# Health professionals training on alcohol and pregnancy

In 2021, FARE commissioned Heartward Strategic to undertake research on training for health professionals and continuing professional development (CPD) on alcohol and pregnancy.

This research was undertaken to inform the *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) – National Awareness Campaign for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Women* (hereafter the National Campaign). As part of the National Campaign, FARE sought to redevelop and improve health professional training on alcohol and pregnancy that was originally developed for FARE’s *Women Want To Know* campaign. This was to ensure that the campaign is informed by the latest evidence and the current National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* (2020) (the Alcohol Guidelines).

This research comprised an audit and review of existing training to identify gaps and opportunities, and a series of 15 interviews with health professionals to explore habits, needs and preferences with respect to training.

## Key findings

This research found a clear need to have training and resources on alcohol and pregnancy available to Australian health professionals, including the following:

* Fifteen pieces of broadly relevant training were identified in the audit. Of these, five had a focus similar to *Women Want to Know*, covering the importance of and ways to support abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy. The remainder focused on FASD diagnosis, assessment and management, addiction medicine, and alcohol consumption while breastfeeding. Few pieces of training targeted health professionals overall, most being jurisdiction-, context- or profession-specific.
* CPD requirements are a key driver of engagement with training. Many participants spoke of selecting ‘the best’ from what is immediately available through their preferred source(s) of CPD. Topics generally favoured were those addressing a recognised deficiency in their skills or knowledge, a developing interest, or commonly seen patients or patient presentations.
* Around a third of health professionals recalled completing training on alcohol and pregnancy in the last five years. For most, their knowledge and skills in this area came from foundational training, during which this topic may have been minimally addressed.
* There are capability, opportunity and motivation barriers for health professionals to engage in training on alcohol and pregnancy, such as:
  + A lack of knowledge of training opportunities, and a genuine lack of training opportunities available through their preferred channels
  + A lack of appreciation of the need to address this issue with their patient cohort
  + A perception that acting in this area may be outside their professional remit
  + A lack of personal prioritisation of this issue, primarily because of assumptions made about patients and low perceived patient risk
  + A belief that they already know all they need to about this topic
  + Downplaying the value of training.
* Health professional engagement with training on alcohol and pregnancy is most likely to be influenced by:
  + Increased awareness of training availability
  + Visibility on familiar education and training platforms
  + Clear relevance to patient cohort
  + Minimal time commitment
  + Linkage to CPD points
  + No cost to participate.

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[view the report](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Heartward-Strategic_Health-Professionals-Training-Research-Report.pdf)