

Government Action Plan to address Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) – a milestone worth celebrating

Alcohol Healthwatch media release

Embargoed until 6pm, 16 August 2016

Alcohol Healthwatch is pleased to celebrate the launch of the Government's three-year action Plan addressing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in New Zealand, but says wider issues must still be addressed.

Director Rebecca Williams says Alcohol Healthwatch can claim some kudos for the Plan, having kept FASD on the agenda for well over 20 years.

Williams says she is really pleased to see the Government finally acknowledge the significant burden this alcohol-related disability places on individuals and families, as well as services and systems.

"It is heartening to see the Plan acknowledge FASD as a preventable disability that requires improved co-ordination, collaboration and a more informed public and workforce. Significant improvements in outcomes for those affected can be achieved by working together.

"It is also important that attention is turned to improving interventions for those affected by FASD, along with building the New Zealand research base. Government has clearly listened to feedback from affected families and those working with them.

"What we need now is a true commitment to the necessary investment to effectively implement the Plan, and break down the barriers within systems that have stood in the way of progress on this issue at an individual and societal level."

Williams says that despite significant barriers Alcohol Healthwatch has worked collaboratively to bring training and support to the wider workforce and affected families. This includes coordination of training of New Zealand's first multi-disciplinary diagnostic team in 2008, and many more since. She hopes the Plan will build on and strengthen these foundations.

While warmly welcoming the Plan Williams says, "Women's consumption of alcohol is influenced by the wider environment and culture. New Zealand cannot expect to prevent FASD effectively without addressing the risk factors that contribute to risky drinking such as alcohol marketing and its cheap, easy accessibility. The Plan is silent on these issues."

Alcohol Healthwatch acknowledges the Ministry of Health officials who have led the cross-ministry work on the FASD Action Plan.

For further comment:

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Taking Action on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: an action plan 2016-2019 will be launched 5pm – 6pm Tuesday 16 August 2016, in Parliament by The Honourable Peter Dunne, Associate Minister of Health.