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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

### **PROVINCE RECOGNIZES FASD PREVENTION AND SUPPORT DAY**

VICTORIA –Each year, on the ninth day of the ninth month, people in British Columbia and around the world recognize Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Prevention and Support Day to raise awareness of this disorder and highlight the importance of abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy.

FASD describes the range of harms caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. These may include lifelong physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities. Understanding no geographic, social or economic borders it can affect anyone regardless of income, education, community or background. It is estimated that every year in Canada, nine in every 1,000 babies are born with FASD.

“Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a disability that is often invisible and always irreversible,” said Minister of Children and Family Development Mary Polak. “With close to 400 children born with FASD in British Columbia each year, supporting women to be healthy in child bearing years is vital. We need to recognize and understand the challenges that people living with FASD face each day. We have to look past the disability, past the behaviour or learning challenges as we provide the supports to help children, youth, adults and their families.

“When we see the person and find their strengths we can build on what they do well and assist them along a successful path in life.”

FASD affects how the brain processes information with no two people affected in the same way. Effects can range from mild learning disabilities to more severe challenges where children may have difficulty responding to emotions, planning ahead or understanding the consequences of their actions.

“It is important to remember that there is no safe amount of alcohol, no safe type of alcohol, and no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy,” said Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Ida Chong. “By raising awareness of this disorder, educating the community and encouraging prevention, we hope that we’ll eventually be able to reduce the number of babies born with FASD in B.C. to zero.”

One of the Province’s most successful FASD initiatives is the Key Worker Program that began in 2006. Key Workers are at the centre of a network of local support services, helping families understand FASD, offering education and information, identifying community resources and providing emotional and practical support to families raising a child with FASD.

“Parents have told me that one of the best services I provide is that I understand when they talk about the challenges their kids have,” said Scott McLaughlin, a key worker at Cariboo Chilcotin Child Development Centre in Williams Lake. “They used to worry about being judged or about their child being judged or labelled. Parents used to think they were alone. Now they are connecting with other families who share their frustrations, their day-to-day challenges and their triumphs.

“It is important to remember that FASD is what these kids have – not who they are,” added McLaughlin. “I work with children and youth who excel at drawing, sports and chess. They are all unique and wonderful kids doing incredible things despite having FASD – yet most of them, have at one point faced obstacles because few people understood the nature of what was going on inside them and how they functioned.”

For more information on FASD, provincial prevention strategies and programs to assist children and their families, visit the Ministry of Children and Family Development website at [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd) and the Baby’s Best Chance website, [www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca).

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## BACKGROUND

### FASD PREVENTION AND SUPPORT DAY

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term that describes a range of disabilities that may affect people whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy. Governments and communities are responding with a multi-faceted approach – from prevention activities through awareness and education to support for children, youth and adults living with FASD:

- This year, the Provincial Government and Health Canada developed a community toolkit that was distributed to municipalities and stakeholders to assist in planning awareness activities. The Toolkit also contained new awareness campaign material developed by BC Liquor Distribution Branch. [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd)
- The Ministry of Children and Family Development Key Worker Program helps families understand the disability and access community resources. [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd/kw\\_support.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd/kw_support.htm)
- In March 2008, British Columbia released a new 10-year Provincial Plan - a collaboration of nine provincial ministries outlining strategic priorities across government in policy, community service and research. [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd/ten\\_year\\_plan.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd/ten_year_plan.htm)
- Ministry of Education operates a Provincial Outreach Program that provides teachers with information on the effects of FASD on student learning and behaviour. [www.fasdoutreach.ca](http://www.fasdoutreach.ca)
- B.C.'s Baby's Best Chance website is filled with up-to-date and practical information, useful tools and resources for women, expectant parents, and families with babies and toddlers up to three years of age. [www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca)
- Community Living BC offers the Personalized Supports Initiative for adults with both significant limitations in adaptive functioning and a diagnosis of FASD. [www.communitylivingbc.ca/individuals-families/personalized-supports-initiative](http://www.communitylivingbc.ca/individuals-families/personalized-supports-initiative)
- The Knowledge Network, in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, created a powerful and informative documentary on FASD called Finding Hope that can be viewed online at [findinghope.knowledge.ca](http://findinghope.knowledge.ca)

British Columbia is the lead jurisdiction this year for the Canadian Northwest FASD Partnership - an alliance of seven provinces focused on the prevention, intervention, care and support of individuals affected by FASD. Partners work collaboratively on prevention and share expertise, best practices and materials, thereby aiding effective and efficient use of resources.

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