# International Day of the Midwife: Helping women have alcohol-free pregnancies

Midwives play one of the most important roles in providing support and care to women who are pregnant, and in the early stages of breastfeeding.

Throughout this journey, they provide advice about why it’s important to go alcohol-free during pregnancy, and safe breastfeeding practices.

The [Australian Alcohol Guidelines](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol) advise that women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding should not drink alcohol.

To mark International Day of the Midwife on 5 May, we sat down for a chat with FARE’s Health Promotion Manager, Marie Hobden – who has worked as a midwife and lactation consultant for 15 years – to share her reflections on helping families through their pregnancy journeys.

**What are some of the biggest challenges you see when it comes to providing advice about alcohol and pregnancy?**

It was the level of conflicting advice that was given to women.

There used to be a Guideline that spoke of one to two standard drinks per week being safe, and we now know, because of the latest research that there’s no known safe level.

So that’s why the Guidelines were updated to say that women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy should not drink alcohol. For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their baby.

A big part of my role at FARE is working on the [Every Moment Matters campaign](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/), which provides Australians with current, evidence-based info and advice about alcohol, pregnancy and breastfeeding.

It also provides [free, accredited eLearning](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/for-health-professionals/) for health professionals so they can continue to update their knowledge and skills, which in turn helps give women who are pregnant the clarity they need.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LusdgnLeojg

**Why is it so important for clinicians to be on the same page regarding the Guidelines?**

Women want access to accurate and up-to-date information on many, many topics on their health through pregnancy.

Clinicians play a vital role in this process by raising awareness of the Guidelines, providing accurate information and directing families to resources and additional support, so they can make important choices about their health.

We know women expect to be asked about habits with alcohol and how much they consumed prior to pregnancy, by the people who care for them.

It’s important to remember we want to have these conversations in a way that doesn’t create guilt, stigma or shame.

Clinicians get to have multiple meetings with these families and continue to build on that advice and build a rapport – so by asking about alcohol at every single appointment, in the same way as diet, nutrition and smoking is discussed, you give women multiple opportunities to talk about alcohol openly.

So relaying accurate information means you can provide the right information at the right time, and the more we talk about alcohol, the less guilt, shame and stigma there will be.

**Why do the Guidelines make it clear that no amount of alcohol is safe?**

We know even small amounts of alcohol can impact the developing baby, and it’s incredibly unlikely we’re ever going to know exactly what amounts and exactly what time alcohol was consumed would cause harm – because of the way alcohol metabolises.

Alcohol is a teratogenic, a substance that’s known to cause birth defects.

Because of that, the only safe recommendation is in line with the Guidelines.

If people are concerned about alcohol consumed during pregnancy, we recommend talking to a health professional in the first instance for advice that's specific to their circumstances.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2fYCSUdJXA

**How have we tackled this, to close knowledge gaps and give parents and clinicians a reliable, factual resource they can turn to?**

The Every Moment Matters campaign has done a fantastic job in raising awareness around the current Guidelines – and raising that awareness with the general public and clinicians means we’re having the conversations and providing up-to-date advice across the board that’s in line with the Guidelines.

Since the campaign launched two years ago, the number of women and their partners who know that there is no safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy has [risen from 58.3% to 82.3%.](https://fare.org.au/every-moment-matters-campaign-celebrates-two-year-milestone/)

I get to have conversations all the time with clinicians so they know the Guidelines, as they want to have these conversations with women and families.

But they also want to go one step further - they want to know more about FASD, and they’re asking questions around why they haven’t known more about this in the past.

So, what has happened is more clinicians are now aware that there is no safe time, no safe amount, and no safe type of alcohol to consume during pregnancy.

And this means pregnant women and their families consistently get the same advice.