



## MEDIA RELEASE

**For immediate release**

### **ELECTION COMMITMENT SOUGHT FOR CANBERRA FASD CLINIC**

**9 September 2016:** Ahead of the 15 October Australian Capital Territory (ACT) election, local politicians and candidates are being asked to commit to a much needed Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) clinic for the nation's capital.

The call comes as International FASD Awareness Day is observed in time zones around the globe at 09:09AM on 9 September, in recognition of the nine months of pregnancy.

FASD is an umbrella term for the range of learning, behavioural, and developmental disabilities which result from alcohol exposure during pregnancy, and is the most common preventable cause of non-genetic developmental disability in Australia.

The proposal, fully costed at \$1 million over four years and prepared by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), aims to address the lack of diagnostic opportunities and the difficulties accessing disability support services faced by families living with FASD.

There are currently very limited opportunities for a child to be assessed for FASD, with only three operational diagnostic models in Australia. The closest diagnostic clinic for Canberrans is located in Sydney and only operates on a part-time basis.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn urged the major parties and independents to commit to a local clinic that would make a significant difference to the lives of people affected by FASD and their carers.

"FASD is an issue that affects the whole community. Children born with FASD have a range of disabilities that can affect them for the rest of their lives. Yet, there remain significant gaps in the prevention, diagnosis, and management of FASD across Australia, something that is particularly evident in the Canberra region. The ACT has been described as one of the most difficult jurisdictions in the country for children and adults living with FASD to access the diagnostic and support services they so desperately need," Mr Thorn said.

A diagnosis of FASD is determined through a multidisciplinary team involving a range of health professionals, including paediatricians, clinical or neuro psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, and social workers.



Foundation for Alcohol  
Research & Education

Funding of \$1 million over four years will ensure that an ACT clinic can retain a sessional paediatrician to conduct a regular diagnostic clinic and to coordinate access to care and support services.

Earlier this year the Commonwealth Government released the *Australian FASD Diagnostic Instrument* and Referral Guide, to improve assessment services and assist clinicians to diagnose and manage FASD.

Mr Thorn says the investment in a local clinic would support the implementation of these resources and provide opportunities for the training and upskilling of Canberra health professionals.

“Early diagnosis is key to improving an individual’s quality of life, leading to a better understanding of the specific needs of a person with FASD, including appropriate healthcare, education, service needs,” Mr Thorn said.

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**Media notes:**

Mr Thorn is available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges. To find out more visit [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au).