

Mapping FASD work in Atlantic Canada

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Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a lifelong disability that is unparalleled in its complexity and need for responses. Some of the complexities in addressing FASD are rooted in social drinking cultures, myths resulting in stigma or silence, formal healthcare responses such as limited diagnostic capacity and the need for involvement from varied areas of discipline (e.g., prenatal and postnatal, pediatrics, education, child welfare, and justice, among others).

Despite these and other challenges, FASD work is underway through various systems and mechanisms across Canada and worldwide. In Atlantic Canada, this is also the case. In this paper, we outline some of the key pieces of work that have been conducted in the four Atlantic provinces. We do so to provide context of the breadth of work taking place, gaps to address, and importantly the values and focus that underpin this work.

Provincial and Regional Level Work in the Atlantic Provinces

Two of the four Atlantic provinces have provincially focused organizations focused on varied elements related to FASD. For example, in New Brunswick, the FASD Centre of Excellence has offered diagnostic services for residents across the province. The centre, which was established through a partnership with the provincial Ministry of Health and in collaboration with regional health authorities, offers culturally informed and bilingual services related to prevention, diagnosis, and follow-up.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, fasdNL, a provincial non-profit organization, has focused on tailored FASD training development and delivery, advocacy, resource development, parent and caregiver supports, and community-based research. fasdNL, supported by the provincial Department of Health and Community Services, works in collaboration with the dedicated FASD diagnostic team in the Labrador Grenfell Health region that was established in 2014, private practice options throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and Atlantic Canada, and advancing diagnostic capacity in the province. In Labrador, the Nunatsiavut Government and Innu Round Table have prioritized FASD work through the creation of FASD liaison/coordinator positions and have engaged in the development and delivery of culturally-informed and community-led FASD initiatives.

In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, FASD work has long been championed by community organization advocates. While there are no provincial organizations in these two provinces, there has been the development of strong networking and engagement across regions in recent years. Among the sectors represented at these various tables include community-based organizations, justice and correctional professionals, healthcare providers, and private practice clinicians.

In an effort to advance collaboration across the four Atlantic provinces, fasdNL led the formation of the Atlantic FASD Community Network in 2020, bringing together individuals with community or committee experience around FASD living and working in the Atlantic provinces. The group has representation from all four Atlantic provinces and led to the launch of a [blog](#) to capture the voices and experiences of individuals working and living with FASD in the region.

The history of FASD work completed to date in the Atlantic provinces has focused on and benefited from community collaboration and working to build capacity to better address FASD in the provinces. For example, in 2013, fasdNL hosted a National FASD Conference in St. John's. In 2017, the Northern Nova Scotia FASD committee held a conference in Pictou County entitled *Building Bridges Not Barriers* and brought together community and multi-sectoral representation from all four Atlantic provinces.

FASD work has been and continues to be championed and supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The PHAC is the federal lead for FASD, coordinating the FASD National Strategic Projects Fund to support projects across the country. The PHAC Atlantic office chairs the long-standing Atlantic Intergovernmental FASD Partnership, with representation from the four provinces. In addition, through multi-sectoral and intergovernmental collaboration and knowledge exchange events over the years, community organizations and networks across Atlantic Canada have benefitted from a shared commitment to addressing FASD in the Atlantic region.

In the Atlantic region, PHAC created a temporary Atlantic-specific FASD Analyst contract position in 2019 to map ongoing work and networks in the provinces. Further, the funding and support for *Knowledge to Practice: Trauma informed practice, women and pregnancy, and FASD*, an event consisting of workshops, training and resource provision in each Atlantic province in 2016, was coordinated by PHAC and Atlantic community partners.

Finally, a current three-year FASD project in Atlantic Canada focused on prevention, awareness and collaboration action was announced in 2021. This project, led by fasdNL and funded by PHAC, includes a social media and radio ad campaign, synchronous training delivery for justice and legal professionals, resource development, and face-to-face meetings in 2023. Importantly, this project brings together networks of individuals engaged and committed to collaborative work in Atlantic Canada and highlights the importance of centring Atlantic-specific strategies.

Place-based Knowledge and Values

Underpinning FASD work in the Atlantic provinces has been an emphasis on community-level work, in other words, a commitment to addressing FASD *by* the community *for* the community. In our view, the most successful work to date has emerged from this commitment and has been based on collaboration, mutual trust, and respect. We aim to conduct our work in a collaborative rather than competitive manner and hold respect for one another's knowledge and expertise, thus avoiding ownership or knowledge hoarding.

The success to date and the work outlined as necessary next steps have continued to be driven by our collaborative efforts. In Atlantic Canada, we recognize and centre the need for and valuing of place-based knowledge and practices. We centre the need for policy, diagnostic capacity, service provision and supportive resources that are Atlantic focused, aware of, informed by, and developed for people within the Atlantic provinces.

The coming year promises to hold exciting developments, continued collaboration, and action in Atlantic Canada. We recognize the tremendous amount of work completed to date in Atlantic Canada. We wish to make this work visible and simultaneously address identified gaps across the Atlantic provinces. As we look forward, we will continue to centre place-based knowledge, collaborative action and community relationships with our partners across the Atlantic region.

Additional Information

Atlantic FASD Community Network Blog

<http://www.fasdnl.ca/atlanticfasdcommunitynetworkblog>

fasdNL Network

www.fasdNL.ca

Government of Canada invests in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention in Atlantic Provinces.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2021/06/government-of-canada-invests-in-fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-prevention-in-atlantic-provinces.html?fbclid=IwAR0E6DIyNc858Jyw60jmQsXFx12gC4ECouN4YLD1ASg5upALY14CEfINBPo>

Kids First Association

<https://capc-pacc.phac-aspc.gc.ca/en/project-details?project=19>

New Brunswick Centre of Excellence

<https://www.vitalitenb.ca/en/points-service/health-centres-and-clinics/new-brunswick-fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd-centre-excellence/nb-fasd-centre-excellence>

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<https://www.csa-scs.ca/conference/paper/bringing-focus-to-the-service-support-needs-of-individuals-personally-and-professionally-impacted-by-fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder/>