

DDRC

Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary

Prenatal Screening

The aim of this discussion paper is to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity, worth and equal rights of all people. All citizens, including those with disabilities, are part of their local communities and should be recognized as having a rich contribution to make in the development and well being of the human community. Our vision is 'Everyone belongs'.

As a resource centre for inclusion, and an agency that has a rich history, we have a responsibility to share information including providing a counter-balance to historic, negative perceptions, which left unchecked, serve as a risk not only to individuals with disabilities, but to the health and vitality of our community.

There are a number of prenatal tests that establish the probability of a pregnant woman having a child with a disability. As non-invasive tests with expanded capabilities are developed, there is a strong likelihood this will result in the more widespread use of prenatal screening for chromosomal or other disorders.

Experience has increasingly demonstrated the enormous potential that exists for people with developmental disabilities to live full and fulfilling lives, to grow through opportunities to participate, contribute and connect with others in meaningful ways; however people with disabilities may still find the community in which they live more disabling than the disability itself. The widespread use of prenatal genetic screening for chromosomal or other disorders that are linked to disabilities may encourage negative attitudes of society towards persons with disabilities.

We believe the primary goal of prenatal screening should be directed towards the provision of improved health care for the mother and baby and support for those individuals who will be the most actively engaged in the child's upbringing, not to reduce the birth prevalence of disabilities in the population.

The prenatal recognition of disabilities could offer many benefits, including:

- the preparation of the woman or couple and the medical caregivers regarding any necessary medical or surgical procedures to be carried out either before or after the baby's birth;

- the opportunity for the woman or couple and other family members to have contact with families who have a child with a disability;
- the opportunity for the woman or couple to receive counseling; and
- the opportunity for the woman or couple and other family members to receive accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information.

Key Messages:

- There are a number of prenatal tests that establish the probability of a pregnant woman having a child with a disability. As more tests are developed, there is a strong likelihood this will result in the more widespread use of prenatal screening.
- The widespread use of prenatal genetic screening for chromosomal or other disorders that are linked to disabilities may encourage negative attitudes of society towards persons with disabilities.
- Given this potential, we believe the primary goal of prenatal screening should be directed towards the provision of improved health care for the mother and baby and support for those individuals who will be the most actively engaged in the child's upbringing