



## Media Release

# ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY – WOMEN WANT TO KNOW

**1 July, 2014:** 97 per cent of Australian women want to be asked about alcohol use during pregnancy and now a new national public health initiative promises to deliver this information.

Assistant Minister for Health Senator Fiona Nash will launch *Women Want to Know* in Sydney today. The campaign encourages health professionals to discuss the risks of alcohol and pregnancy with women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, and provide advice that is consistent with Australia's official Alcohol Guidelines.

The project, developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) in collaboration with leading health professional bodies, is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and is the first national campaign targeted at health professionals since the Alcohol Guidelines were last updated in 2009.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn, says a survey of 300 health professionals undertaken ahead of the project had found one in five health professionals had not heard of the Guidelines and more than two in five (45%) were aware of the Guidelines but not familiar with the content.

"The Alcohol Guidelines changed in 2009, and up until now very little has been done to promote them, both to health professionals or the general public. *Women Want to Know* closes that gap, and importantly, ensures that health professionals who are advising women about alcohol and pregnancy are providing the very best advice to protect the unborn child," Mr Thorn said.

The National Health and Medical Research Council's *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* specify that '*Maternal alcohol consumption can harm the developing fetus or breastfeeding baby*' and '*For woman who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking is the safest option*' and '*For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option*'.

Mr Thorn says health professionals can positively influence a woman's choices about alcohol during pregnancy, and importantly, says ensuring those conversations take place will help prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), the most common preventable cause of birth defects in Australia.

"Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a devastating lifetime condition, but, importantly, it's also preventable. One effective way to prevent FASD is to encourage health professionals to talk to women about alcohol. *Women Want to Know* will ensure that health professionals provide clear and consistent messaging, that not drinking is the safest option," Mr Thorn said.

*Women Want to Know* involves two main components; resources to support health professionals in discussing alcohol use and pregnancy with women, and accredited training, which were developed by a working group including the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), the Australian College of Midwives (ACM), the Australian Medical Association (AMA), the Australian Medicare Locals Alliance (AMLA), the Australian Government Department of Health, as well as a consumer representative from the Maternity Coalition.

Leading paediatrician and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Specialist, Professor Elizabeth Elliot, says conversations with women about alcohol are wanted, welcome and worth it.

“It is important for health professionals to know that conversations about alcohol with women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy are wanted, welcome and, most importantly worth their time. Research tells us that women are willing to make changes to their lives during pregnancy to provide the best for their babies, and conversations with health professional can potentially prevent a child being born with FASD,” Professor Elliot said.

Resources for health professionals can be ordered from [www.alcohol.gov.au](http://www.alcohol.gov.au)

**Michael Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) and Professor Elliott are available for interview.**

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. More than 3,500 lives are lost every year and more than 100,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by **supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness** and **advocating for changes to alcohol policy**. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.

For further information visit FARE’s website: [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au).