wide variety of stakeholders and organizations in consultation and communication are essential components in policy development and can take place at any time throughout the process.

There are commonly six generic steps in the process that ensure consistency and a quality standard for policy development. These are as follows:

1. Identify the issue of priority
2. Analyze the agencies role related to the issue
3. Generate and assess potential response
4. Choose and define response
5. Prepare and implement an action plan
6. Evaluate effectiveness; maintain, revise or terminate policy

The first 4 steps have been discussed to some extent already. The 5 step is dependant upon the nature, structure and resources of an agency, and the characteristics and specific needs of the community it serves.

In the case of FASD Prevention, the Service provider is currently in the position of providing both secondary and tertiary services. Meaning that, the focus is now at a phase beyond increasing public awareness and promoting healthy lifestyle choices. In Ontario, funding was made available in 2002 to 17 service agencies. Each one is presently engaged in either planning or providing direct services to women, with substance use issues, who are pregnant, parenting and 'at-risk'. These same women may already have children with FASD or may themselves be affected.

In the Niagara Region, the ABC Program, received funding under the above mentioned initiative in July of 2002 and has been in the early implementation phase since November. Policy development has taken shape in terms of Guiding Principles for service provision. These guiding principles were the foundation upon which a service strategy plan was fashioned and implemented.

### Guiding Principles for ABC: A Better Choice Program

- ❖ **Timely identification and Intervention**
- ❖ **Inclusive spectrum of services**
- ❖ **Flexibility of service delivery and responsiveness to the needs of individuals**
- ❖ **Integration of services with partner service providers**
- ❖ **Respectful service delivery, indicative of both awareness and compassion for the complex issues facing individuals**

The 6<sup>th</sup> step of the process involves evaluation. Although evaluation may be perceived as an end-stage activity, occurring only after a period of time of implementation has lapsed; it is in fact an essential beginning phase consideration. Taking into account the methods and measurements of evaluation processes provides an opportunity to integrate these in practice from the onset. The benefit is that indicators of effectiveness (or lack thereof), can be efficiently identified and appropriate revisions to the action plan can be executed at any time. This enhances a programs ability to be responsive to the needs of the individuals it is serving, or failing to reach.

***A final thought...***

### THE LIFE CYCLE OF A POLICY (A Simplified Model from a Service Provider's Perspective)

