Department of Health and Wellness

**Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness**

Toolkit

***#BEYOND ALL LIMITS***

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# Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Day[[1]](#footnote-1)

* International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)Awareness Day is commemorated annually on 9 September.
* FASD is a diagnostic term describing a range of conditions affecting persons exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. The effects can include physical problems and problems with behaviour and learning. [[2]](#footnote-2)
* Globally, every year at nine minutes past nine on 9 September, people are encouraged to ring bells as part of the international call to create awareness and focus attention on the facts that any alcohol intake by women during the nine months of pregnancy, will affect the unborn baby.
* Leaders in government, NGOs and civil society come together with one voice and reflect on the milestones gained in educating the public on the devastating effects of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Further advocating to strengthen the role of men in providing a supportive environment to their pregnant partners.

# Theme

* According to the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) this year’s FASD Awareness Day theme is ***#Beyond All Limits.*** The theme aims to encourage individuals and the community at large to go ‘beyond all limits’ in supporting, caring for and loving those affected.

# Objectives of this toolkit

* This toolkit covers FASD messages that can be used to create awareness around FASD during September and beyond to support related activities.
* The reader can choose key messages and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material most suited for their setting to:
* Raise awareness to the public on aspects of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
* Capacitate the health promoters and partners with information that can be used when imparting knowledge to the public.
* To empower with information, guided by global, national, and provincial approaches.

# Target audience for this toolkit

* The target audience for this toolkit is twofold:
  1. The toolkit user target group
     1. Facility based staff, Health Promoters and allied health staff working across the health system in the Western Cape.
     2. Western Cape on Wellness (WoW!) Champions to share with their members.
     3. Community Liaison Officers in Metro and Rural Health Services.
     4. Community Health Care Workers.
     5. Relevant Partners.
  2. The toolkit target audience (group that can benefit from the information)
     1. Pregnant women including adolescents.
     2. Women planning to conceive.
     3. Males to promote playing a supportive role.
     4. General public.

# Channels of communication

* The toolkit will be shared with the toolkit users via email and on the WOW! website. The recipients could then use the information in the toolkit to inform activities.
* Key messages and IEC material used in this toolkit can be shared via social media pages such as the WoW! Facebook Group (WoW! Western Cape on Wellness) and the Department of Health and Wellness Facebook page (i.e. Western Cape Government Health) including further social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter.
* The suggested hashtag for all social media posts is ***#BEYOND ALL LIMITS*** for September activities.

# Tips for social mobilisation

* Share information in the waiting areas.
* Share information such as IEC material in the toolkit via email, display on notice boards or on information tables.
* Arrange Health talks at the facility or at community level, providing health education and awareness on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (see zip folder with information material).
* Share activities on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp.
* Share and purchase the FASD knot and badge (see details below). Let’s stand together and share the FASD prevention and support message with as many people as possible and encourage everyone you know to wear the knot and button badges during the week before and on 9 September 2023.

# Measures of success

* Feedback from the toolkit users on its usefulness can be provided to the Provincial Wellness team ([Ferdinand.Bomvana@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Ferdinand.Bomvana@westerncape.gov.za) or [Karen.Nieuwoudt@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Karen.Nieuwoudt@westerncape.gov.za)) to explore and include aspects to address respective needs.
* To measure the success of the toolkit implementation and activities sharing with partners and target audience, through mentioned channels is a first step.
* Feedback reports can further be used to document successes and measure impact. Showcase activities in the reports by adding pictures with the relevant permission. Share plans on the activity and reporting template communicated.
* For the above purposes, as an example the following indicators can be used:

1. Number of beneficiaries for activities
2. Number of key messages or IEC material distributed via different platforms, including social media
3. For social media activities, statistics can be gathered to identify number of views, likes or engagement on the platforms.

