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FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME DISORDER (FASD) SHOULD BE RECOGNISED AS A DISABILITY

The AMA is calling for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) to be included on the list of recognised disabilities, so that families can have access to much-needed support services.

Ahead of World Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day on 9 September, the AMA today released its new *Position Statement on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – (FASD) 2016*.

FASD is a diagnostic term used to describe the range of permanent, severe neurodevelopmental impairments that may occur as a result of maternal alcohol consumption.

Globally, FASD is thought to be the leading cause of preventable birth defects and intellectual disability. World FASD Awareness Day aims to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy and the plight of individuals and families who struggle with FASD.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said that FASD has a significant impact on education, criminal justice, and child protection services in Australia, and yet has not been included by the Government on the list of recognised disabilities.

“FASD is associated with a range of birth defects including hyperactivity, lack of focus and poor concentration, delayed development, heart and kidney problems, and below average height and weight development,” Dr Gannon said.

“The average life expectancy of a patient with FASD is just 34 years. FASD is extremely costly to our health, education, and justice systems, yet is potentially preventable.

“The AMA welcomes the efforts of the Government, particularly the Commonwealth Action Plan, through which the Australian Guide to the Diagnosis of FASD was developed, but more must be done.

“The current Commonwealth Action Plan expires in 2017 and the lack of recognition of FASD on the Department of Social Services disability list leaves families without access to much-needed disability support services.

“The AMA urges the Government to continue to provide support for the important preventive and aftercare work being undertaken, and to include FASD on the list of recognised disabilities.”

Dr Gannon said that no safe level of fetal alcohol exposure to alcohol has been identified.

“The AMA believes that the safest option for women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy is to completely abstain from alcohol consumption,” Dr Gannon said.

“The message is simple and safe – no alcohol during pregnancy.

“The AMA encourages partners, friends, and loved ones to support pregnant women in their choice not to drink,” Dr Gannon said.

The AMA *Position Statement on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – (FASD) 2016* is available at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd-2016>.

Background

- We do not currently know the true extent of FASD in the Australian community, largely due to the complexity of the diagnostic process.
- Data from comparable countries suggests FASD may affect roughly between 2 per cent and 5 per cent of the population.
- Overseas research suggests that individuals with FASD are 19 times more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system than their peers.
- In Canada, this is estimated to cost the Juvenile Justice System \$17.5 million CND and the adult custodial system \$356.2 million CND annually
- No safe level of fetal alcohol exposure has been identified.
- The safest option for women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy is to completely abstain from alcohol consumption.

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