

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG WOMEN

THE NATIONAL PERINATAL ASSOCIATION IS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING THE HEALTH AND WELL BEING OF MOTHERS AND BABIES, ENRICHING FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND OUR WORLD. NPA ENGAGES A BROAD COALITION TO IMPROVE SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTS.

Substance abuse is epidemic in the United States. It involves not only illicit drugs but also many products easily and legally available--beer, wine, whiskey, and prescription drugs. This addictive behavior affects all socio-economic groups. It is often accompanied by the use of tobacco.

Many substance abusers are pregnant women or women of childbearing age. The adverse effects on both the mother and the infant are well documented. Such addiction is an illness widely recognized by medical and health professionals as a public health problem. However, in some communities, the response has been to bring criminal charges against the pregnant woman for abuse of the fetus.

The National Perinatal Association opposes criminal prosecution of women solely because they are pregnant when they used alcohol or drugs. The threat of such prosecution is both inappropriate and counterproductive. No evidence exists to show that it either prevents prenatal drug or alcohol exposure or improves the infant's health. Such a threat prevents many women from seeking prenatal care and early intervention for their alcohol or drug dependency. It undermines the relationship between the health care providers and their patients and may keep women from giving accurate and essential information vital to their care.

NPA supports a comprehensive program that embodies the following principles:

Education on the effects of substance abuse must begin before use and/or abuse is probable.

Pregnant women and women of childbearing age must be given priority in medical substance treatment programs. Such programs must be based on a therapeutic model of care.

Substance treatment programs must include comprehensive services for the addicted and her family as addictive behavior arises from a complex set of social and psychological factors that affect all family members.

All children impacted by alcohol or drug dependence must have access to comprehensive, family-centered health and social services.

NPA also recognizes the debilitating effects that smoking has on the fetus. Since smoking is an addictive behavior often associated with drug or alcohol dependency, NPA urge that dependency treatment programs include smoking cessation. NPA also believe such cessation programs should be available to all pregnant women without charge.