# FASD Facts

* According to an article on the Western Cape Government Health and Wellness website, it is noted that FASD is preventable and occurs in children who are exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. There is also no cure for this irreversible lifelong condition.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that South Africa has the highest reported FASD prevalence rates in the world, with rates as high as 28% in some communities.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* In South Africa, research done by FARR in 5 of the 9 provinces, revealed rates as high as 282/1000 live births in some communities in the Northern Cape Province.
* The Western Cape Province has areas with rates as high as 250/1000 live births (25%) (FASER-SA report).
* FASD prevalence rates of studies in the Western Cape are sketched below
  1. All of these studies were done by FARR, except the Wellington, Montagu, Ashton, Robertson study\*.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Province | Community | Prevalence rate per 1000 | Reference |
| Western Cape | Wellington  (x 3 studies) | 89 | Viljoen, Gossage, Brooke, Adnams, Jones, Robinson…. & May 2005 |
| Aurora | 100 | Olivier et al., 2013 |
| Witzenberg Sub-district | 96 | Olivier et al., 2016 |
| Saldanha Bay Municipality | 67 | Olivier et al., 2016 |
| Wellington, Montagu, Ashton, Robertson | 135 – 208 | May et al., 2016\*  (\*American Group) |
| Prince Albert | 69 | Still to be published |

* More Statistics from FARR about the incidence of FASD in South Africa reveal that the Northern Cape followed by the Western Cape has the highest incidence of FASD in the country.
* To address FASD concerns, policy recommendations are suggested:[[5]](#footnote-5)
* Policy development to prevent and manage FASD should be multi-sectoral calling for collaboration between different sectors and departments.
* Social determinants of health such as socioeconomic status, living conditions, level of education contribute significantly to the increase in the prevalence of FASD.
* A family-centred approach should be considered encouraging the input from individuals with FASD and their families ensuring their human rights are protected.
* There is a need for awareness and education on the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy in communities, health facilities and schools, targeting adolescents. Awareness and education should also target the general population.
* Unplanned pregnancies contribute to the increase in the prevalence of FASD. To reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies, families should be encouraged to use various effective family planning approaches.
* Furthermore, individuals with alcohol problems should be assisted to access and complete treatment and be supported to integrate back into the society after treatment.
* Promoting skills development and other social programmes are also necessary to engage individuals with alcohol problems.
* Moreover, relevant service providers should be trained to be able to document and counsel individuals appropriately including pregnant women with alcohol problems.
* **Clinical Features of FAS:[[6]](#footnote-6)**
* Low body weight
* Poor coordination
* Hyperactive behaviour
* Difficulty with attention
* Poor memory
* Difficulty in school (especially with math)
* Learning disabilities
* Speech and language delays
* Intellectual disability or low IQ
* Poor reasoning and judgment skills
* Sleep and sucking problems as a baby
* Vision or hearing problems
* Problems with the heart, kidneys, or bones
* Shorter-than-average height
* Small head size
* Abnormal facial features, such as a smooth ridge between the nose and upper lip (this ridge is called the philtrum

# Efforts to address FASD

* The First 1000 days[[7]](#footnote-7) is a key initiative driven by the Western Cape Government Health and Wellness with a promotion and prevention element connecting to FASD. A child’s health is most vulnerable during the First 1000 days of life. This period, from conception until a child’s 2nd birthday, offers a unique opportunity to shape healthier and prosperous futures.
* The First 1000 days’ is a key lever of the Provincial strategic plan’s Vision Inspired priorities namely *Empowering people*, focusing on the health and wellness outcomes of a child and mother. The goal is to realise optimal wellness for children and the community at large. The three core scientific aspects link to growth, love and play where advocating for no alcohol during pregnancy becomes vital.
* Research highlights if alcohol is consumed during pregnancy, it can have a negative impact on the infants’ brain growth and learning ability in early childhood.



Figure 1: Left- Brain of a child with FAS. Right- brain of a child without FAS.

* Abstinence from alcohol consumption during pregnancy can have a positive impact on the overall growth and development of the infant.
* The whole of government and whole of society approach is key to realise the First 1000 days objectives.
* **FASD Knot and Button Badge**
* As a build up to 9 September and to create awareness around FASD, FARR has launched Button Badges to wear on International FASD Awareness Day that can be ordered, and to share with community members, colleagues, friends, and family.
  + The button badge is 55mm in diameter and can be kept for years to wear on International FASD Awareness Day!

