

RECOMMENDATION NO. 20

The Sub-Committee recommends that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Health and Welfare Canada, in cooperation with the Special Aboriginal Committee on Alcohol and the Foetus, review and evaluate existing programs for the learning-disabled in aboriginal communities to develop more effective and appropriate community-based programs to deal with learning disabilities of individuals afflicted with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome or Foetal Alcohol Effects.

(L) ADULTS WITH FAS AND FAE

While the bulk of this report appropriately focuses on children with FAS or FAE, it is necessary and important to consider that there are many adults in Canadian society who are afflicted with these conditions. The actual numbers can never be known with precision but, based on the estimated incidence rates discussed above, there could be tens of thousands of FAS and FAE adults living in Canada today.

Most of these individuals have never been correctly diagnosed and few, therefore, will have received any treatment or care. Many of the most seriously damaged, those who are mentally retarded, probably are living in a variety of institutions, including mental hospitals. Many others, particularly those who suffer from FAE and have significant behavioural and learning problems, probably eke out an existence on the margins of Canadian society. From the testimony we have received on FAE children, it seems likely that many FAE adults will have come into contact with the criminal justice system. We suspect that a significant number end up in prison for part of their lives.

These individuals, damaged by alcohol before birth, have had little if any possibility of developing independent and productive lives. They are victims in the deepest and most tragic sense of the word. The question is, what can be done to assist them at this point in time?

The Sub-Committee has received little testimony on this aspect of the FAS/FAE issue, and most of the testimony we did receive focused on the development of programs, workshops and homes to assist FAS/FAE children as they grow into adulthood. The plight of undiagnosed FAS/FAE adults has not received much attention. We believe this is an important aspect of the overall problem, however, and should not be ignored.

This is an area where a great deal of research is needed before any programs can be contemplated. The first priority must be the development of effective and efficient methods to diagnose adults who suffer from FAS or FAE. We propose this research initiative as the first step in a comprehensive program to assist people whose lives have been blighted by alcohol-induced prenatal injuries.

If and when effective diagnostic procedures for adults have been developed, it will be necessary to develop programs of assistance for these individuals in a variety of areas, including treatment and care, and education and training where this is feasible. Group homes, sheltered workshops, and income assistance, possibly in the form of disability pensions, are among the options that should be explored.