



**Senator the Hon Fiona Nash
ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR HEALTH**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Tackling impact of alcohol on babies and children

The Australian Government has welcomed a new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which identifies strategies to address information gaps regarding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

FASD describes a range of growth, behavioural and central nervous system abnormalities caused by exposure of a fetus to alcohol during pregnancy. The report found that relatively little is known about the incidence or prevalence of FASD in Australia and internationally.

“This lack of data reflects the challenges of clinicians in recognising FASD conditions, and highlights the complexity of a diagnosis in the absence of nationally agreed and consistent diagnostic criteria and definitions,” the Assistant Minister for Health, Fiona Nash, said today.

“This is why the Government is providing \$9.2 million towards the National FASD Action Plan, for a range of projects to help tackle the harmful impacts of FASD on children and families in Australia.”

Minister Nash said a new FASD diagnostic tool is due for release in 2015 along with more resources for families and health practitioners. This will enable families and children impacted by FASD to be better supported, as well as collecting more information around incidence and prevalence.

“The data to be collected by the tool will significantly improve our knowledge of the prevalence of FASD and will enable planning for policy responses across government, which can better target areas of need to address this important and complex social and medical issue,” Minister Nash said.

“Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are entirely preventable. Early and accurate FASD diagnosis can help improve the outcomes and quality of life for those affected and their families. This is where the Australian FASD diagnostic tool will be of great benefit.”

A FASD technical network to support the FASD National Action Plan has now been established and will be chaired by Professor Elizabeth Elliott, a specialist in paediatrics and child health.

The investment in the National FASD Action Plan builds on the recently completed *Women Want to Know Project* funded by the Australian Government (\$595,000), which provides clear information to women who are pregnant, or planning pregnancy, and healthcare practitioners that no alcohol is the safest option during this time.

More information and advice regarding alcohol and pregnancy can be found at www.alcohol.gov.au

For more information, contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7440