

VITAL FUNDS FOR PROTECTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM ALCOHOL HARM

17 December 2019: The Australian Government is making a significant investment in the health of future generations of Australians, according to the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE).

FARE has welcomed the announcement in the MYEFO 2019-20 of \$25 million dollars for a national campaign to raise awareness of the potential risks and harm caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

The announcement coincides with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) strengthening the guideline on drinking and pregnancy which states, "To reduce the risk of harm to their unborn child, women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol".

FARE Director of Policy and Research Trish Hepworth says the \$25 million will enable FARE to improve awareness across the whole population that there is no safe drinking level.

"Minister Hunt is to be congratulated for tackling this essential preventive health challenge," Ms Hepworth said.

"People often underestimate the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol can cause a range of adverse effects, including miscarriage, stillbirth and life-long disabilities such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)," she said.

Raising awareness is important as the National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016 shows one in four pregnant women in Australia continue to drink alcohol after knowledge of their pregnancy.

"This results in approximately 76,000 alcohol-exposed pregnancies annually. Women have a right to know and want to know if something may harm their baby before birth," Ms Hepworth said.

A new national campaign highlighting the risks of alcohol use and pregnancy will have strong synergies with the current Senate Inquiry into FASD initiated by the Centre Alliance Senator Stirling Griff.

"We also acknowledge and thank Senator Griff for his tireless advocacy on FASD and for his commitment bringing this hidden issue into the light," Ms Hepworth said.

Australia has one of the highest rates of alcohol use during pregnancy in the world, while FASD is estimated to affect up to five per cent of the Australian population, with a potential range between two to nine per cent of babies born with FASD each year.



“Extraordinary work has been done by dedicated and passionate individuals and organisations at the forefront of awareness, diagnosis and support for those with FASD. We acknowledge and thank them for this solid foundational work to respond to this complex, preventable disability,” Ms Hepworth said.

“Until now there had never been sufficient funds to match this exceptional effort in protecting women and unborn children and achieving the objective of no new FASD cases in Australia,” she said.

Trish Hepworth 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. Nearly 6,000 lives are lost every year and more than 144,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges.

FARE works with communities, governments, researchers, 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.