# Opening remarks: ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on health and community wellbeing

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| **Author** | Caterina Giorgi |
| **Date** | 2021-09-28 15:07:57 |
| **Categories** | Health |

### Opening remarks from Caterina Giorgi, CEO of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

FASD is the leading preventable developmental disability in Australia and is caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy. It is a lifelong disability which results in behavioural, emotional and developmental challenges.

For people living with FASD and their carers, having access to diagnosis, disability support funding, services and early intervention results in better outcomes throughout their lives.

FARE CEO, Caterina Giorgi in her opening statement to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing called on the ACT Government to build on its commendable work in FASD prevention to improve the lives of people with FASD.

“Actions taken now can make a difference to the health and wellbeing of children, families and the broader community.” Ms Giorgi said.

Read the full opening statement below.

I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people, and to pay my respect to elders past and present.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to talk about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and ensuring that there are adequate systems and services in place to prevent FASD and support people with the condition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that our health and wellbeing is the most important thing.

The health and wellbeing of our families and communities should be at the forefront of the development of policies and programs to prevent FASD and to support people with FASD and their families.

FASD is the leading preventable developmental disability in Australia and is caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy. It is a lifelong disability which results in behavioural, emotional and developmental challenges.

No two people with FASD have the same support needs.

Many people with FASD and their families struggle to get a diagnosis, most have challenges navigating and receiving supports and many experience community misunderstanding and prejudice.

The earlier a child with FASD gets an accurate diagnosis, the better their long-term outcomes.

The ACT Government has shown strong commitment to preventing FASD.

Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith was instrumental in progressing mandatory pregnancy health warnings on all alcohol products in Australia and New Zealand.

The ACT Government has also supported FARE’s Pregnant Pause campaign through the Health Promotion Grants Program. This campaign has raised community awareness of the need to support alcohol free pregnancies.

While the ACT has had a strong focus on prevention, greater supports are needed for people with FASD.

For people living with FASD and their carers, having access to diagnosis, disability support funding, services and early intervention results in better outcomes throughout their lives.

However, the ACT does not have a FASD diagnostic clinic or support services available.

Children and young people with FASD are also overrepresented in the criminal justice system, with a study undertaken in Banksia Hill in Western Australia showing that 89% had at least one domain of severe neurodevelopmental impairment, and more than a third (36%) were diagnosed with FASD.

We commend the ACT Government for committing to raising the criminal age of intent in the ACT. In working towards this, it is important that children and young people in the criminal justice system are screened for FASD, that the opportunity for diagnosis is provided and that supports are made available in the community.

With the high prevalence of FASD in the criminal justice system, routine screening and diagnosis is critical to ensuring that people get the supports that they need.

Across the education, health and child protection sectors – a greater awareness of FASD is also needed. This will ensure that children and young people with FASD are supported to reach their full potential.

This Inquiry presents the ACT Government with the opportunity to build on the work in prevention to improve the lives of people with FASD.

Actions taken now can make a difference to the health and wellbeing of children, families and the broader community.

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