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **FASD Knot** | **FASD Button Badge** |
| Cost: **R25** per packet of 9 knots | Cost: **R198** per packet of 9 button badges |

* + FASD knots and button badges are sold in packets of 9 (the 9 refers to the 9 months of alcohol-free pregnancy).
  + Each knot and button badge come with a short message. Included in each order is an information sheet regarding International FASD Day and the process to be followed to commemorate the day, as well as the symbolism of the FASD knot. This will enable you to host your own International FASD Day event, and to join the rest of the world on 9 September 2023.
  + Order process:
    - The orders are open to South African residents only.
    - Orders can be collected from the FARR Head Office in Bellville (Cape Town) or it will be couriered to you.  Please provide a delivery address.
    - Cost of knots and button badges is excluding courier costs. If you order 10 packets (9 knots/button badges per packet), you get an additional packet of knots free of charge.
    - To place an order contact Liska White ([info@farrsa.org.za](mailto:info@farrsa.org.za)).
    - To enable FARR to get the knots to you in time for FASD Day, place your order as soon as possible.



# Key Messages

* The following content can be used to raise awareness and to educate about FASD.

***No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.***

***FASD causes permanent damage, but it is 100% preventable.***

|  |
| --- |
| * Alcohol can cause damage to the unborn babies development even before the woman knows she is pregnant. * Alcohol can continue to harm the baby until the baby is born and afterwards if the mother is breastfeeding. * It is never too late to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy. * No amount of alcohol is safe for the unborn baby. |

**What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?**

* Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a group of birth defects that can occur in a person who has been exposed to alcohol before birth.
* Alcohol damages the unborn baby’s growing body and brain resulting in many types of birth defects and long-term psycho-social and behavioural challenges.
* FASD is 100% permanent. The damage done by the alcohol cannot be undone.
* The safest choice for your unborn baby is not to drink any alcohol when you are pregnant.

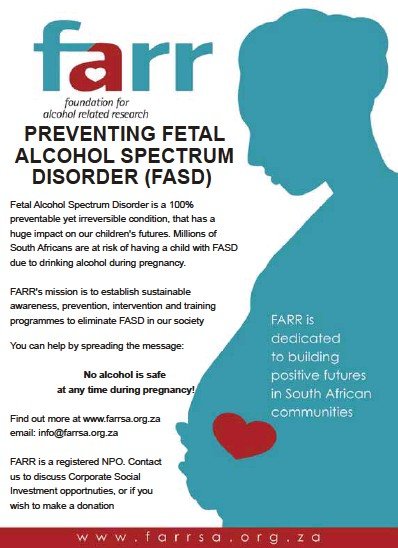


Key messages and images source: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) flipchart*. See flipchart in zip folder.*

