



FOR RELEASE
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Yukon leads the country with the start of FASD prevalence study

WHITEHORSE—In partnership with the Child & Family Research Institute at BC Children's Hospital and the University of British Columbia (UBC), the Department of Justice has begun a study evaluating the prevalence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in individuals who are incarcerated or on probation in Yukon. The purpose of this research is to better understand how many people in the corrections system face challenges linked to FASD, mental-health disorders and substance-use problems.

The study was recently granted ethics approval by the UBC Children's and Women's Health Centre of British Columbia Research Ethics Board. Throughout the study, Department of Justice staff will conduct interviews, assessments, and screenings. The data collected will then be analyzed by the university.

"The Yukon government is working with partners to improve services and outcomes for adults with FASD, cognitive or mental health disorders, or substance-use issues involved with the corrections system," Minister of Justice Mike Nixon said. "The findings from this study will be helpful in guiding our next steps."

To provide an accurate picture of the prevalence of the disorder, 150 volunteers between the ages of 18 and 40 (both men and women) with and without FASD will participate in the study.

"We are grateful for the participation of the volunteers," FASD Prevalence Study Manager Kailey LeMoel said. "Our hope is that the results of the study will contribute to, and improve, Yukon service delivery."

The FASD study is part of a larger collaborative FASD initiative between the Yukon departments of Justice and Health and Social Services, who are tasked with developing a local FASD diagnostic team to identify and improve gaps in service and case management.

"The information gained from this ground-breaking study will not only help Yukoners afflicted with FASD who are involved with the justice system, it will also provide an important resource for all Canadians," Nixon added.

Learn more:

Read about the study online at www.justice.gov.yk.ca/FASDStudy.html

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See background below.

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Background

The current Government of Yukon FASD initiative comes from the recommendations of the 2008 national conference on Access to Justice for Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), hosted by Yukon Justice and Justice Canada.

There are two streams to the government initiative: the research stream with the University of British Columbia (UBC) managed by the Department of Justice; and the framework/capacity development stream managed by the Department of Health and Social Services.

In 2013 the Government of Yukon signed a three-year research agreement with UBC which outlines how the study will be conducted. This includes the financial arrangement for data analysis and reporting, storage, ethical procedures, deliverables, and the roles of members of the research team, such as the principal investigator.

The project aims to determine the prevalence of FASD and other mental health and substance use problems in the corrections population, to test the validity of several FASD screening tools; and ensure the adaptability of the research approach and project models to other jurisdictions in Canada.

The principal investigator who is leading the research is Dr. Kaitlyn McLachlan who also developed a research methodology and submitted it for ethics review. Dr. McLachlan is a postdoctoral fellow with the University of Alberta at the Child & Family Research Institute (CFRI) at BC Children's Hospital, working in collaboration with Dr. Tim Oberlander, developmental pediatrician with BC Children's Hospital, and a professor at UBC.

The goals of the framework/capacity development stream of the Government of Yukon FASD initiative are to increase adult FASD diagnostic and assessment capacity within Yukon, to improve case coordination for individuals, access to services and support for offenders with FASD, and improve awareness and understanding of FASD in the territory.

A Prevalence Project Partners Board helps guide the study and it includes: Yukon Department of Justice; Yukon Department of Health and Social Services; Correctional Services Canada; Justice Canada; Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse; Northern Institute of Social Justice; Yukon College; Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon; and First Nations Health and Social Development Commission.

Yukon is co-chair of the Federal/Territorial/Provincial Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials' Steering Committee on FASD.

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