



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

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government Funds National Strategy to Target Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

The Australian Government will provide \$9.2 million to the National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Action Plan to address the harmful impact of FASD on children and families, the Assistant Minister for Health Fiona Nash announced today.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and FASD describes a range of cognitive, learning, behavioural and developmental abnormalities caused by exposure of the developing fetal brain to alcohol during pregnancy.

"This funding highlights the Government's commitment to the National FASD Action Plan. As a priority, a National FASD Diagnostic Tool is being finalised, which will assist paediatricians and other clinicians in diagnosing FASD," Minister Nash said.

"A FASD Technical Network will be established to ensure the Plan addresses the many complex social and medical issues involved. The plan includes looking at targeted measures to prevent and manage FASD in Indigenous and other communities and at projects to support and treat pregnant women with alcohol dependency."

The Government will provide \$3.1m for grants to drug and alcohol services to support alcohol dependent women; up to \$1.5m in targeted grants to undertake further research to develop best practice guidelines; an additional \$4m to the New Directions: Mother and Babies program; \$500,000 for the Diagnostic Tool and \$100,000 to the Technical Network.

"I am pleased that Professor Elizabeth Elliott AM has agreed to take on the role of Chair of the FASD Technical Network. Professor Elliott brings a wealth of experience in clinical service, research, teaching and translation of policy regarding FASD to this important role," Minister Nash said.

Professor Elliott said the diagnosis and appropriate management of children with FASD enabled them to reach their potential and contribute as adults to society.

"Early treatment decreases adverse secondary outcomes, including academic failure, substance misuse and trouble with the law," Professor Elliott said.

"Prevention of FASD is our key goal for the future. This requires a multi-faceted approach, including community and professional education, treatment for women who misuse alcohol, and evidence-based strategies to minimise risky drinking."

"Prevention must be underpinned by our understanding the stresses that prompt women to drink during pregnancy and the strong influences of disadvantage, historical trauma and the general community's tolerance to risky drinking."

Minister Nash acknowledged the work of the Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, Member for Murray, through The House of Representatives Standing Committee and their report *FASD: The Hidden Harm: Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*. The report provided recommendations to Government.

Dr Stone, who has been championing the need for a national response, said FAS and FASD was the greatest cause of brain damage in Australian newborns and it is 100 per cent preventable.

"Increasing community knowledge about the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy is fundamental to reducing the rate of these disorders," Dr Stone said.

"The Australian Government is committed to reducing harms caused by alcohol, including those as a result of drinking alcohol during pregnancy," Minister Nash said.

The Government has already provided \$595,000 to the Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education (FARE) to develop resources to enable GPs and other health professionals to promote awareness that no alcohol is the safest option for women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy.

Minister Nash said funding announced today was in addition to the \$2.8m provided for research into FASD announced by the National Health and Medical Research Council earlier this year.

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