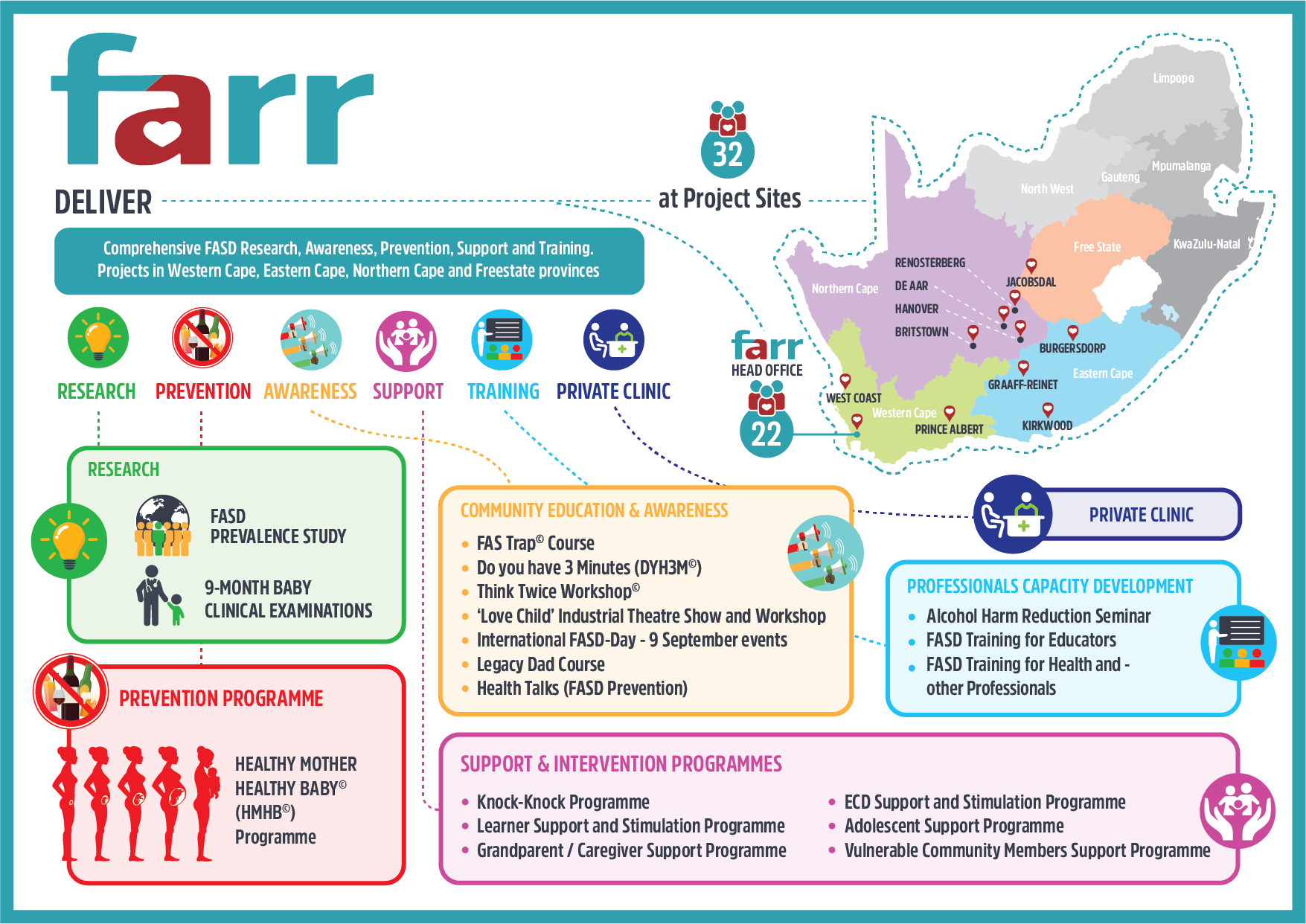
Graphical user interface

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* Use the poster below for prevention and awareness raising to the public. The poster is available in the zip folder.



* **Use this additional resource that shows services available by FARR**



* **Support for FASD Children and families**

**Where do you go if you are worried your baby/child has FASD?**

* Go to the clinic and ask that your child be tested
* Only a specially trained doctor using sophisticated tests can determine if a child has FASD.

**Where do I go for help?**

If you need help to control your alcohol intake, drug misuse and smoking then speak to:

* Local community structures e.g. women’s groups
* Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous
* A social worker
* A mental health nurse
* Places of worship
* Religious leader

Don’t go it alone. Seek help.

**Diagram, text

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# Useful websites to visit

* Foundation for alcohol related research. Available at <https://farrsa.org.za>
* Township trauma: the terrible cost of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Available at <https://www.pebblesproject.org/>

# Reference list

1. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/facts.htm>
2. Fetal alcohol syndrome awareness programme. Available at [https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/Fetal-alcohol-syndrome-awareness-programme](https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/foetal-alcohol-syndrome-awareness-programme)
3. First 1000 Days. Available at <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/first-1000-days/>
4. Policy requirements for the Prevention and Management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in South Africa: A Policy Brief. Available at <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.592726/full>



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1. For more information see zip folder. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/facts.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fetal alcohol syndrome awareness programme. Available at https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/foetal-alcohol-syndrome-awareness-programme [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fetal alcohol syndrome awareness programme. Available at https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/foetal-alcohol-syndrome-awareness-programme [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Policy requirements for the Prevention and Management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in South Africa: A Policy Brief. Available at https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.592726/full. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Basics about FASDs. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/facts.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For more information visit https://www.westerncape.gov.za/first-1000-days/. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)