

## **STATES THROW DOWN GAUNTLET TO COMMONWEALTH ON ALCOHOL PREGNANCY WARNING LABELS**

**5 October 2018:** Is the Commonwealth Government daring to recklessly endanger the lives of Australia's unborn children?

That is the question all state and territory jurisdictions must now be asking in the lead up to a critical meeting to decide if alcohol products should carry mandatory pregnancy warning labels.

There are grave concerns today that the Commonwealth is prepared to oppose the introduction of clear, strong pregnancy labelling laws that would give women truthful and frank information on the dangers of alcohol and the risks to their growing babies.

As Australian and New Zealand Food Ministers prepare to meet on Thursday, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) has released comprehensive research providing further proof that the existing voluntary labelling scheme created by the alcohol industry has failed dismally.

The study *Examining trends in alcohol consumption during pregnancy in Australia, 2001 to 2016*, which draws on 15 years' worth of data, has revealed that a large cohort of Australian women continues to drink while pregnant.

The most alarming finding is that a particular group of women – characterised by being older and more highly educated – continue to drink after being aware of their pregnancy, compared to younger women.

The hazards are life-threatening, and the risk is real, including miscarriages, stillbirths, low birth weights and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says the findings of FARE's study represent another very clear message to Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Senator Bridget McKenzie, the Chair of the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation, that they must not capitulate to the pressure applied by the alcohol industry on this critical issue.

"Enough is enough – this upcoming meeting of Food Ministers must be a line in the sand on this dismal policy failure, Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the Commonwealth Government must recognise the need for clear, effective, Government regulated and mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels.

"Under the current voluntary system, too often, alcohol products in Australia carry no warning at all, but we know that women want to know the truth so they can make informed decisions," Mr Thorn said

To share the truth, FARE has launched a new [online campaign](#) this week highlighting the fact that everyday household items, from batteries to blinds, dishwashing tablets, prescription drugs and potting mix all carry bold, visible warnings alerting consumers to the very real potential for harm, and asks why consumers are not afforded the same protection when it comes to alcohol.



Mr Thorn says that after seven years, the voluntary alcohol pregnancy warning label scheme has proven only one thing; that the alcohol industry continues to deliberately manipulate and mislead consumers.

“Currently 52% of all alcohol products do not have pregnancy warnings. It is astounding that in Australia alcohol companies are still not legally required to include pregnancy warning labels on their products.

“This is a dismal policy failure that can, and must, be corrected,” Mr Thorn said.

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**What does the research tell us? *Examining trends in alcohol consumption during pregnancy in Australia, 2001 to 2016***

The study released today examined alcohol consumption trends among pregnant women in Australia.

Using the cross-sectional survey data of pregnant women from six waves of the Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), this study estimated and investigated trends in female alcohol consumption during pregnancy and before knowledge of pregnancy by age and education level groups from 2001 to 2016.

Co-author, Sarah Callinan from the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research at La Trobe University, said the study found that while alcohol consumption during pregnancy decreased during the study period, women who were older, or with a higher education, were more likely to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

“Our research concluded that health promotion campaigns should focus on older, more highly educated women who appear less likely to refrain entirely from drinking during pregnancy, and on those with lower education levels who appear to be more likely to drink at higher-risk levels during pregnancy,” Ms Callinan said.

Mr Thorn said that the study makes clear that more must be done to address misconceptions around the dangers of drinking while pregnant among many Australians.

“While there’s been a shift in the behaviour and attitudes of some Australians around alcohol consumption and pregnancy, too many pregnant women are still being misled by misinformation spread by the alcohol industry,” Mr Thorn said.

“The communication of accurate information about the risks of alcohol in pregnancy is too important to leave in the hands of those without the necessary expertise and who have been shown to misrepresent other important health risk information. We simply cannot allow the alcohol industry to continue to mislead Australians any longer,” Mr Thorn said.

**Mr Thorn and Ms Callinan are available for interview.**

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