

New National Awareness Campaign on the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy launched

More than one in four Australian women (29 per cent) who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or would consider having a baby are unaware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy could cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), despite it being the leading non-genetic developmental disability in Australia.

A Kantar Public study of almost 1,500 Australian women aged 18-44 years surveyed also found that:

- almost half (51 per cent) of the women surveyed were not aware that alcohol use could cause harm even in the first few weeks after conception
- more than two thirds (69 per cent) didn't know that alcohol freely crosses the placenta to the developing baby.

The data was released to coincide with Australia's first national awareness campaign on the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and while breastfeeding which officially launched today.

Developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and endorsed and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, the National Awareness Campaign for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Women (the Campaign) aims to raise awareness of the risks of drinking alcohol while pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or breastfeeding and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The first instalment of the Campaign titled '*Every Moment Matters*', highlights that every moment matters in pregnancy when it comes to drinking alcohol, starting from the moment a person starts trying to conceive. Alcohol consumed at any stage of pregnancy passes directly to the baby and can damage their developing brain and organs.

With the tagline 'The moment you start trying is the moment to stop drinking', the Campaign will feature nationally on television, radio, digital and out-of-home channels and run until July 2024.

FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi said the *Every Moment Matters* campaign will help address the mixed messages people often receive about alcohol and pregnancy.

"There is a lot of misinformation about alcohol and pregnancy, and it makes it hard for people to find the latest accurate information," Ms Giorgi said.

"The Campaign will provide clear information to Australians about the risks of drinking alcohol at every stage of pregnancy, to support all Australian families to be healthy and well.

Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, said the Government is committed to raising awareness of the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

"We can all play a role in supporting women and families to have healthy pregnancies and in raising awareness of FASD," Minister Hunt said.

"Every Moment Matters highlights the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, to inform the broader community that alcohol should not be consumed during pregnancy."

Sophie, a biological mother to a teenage son diagnosed with FASD, said that this Campaign is vital to increasing awareness.

"You always want to do the right thing by your baby to keep them happy and healthy. When I was pregnant, I read lots of information and changed many of my behaviours while pregnant, including reducing my caffeine intake and giving up soft cheeses," Sophie said.

"My husband and I hadn't expected to become pregnant so quickly, and we drank socially on several occasions before pregnancy confirmation at six weeks. As soon as I realised I was pregnant, I stopped drinking socially with friends and reduced my consumption to half a glass a week.

"My son was diagnosed recently with FASD. I want everyone to know that the guidelines are very clear, and for people who are pregnant – it's crucial that they don't drink any alcohol at all," said Sophie.

Australia's leading body on health and medical research, the National Health and Medical Research Council, advise that women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy should not drink alcohol.

For more information about drinking alcohol while pregnant, visit everymomentmatters.org.au, call the NOFASD hotline on 1800 860 613, the Alcohol and Other Drugs hotline on 1800 250 015 or speak to a health professional.

To organise an interview, please contact

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FARE is also able to facilitate an interview or provide quotes from people with lived experience of FASD and expectant parents who have decided to have an alcohol-free pregnancy.

Background

About the Campaign

The first instalment of the National Awareness Campaign for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Women (the Campaign) titled '*Every Moment Matters*', highlights that every moment matters in pregnancy when it comes to drinking alcohol, starting from the moment a person starts trying to get pregnant. This is because alcohol consumed at any stage of pregnancy passes directly to the baby and can damage their developing brain and organs.

The Campaign, funded by the Department of Health, will feature nationally on television, radio, digital and out-of-home channels and run until July 2024.

The Every Moment Matters launch is part of a broader Campaign that includes information and training for health professionals, resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and targeted support for women most at risk of having alcohol-exposed pregnancies.

The Campaign has been developed together with advice from NOFASD Australia, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Royal Australian and New Zealand College

of Obstetricians, and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), and Australian College of Midwives (ACM).

Key study findings:

- More than a quarter (29%) didn't know that drinking alcohol during pregnancy could cause FASD.
- Almost half (51%) did not know that alcohol could cause harm in the early stages of pregnancy.
- More than two thirds (69 per cent) didn't know that alcohol freely passes the placenta to the developing baby.

About the Kantar Public survey

Kantar Public, Australia's leading insights and advisory agency to Government and Not-for-profit organisations, conducted an online study of 1,497 Australian women aged 18-44 years in February 2021 who were pregnant, planning a pregnancy over the next two years, trying to conceive, or would consider having a baby if they fell pregnant in the next two years. Excluded from the survey were those who indicated they usually don't drink alcohol.

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We approach this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy, and delivering health promotion programs.

FARE has been working with communities across the country to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians for 20 years.

To learn more about us and our work, visit www.fare.org.au.