# Supporting health professionals to have conversations about alcohol and pregnancy

Health professionals are one of the most trusted sources of information on pregnancy.

When it comes to alcohol use during pregnancy, they play a key role in communicating clear advice based on the [*‘Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol’*](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol) (the Guidelines) by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

In fact, 97 per cent of women who are pregnant or trying to conceive expect their health professional to talk to them about alcohol and pregnancy.[1](#reference)

Why is this important?

Alcohol consumed at any stage of pregnancy passes directly to the developing baby and can damage its brain, body, and organs. It can lead to a lifelong disability known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

People with FASD have their own individual strengths but also experience a range of lifelong challenges.

FASD can be prevented by supporting women to remain alcohol-free during pregnancy.

So, what should health professionals talk to women about?

It is important to discuss the recommendations of the Guidelines that women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol and that, for women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is the safest option for their baby.

Ideally, consultations should also involve:

* routinely and sensitively initiating open conversations about alcohol consumption when caring for pregnant and breastfeeding women – and, when doing this, to go beyond simple yes/no questions and socially acceptable patient responses
* unambiguously recommending abstinence for women who are pregnant or trying to conceive and advocating safe breastfeeding practices to ensure the baby is not exposed to breastmilk containing alcohol
* reinforcing the benefits of being alcohol-free for mother and baby, and actively using resources to assist
* using a validated tool such as [AUDIT-C](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/assessing-alcohol-consumption-in-pregnancy-using-audit-c) to assess alcohol consumption
* providing tailored support including referral to a specialist service for women who need help to stop drinking
* providing appropriate follow-up care including monitoring.

To support health professionals to have these conversations, FARE has partnered with [Medcast](https://medcast.com.au/) – an education provider for health professionals – to develop new online training, [*Supporting alcohol-free pregnancy and breastfeeding*](https://medcast.com.au/courses/596?utm_id=7012y000000U45I&utm_medium=website&utm_source=partner&utm_campaign=FARE_Pregnancy_and_alcohol_elearning_course)*.*

Designed in consultation with a range of health professionals, the training covers topics such as:

* explaining the latest evidence about the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, when trying to conceive and when breastfeeding
* describing the impact of alcohol at all phases of pregnancy, including during the first weeks
* using the validated AUDIT-C tool for assessing alcohol consumption during pregnancy
* providing positive reinforcement, strengths-based care, or referral, according to the assessed level of risk
* confidently providing advice that is consistent with the Guidelines.

The course contains five modules and three case studies. The core module covers the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy, as well as sensitively and effectively discussing drinking alcohol during pregnancy and assessing alcohol use.

The training is accredited by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), the Australian College of Midwives (ACM), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), and the Australian College of Remote and Rural Medicine (ACRRM).

A range of downloadable [resources](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/resources/?type=health-professionals) complement the training, including information brochures, fact sheets and evidence summaries for health professionals as well as for people who are pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding.

[Specific resources](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/resources/?type=alcohol-and-drug-workers) produced in collaboration with [NOFASD Australia](https://www.nofasd.org.au/) are also available for [alcohol and other drug sector workers](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/resources/?type=alcohol-and-drug-workers) who support women who may be alcohol dependent, and people involved in [out-of-home care settings](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/resources/?type=out-of-home-carers).

The resources and training are part of [*Every Moment Matters*](https://everymomentmatters.org.au/), a nationwide campaign that supports alcohol-free pregnancy and safe breastfeeding practices, in line with the Guidelines.

1Peadon E, Payne J, Henley N, O'Leary C, D'Antoine H, Bartu A, Bower C, Elliot E. How do women want to be informed about alcohol use in pregnancy? In: Book of Abstracts 4th International Conference on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders 2011; 2011.