

Tips for Creating Effective Alcohol and Pregnancy Awareness Campaigns



Building awareness about alcohol is an important part of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention. Awareness campaigns can include messages through a broad range of materials and mediums, including:

- posters;
- brochures;
- websites;
- social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram;
- point-of-sale signs;
- warning labels;
- innovative approaches for bars such as beer coasters;
- pregnancy test dispensers, and information about risks of alcohol use during pregnancy in washrooms.

In the past decade, research on the effectiveness of different approaches to alcohol and pregnancy campaigns has continued to grow and can help inform the development of your campaign. This resource summarizes some of the key findings and lessons learned from other alcohol and pregnancy awareness campaigns.

What are the goals of your campaign?



Research suggests that awareness campaigns rarely change people's actual behaviours. They can have other purposes, including:

- 1** Influencing knowledge and levels of awareness and helping shift attitudes and beliefs;
- 2** Encouraging information-seeking;
- 3** Conveying information about how to make positive changes;
- 4** Letting people know where to receive support and services;
- 5** Reminding, reinforcing, and encouraging people who already know the facts.

What makes a campaign effective?



Comprehension

Does your message contain simple, clear, and direct information? Does the message reflect up-to-date research findings? Have you considered literacy or cultural barriers?

Noticeability

Is the message printed in large, easily readable text? Can you enhance the message with colour or images? What will help it attract attention? (Messages with vertical text, that are placed too high or too low when viewed, or require multiple clicks on a website, tend to attract less attention).

Recall

Is the message going to be placed in an area (physical or digital) frequented by your target audience? Can you introduce variation in content or rotate key messages to increase recall? Is the message consistent over time and/or aligned with other similar campaigns?

Integrated

Combining awareness campaigns with other FASD prevention activities can be more effective. Are there opportunities for your audience to connect with services in the community to learn more or take action? Is the campaign part of wider health promotion activities, e.g., activities related to contraception and sexual health or mental wellness? Are there connections to alcohol policies? Are there opportunities to learn more about people with FASD?

Developing your message- Finding balance between threat and response



When developing your campaign message, it is important to consider your audience and tailor your message to their interests, concerns, and knowledge. Research is demonstrating the importance of finding a message that results in an emotional response where people feel that the message is relevant to them (threat) and where they also feel able to take action (efficacy).

Campaigns that use strong fear-based messages (“One drink can harm your baby”) or unnecessarily graphic images (e.g., fetuses floating in alcohol) can present a threat that results in not just a negative response (“This is not relevant to me”; “I don’t believe this”), but unintended consequences such as reinforcing stereotypes about people with FASD or leading women who consumed alcohol prior to knowing they were pregnant to consider having an abortion.

Level of Threat	Response
Threat is low	No response (“I am not concerned about this issue”)
The threat is higher than my ability to take action	Defensive/negative response, e.g., avoidance, denial, rationalization, anger (“This won’t happen to me”)
My ability to take action is higher than the threat	Positive response, e.g., increase in knowledge about the topic, reinforcement of existing positive behaviours, sharing of information with others (“This is helpful to me. I can do something about this”)

Examples of messages that balance threat and response



It is safest not to drink alcohol during pregnancy (or from the Canada Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: “If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, or about to breastfeed, the safest choice is to drink no alcohol at all”).

If you are already pregnant, it is never too late to cut back or stop drinking.

Alcohol and pregnancy: no safe time, no known safe amount, and no safe kind.

Healthy communities support women and their partners to avoid alcohol during pregnancy.

Using images in your campaign, and other considerations



Photos, illustrations, animations, and other graphics can be powerful tools for communication. When talking about alcohol, pregnancy, and FASD, we can choose images that evoke certain emotions, emphasize key messages or ideas, or reflect our values and beliefs. When choosing and using images, especially graphic images or fear-based images, it's important to consider and minimize unintended consequences such as reinforcing stereotypes about individuals affected by FASD, making it more difficult for women with alcohol use disorders to seek help, or creating fear for women who drank alcohol before they knew they were pregnant.

For examples of appropriate images to use- and images to avoid- refer to the 'Language and Images Matter' section of the guide.



When developing your campaign message, it is important to be aware of your audience, and include culture as a main consideration. As part of your campaign planning, work to address the calls to action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as they relate to FASD.

Checklist- Planning an alcohol and pregnancy/FASD awareness campaign



	Does the content of your message align with current public health guidelines and the latest scientific evidence (e.g., Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines)?
	Is your message easily comprehensible (e.g., printed in large, easily readable text)? Have literacy or cultural barriers been considered?
	If one of the goals of your campaign is to encourage information seeking, does the message include contact information (e.g., phone number, website) about resources in the community?
	Does the message contain simple, clear and direct information about the risks of alcohol or how to avoid them? (It's better to avoid vague or ambiguous messages such as "drink responsibly" or "think before you drink.")
	Has your campaign been designed with a particular target audience in mind (e.g., young women, partners of women of child-bearing age)? Have you considered a balance between threat and response as well as possible unintended consequences?