



Media release

5 September 2013

Auckland marks World FASD Awareness Day

September 9th is World FASD Awareness Day. At precisely 9.09am people around the world take a moment to reflect on the harm that can result from alcohol consumed during pregnancy, which can result in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The time chosen to mark FASD Awareness Day symbolises the nine months of pregnancy. Developed initially by families raising affected children, FASD Awareness Day began in 1999 and has grown globally ever since. New Zealand, being the first country to see the dawn of each new day, has proudly marked World FASD Awareness Day since its inception.

This year also marks 40 years since the first medical publication, The Lancet, brought to world attention the link between alcohol and birth defects. Alcohol Healthwatch is hosting a Fetal Alcohol Network event in Auckland to highlight some of the progress toward greater recognition of FASD in New Zealand's health and social services.

Fetal Alcohol Network Coordinator for Alcohol Healthwatch, Christine Rogan believes that despite knowing about FASD since the 1970s, FASD has remained a neglected area of healthcare in New Zealand.

"We still don't know how many New Zealand children are born affected and most of our health services don't know how to fully assess for the condition, so these vulnerable children can miss out on the help they desperately need and deserve".

Change is long overdue, she says.

“Some progress has occurred where we have been active and our FASD Awareness Day event in Auckland will highlight improvements”.

Guest speaker Clinical Psychologist Andi Crawford from the Hawkes Bay DHB Developmental Assessment Programme will share the experience of a service where FASD can now be assessed by a trained clinical team.

FASD Awareness Day is also about strengthening the prevention message to avoid drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

“Alcohol is prevalent in society so it is somewhat inevitable that babies will continue to be born affected by it if nothing changes,” says Ms Rogan.

“A lot of mothers simply won’t know they are pregnant when they are drinking or will not have received sufficient information and support to avoid the risks. Not drinking alcohol during pregnancy needs everyone’s support, not just mum’s”.

Communities across New Zealand are marking World FASD Awareness Day on 9 September in a variety of ways:

Dunedin – The Bells of St Paul’s Cathedral will ring at 9.09am.

Napier – Families living with FASD will gather for a fundraising “BreakFASD”.

Auckland – ‘BreakFASD’ and seminar *‘FASD Evidence and Practice in New Zealand’s Health System: What we know and are doing differently’*. This will be followed by the official launch of **FASD-CAN Inc**, a new Care Action Network for families living with FASD plus the announcement of a new FASD education partnership between Alcohol Healthwatch and early childhood education organization, Footsteps Poutama. The event will take place between 8am-12pm at Barrycourt Conference Centre, Gladstone Road, Parnell.

Ends

For further information please contact Christine Rogan, Fetal Alcohol Network NZ Coordinator for Alcohol Healthwatch. T: 09 520 7037 M: 027 446 7371 E: christine@ahw.org.nz

Or check out the **FANNZ website, www.fan.org.nz**

Or read the **Key Facts about FASD**.

Key Facts about FASD

- Alcohol is a teratogen, a toxic agent that during pregnancy can cause birth defects and brain disorders in the developing fetus with no known safe level of exposure (Ministry of Health 2006).
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a range of adverse effects including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorders (ARND) and Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD), (Chudley et al, 2005).
- Alcohol exposure during prenatal development can include brain and central nervous system damage throughout gestation and physical abnormalities if exposure occurs in the first trimester. This can result in the child having cognition, attention, language, emotions, memory, planning and learning problems and other health problems. (Novick Brown et al, 2013).
- The New Zealand Ministry of Health Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women recommend that women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy or who are breastfeeding avoid alcohol (Ministry of Health 2006).
- A survey of New Zealand mothers in maternity care units indicates that up to 34% of pregnancies were alcohol exposed (Mallard, 2013).
- International prevalence studies estimate that Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (which includes Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) is likely to occur in 2-5% of all live births. (May et al, 2012).
- The number of individuals affected by FASD in New Zealand remains unknown but based on international prevalence and our current rate of maternal drinking around 3000 babies could be born affected every year. (Sellman & Connor, 2009).
- Children born with FASD do not grow out of their disability and can be at increased risk of developing mental health problem and of experiencing school failure, addictions, unemployment and trouble with the law as they get older (Streissguth et al, 1996).
- Studies show that identifying and supporting the special needs of children affected by FASD early in life, is a protective factor for life (Streissguth, 1996).