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INTRODUCTION

This handbook was compiled by the members of the Public Education Committee of the Coalition on Addiction, Pregnancy and Parenting’s Task Force on Alcohol and Drug Dependent Pregnant and Parenting Women and Their Children. The purpose of this handbook is to assist substance abuse, health and social service professionals who work with pregnant women in engaging women in assessing their use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and in accessing treatment when necessary. Perinatal addiction is a complex issue and this handbook is meant only to be an introduction to this vast topic. The expectation is that the information in this handbook will assist professionals in beginning the process of assessing their approaches for effective and appropriate early identification, referral and treatment of pregnant substance abusing women.

The members of the Public Education Committee represent diverse disciplines, including maternal and child health care, substance abuse treatment, correctional services, family planning, and women’s health. The Committee, in deciding on activities to increase public education on perinatal addiction, felt it was important to begin by enhancing the knowledge base of substance abuse, health, and social service professionals, regarding the needs of this population. Professionals who are attuned to the needs of substance abusing pregnant women will be better able to engage and support substance abusing women, and therefore, may encourage more women to seek help for their addiction. The next step is to increase awareness among communities and families about the disease of addiction, its impact on women, especially pregnant women, and the availability of services. Responsive substance abuse and other health professionals, a conscious public, and adequate treatment services will greatly increase the chances of pregnant women and their children receiving the critical care they require.