

FASD AWARENESS DAY: ALCOHOL & PREGNANCY INFORMATION MUST BE RIGOROUS AND REGULATED

7 September 2018: This *International FASD Awareness Day*, leading public health body, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), is calling for further government efforts in the prevention and treatment of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

FASD describes a range of lifelong physical and/or neurodevelopmental impairments that can result from prenatal alcohol exposure. This outcome occurs when parents are either not aware of the dangers of alcohol use when pregnant or planning a pregnancy, or not supported to stay healthy and strong during pregnancy.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says recent revelations that the alcohol industry deliberately misled the public about alcohol consumption during pregnancy demonstrates that it is vital that government ensures information around alcohol and pregnancy is rigorous and regulated.

“Just last week the alcohol industry was caught red-handed misrepresenting information about the dangers of alcohol and pregnancy on DrinkWise posters distributed to doctors’ surgeries across the country. It’s imperative that the government counters such blatant corporate self-interest to ensure that this reckless tactic by the alcohol industry can never be repeated,” he said.

Mr Thorn says another example where government regulation of information on the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy falls short, is on the products themselves, with FARE continuing to call on government decision-makers to mandate clear and accurate alcohol pregnancy warning labels on all alcohol products as a matter of priority.

“It’s astounding that in Australia alcohol companies are still not legally required to include pregnancy warning labels on their products. The six years of the current voluntary alcohol pregnancy warning label scheme has served only to confuse and mislead consumers, and recent research shows the current system has failed dismally,” Mr Thorn said.

FARE is also calling for a commitment for greater investments in clinical services, through expanding the rollout of FASD clinics.

Mr Thorn says that while Australian health services have developed some highly efficient models for FASD referral, screening and diagnosis, further investment in FASD clinics would provide much-needed support for people with FASD and their families.

Victoria now has its first dedicated FASD clinic in Shepparton, which opened in July. It is heartening that Victoria now boasts a facility to diagnose FASD, but the demand on the clinic’s services does serve as a reminder of the need for the further investment in treatment, the scale of the issue and the urgent need for continued effective prevention efforts across the country,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn also renewed calls for efforts to realise the National FASD Action Plan, which is due for release at the end of this year.



“Government must stick to its commitment of a National FASD Action Plan, which is due for release at the end of this year. A successful rollout of the plan will ensure efforts to effectively address FASD in Australia do not falter,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn is available for interview.

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Media notes:

- [International FASD Awareness Day](#) is observed every year on 9 September at 9:09am in recognition of the importance of being alcohol free for the nine months of a pregnancy.
- **Further information about misleading DrinkWise posters** can be found here: [‘Utterly wrong’: What happens when the alcohol industry makes pregnancy warning posters.](#)
- **For further information on FARE’s alcohol pregnancy warning label campaign**, visit fare.org.au/labelling.
- **FARE’s other campaigns** to raise awareness and support pregnant women to go alcohol free during pregnancy include:
 - [Pregnant Pause](#) – supporting mums-to-be by building a strong support system that will help families achieve an alcohol free pregnancy together.
 - [Women Want to Know](#) – providing practical resources to support health professionals to have conversations with pregnant women about the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, as well as accredited training courses and modules through key health professional bodies.

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.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harm by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.