

The Advancing FASD Research, Prevention, and Services Act

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term that describes a range of physical and mental birth defects that can occur in a fetus when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol. Alcohol exposure during pregnancy is the leading cause of non-hereditary cognitive disability.

Senators Tim Johnson and Lisa Murkowski plan to introduce FASD legislation in early 2012. The Congressional Caucus on FASD and its co-chairs Representatives Don Young and Frank Pallone are working toward the introduction of companion legislation later this year. The Senate bill will seek to reauthorize FASD activities carried out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Health Services and Resources Administration.

While there is no known cure, FASD is entirely preventable, and this bill seeks a balance between directing federal resources to prevention activities and to services for individuals living with FASD and their families. To that end, the bill's major sections focus on:

- **Research** – directs NIH to ensure the inclusion of the most promising avenues of research in FASD diagnosis, intervention, and prevention;
- **Surveillance, Public Health Research, and Prevention** – directs NIH to continue its activities to integrate case definitions into clinical practice, thereby improving surveillance activities, and to provide health care workers and others with resources to reduce alcohol-exposed pregnancies;
- **State FASD Systems** – facilitates development of statewide FASD systems through the continuation of grants to states, public, and non-profit private organizations;
- **Community Partnerships** – provides federal grants to partnerships of health professionals, school systems, child welfare offices, incarceration facilities, parent organizations, Indian tribes and others to collaborate on common objectives and integrate services;
- **Best Practices** - provides federal grants for pilot projects to identify and implement best practices for educating children with FASD, and educating those involved in the justice, adoption, and foster care systems;
- **Support Services** – provides assistance for adolescents with FASD as they transition to adulthood including housing, vocational training and placement services, medication management, and mental health services;
- **Federally Qualified Health Centers** - provides federal grants to implement and evaluate a 5-year demonstration program to increase awareness and identification of FASD in federally qualified health centers;
- **Public Awareness and Education** - authorizes development and broadcast of national public service announcements to raise public awareness of the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy;
- **National Task Force on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders** – renames and reauthorizes the Task Force;
- **Coordination Among Federal Entities** - provides statutory authority for the Interagency Coordinating Committee on FAS and instructs the Comptroller General of the United States to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the appropriate roles and responsibilities of federal entities;