# Alcohol free to prevent FASD

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| **Author** | Fare\_Admin |
| **Date** | 2015-09-09 08:00:00 |
| **Categories** | Media releases |

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International FASD Awareness Day is observed every year on 9 September, with bells rung at 9:09am in time zones from Australia to Alaska in recognition of the nine months of a pregnancy. The day aims to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and the plight of individuals and families who are living with FASD.

FASD is the most common preventable cause of non-genetic, developmental disability in Australia. Children born with FASD have a range of learning, behavioural and developmental disabilities that can affect them for the rest of their lives.

One of Australia’s leading FASD experts, paediatrician Dr James Fitzpatrick of the Telethon Kids Institute, Perth, says it is for that reason that the message of prevention is so important.

“We know that alcohol use during pregnancy can cause lifelong brain damage and a range of birth defects, but the good news is that FASD is not a complex or rare genetic disorder. We don’t need major pharmaceutical breakthroughs to prevent FASD. We can prevent FASD by not consuming alcohol during pregnancy,” Dr Fitzpatrick said.

Around the nation, local and Commonwealth politicians will join celebrities and lend their support to the cause by going alcohol free, posting selfies to social media and by encouraging health professionals to speak to women about alcohol and pregnancy in an effort to prevent FASD.

While there is still much work to be done to prevent FASD and to support people living with FASD in Australia, efforts by state, territory and Commonwealth governments are slowly gathering pace.

This year saw the recognition of FASD by the House of Representatives Inquiry into the harmful use of alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the establishment of a National Parent Advisory Group by advocacy organisation NOFASD Australia.

In New South Wales, the Baird Government announced funding for a FASD diagnostic clinic as part of the Centre for the Prevention of Harm to Children and Adolescents from Drugs and Alcohol at The Children’s Hospital at Westmead in Sydney; while Newcastle is in the process of developing a FASD strategy.

The Western Australian Government has funded a FASD clinic at the University of Western Australia, and an Australian FASD Diagnostic tool is being trialled across multiple clinics nationally.

2015 also saw the publication of the results from the Lililwan Project in Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia focusing on FASD in rural and Indigenous communities; the release of educational videos for Criminal Justice professionals; and the launch of a guide for primary healthcare professionals on how to best support pregnant women who use alcohol or other drugs.

To increase capacity for early intervention and support for those diagnosed with FASD, recommendations are before the Australian Government to ensure that FASD is included in the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

A recent investment from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program has allowed for the regional rollout of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)’s successful national *Women Want to Know* campaign.

Developed with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health in conjunction with leading health organisations, *Women Want to Know* was first launched by FARE in 2014 to ensure that women receive clear and consistent information from health professionals about the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says that while there is much to celebrate in the growing awareness of FASD, and the efforts to date to prevent and treat it, there is still work to be done.

“We know that awareness and understanding of Australia’s drinking guidelines, ‘that it is safest not to consume alcohol while pregnant’ still remains too low, with one in five Australian women continuing to drink alcohol after becoming aware of their pregnancy. International FASD Awareness Day is a valuable opportunity to increase the awareness of this advice and the risks associated with drinking alcohol while pregnant. A child born with an alcohol-related disability is completely unnecessary, and together we can make FASD history,” says Mr Thorn.

For more information visit: [www.fare.org.au/FASD](https://www.fare.org.au/FASD)

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### Metadata