

Building Connections

Improving FASD Awareness Across Canada

We all know that we need more support for FASD prevention, diagnosis, and support across the country. But we're having trouble getting our leaders and the general public on the same page. FASD Day and FASD Month is a great opportunity to bring attention to FASD nationally and internationally. But we need a united front to encourage our leaders to pay attention to FASD in Canada.

Canada is a very large place. Community leaders and organizations have done a great job creating events in their own cities and regions. But we want to make sure there is consistency *across* Canada in the messages that we're sharing about FASD during the month of September.

At CanFASD we're working on developing a consistent message for FASD awareness. We want to make sure this message is non-stigmatizing and strengths-based and aligns with the best practices outlined in research.

That's why we've created a five-year plan for FASD Awareness Month. Our current and future themes are grounded in research to make sure the work we're doing is *pushing FASD forward*. Our hope is that as our movement grows, it puts pressure on our leaders to pay attention.

[Our theme this year is Building Strengths and Abilities](#). Read on to learn how you can help.

Theme: *Building Strengths and Abilities*

Historically we talk a lot about the challenges of FASD. This research is important because it can validate people's experiences and bring attention to areas where more supports and services are needed. But it is equally (if not more) [important to look at the strengths and abilities](#) of people with FASD. Why? When we don't explore the success of people with FASD and celebrate their contributions, *we fail to recognize their immense potential*.

Our theme *Building Strengths and Abilities* goes beyond celebrating the strengths of those with FASD. It also recognizes the strengths and abilities of families and community members and those who are pregnant or parenting.

This FASD Month it's time to celebrate your strengths and abilities! Share what you're good at and what makes you stand out. Let's change the conversation around FASD and *build strengths and abilities*.



Why strengths?

In research and practice we talk a lot about strengths-based approaches. But what does that mean? Our strengths, abilities, and interests are a foundation that we can build upon to improve outcomes. Talents, strengths, and abilities should be recognized and celebrated at all times, especially during FASD Awareness Month.

In families

Only focusing on challenges can [perpetuate stigma and stereotypes about this disability](#). We need to recognize strengths and abilities to balance the story of FASD and help people with FASD achieve their potential.

In communities

Many Canadian communities – especially those in rural and remote locations – are great at [using existing resources and knowledge to best meet the needs of individuals](#) with FASD and their families. Strengths-based community approaches shine the light on effective ways of responding to local needs.

In prevention

For girls, women, and pregnant people it is important to recognize and celebrate what we're good at. Addictions supports should be focused on harm reduction and skill building. To do this effectively, we need to [draw on people's strengths and interests](#).

We need to provide information and support about alcohol and pregnancy that empowers people. We need supports and resources that build skills and abilities to achieve good health.

Overcoming “fatalism”

[Communication experts say that “fatalism” is a key challenge](#) we have to overcome when talking to people about FASD. The “fatalistic” viewpoint sees FASD as permanent damage to the brain. The public (incorrectly) thinks that once someone has FASD, interventions can't do anything to help.

What does this mean? When we talk about FASD, helping the public see that healthy outcomes are possible is more important than sharing the challenges. That's why this year's theme is focusing on strengths and abilities – we want to counteract the negative “fatalist” perspective the general public has about this disability. We need to make sure people know that healthy outcomes *are possible*. People with FASD can and do succeed when they have the right supports.

Rock Red For FASD

We are asking key landmarks and [monuments across Canada to light up red](#) on September 9th in honour of FASD Awareness Day. These are the monuments that CanFASD is initially contacting:

- **Calgary Tower**, Calgary, AB
- **High Level Bridge**, Edmonton, AB

- **BC Place**, Vancouver, BC
- **Sails of Lights**, Vancouver, BC
- **Vancouver Convention Centre**, Vancouver, BC
- **Saskatoon City Hall**, Saskatoon, SK
- **Humboldt City Hall Canopy Lights**, Humboldt, SK
- **3D Winnipeg Sign**, Winnipeg, MB
- **CN Tower**, Toronto, ON
- **Niagara Falls**, Niagara, ON
- **Peace Bridge**, Niagara Falls, ON
- **Shaw Centre**, Ottawa, ON
- **Montreal Tower (Parc Olympique)**, Montreal, QC
- **Government House**, St. Johns, NL
- **Charlottetown City Hall**, Charlottetown, PE
- **Halifax City Hall**, Halifax, NS
- **Legislative Assembly Building**, Fredericton, NB

Help add to this list! Reach out to landmarks and monuments in your local cities and ask them to light up their building red on September 9th in recognition of FASD Awareness Day. We will be using the HEX colour: #FF0000 (red). If you need more details, email info@canfasd.ca.

Did you reach out to a monument that agreed to rock red for FASD? [Fill out this form](#) and we will add it to our list!

Social Media Movement:

Wear your red shoes on FASD Awareness Day (September 9th) and throughout the month of September to bring attention to FASD and raise awareness about this disability.

Don't have red shoes? That's okay! Add a red shirt or red pants to your outfit instead. Be sure to share on social media with the hashtag #RedShoesRock! Along with your red shoes, take this opportunity to share your strengths on social media! Tell us what you're good at, what your talents are, what you like to do!

You can download our FASD awareness graphics [here](#) and are welcome to add your organization logo to the top right of many of the images.

Community Events:

Hosting events in your community is a great way to connect with others to raise awareness about FASD. If you are planning an event, be sure to follow all the rules and regulations of your local municipality.

Here's some ideas for community events that other organizations across Canada have done to celebrate FASD Awareness Day and FASD Awareness Month:

- **Run an awareness walk**
 - Plan a walk through your city with a group. You can make a big impression by starting or ending your walk at an important landmark, like your local city hall. You can also dress in red and wear signs to bring attention to FASD Awareness Day.
- **Host a community barbecue or lunch**
 - Previously, communities have hosted barbeques or [food truck lunches](#) to raise awareness of FASD
- **[Post lawn signs, posters, or billboards](#)**
 - Previously advocates and community members have put up billboard ads and signs on the sides of buses or even passed around lawn signs in their community in honor of FASD Awareness Day and Month.
- **[Paint rocks red](#)**
 - In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations painted rocks red with information about FASD and left these rocks on local trails for other people within their area to discover.
- **[Go see the lights](#)**
 - Are you in a community where something is being lit up red for FASD? Gather a group and go see the lights.

Are you hosting an event in your community? We can help spread the word. [Tell us what, when, and where](#). We will share it on our channels to help community members get involved.

Note: CanFASD reserves the right to restrict distribution of certain events. As a not-for-profit, we will not promote for-profit events. CanFASD is not affiliated with events on this list.

Next Steps

Like you, we want to see more support for FASD in Canada. Our voices are loud, but we can say so much more when we join together. Our goal with this campaign is to connect organizations and advocates across the country to create one large voice for FASD that our governments can't ignore.

But we need your support. Our goal with this package is to do the legwork behind the research and messaging to free up some of your own resources and time to create additional buzz around FASD awareness month. Watch a recording of our latest [Thinking About FASD Month webinar](#) to learn more.



We will send out a post campaign survey in October. Let us know what you think of the campaign and resources we've created. We will be sending out a similar package (earlier in the year) for the next several FASD Awareness campaigns.