

Media Statement - 15 February 2016

Canadian experts visit New Zealand as Government calls for submissions on FASD action plan

Two Canadian experts are visiting New Zealand over the next fortnight to present a series of workshops on providing effective services to children affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and their families.

Non government organisations Alcohol Healthwatch, Fostering Kids New Zealand and FASD-CAN are working together to present these workshops across the country to give professionals, caregivers and families an opportunity to access the very latest information and experience around research, programmes and practical strategies for supporting children with FASD.

Alcohol Healthwatch FASD Project Coordinator Christine Rogan says the visit is very timely given the Ministry of Health is calling for public submissions on a discussion document entitled [Taking Action on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](#). The submission process, which closes 26 February, will help in developing an action plan to reduce the harm that accompanies drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The experts are Dr Jacqueline Pei, Associate Professor of Psychology and researcher from the University of Alberta and Ms Tracy Mastrangelo who leads a Canadian school-based programme supporting children with FASD to learn and achieve. They will share their knowledge and experience with more than 750 professionals and caregivers who have already registered to attend the four workshops.

FASD is a brain-based neurodisability caused by exposure to alcohol during pregnancy which disrupts normal development. Yet it is only recently that attention has turned to what works best to improve the learning and behaviour difficulties suffered by individuals with FASD across the lifespan.

“Once we know how to help these children learn more effectively, we can begin to reduce the stress they, their teachers, caregivers and their families experience, and guide them to a successful adulthood,” Ms Rogan says.

“It’s important to understand that it’s the system approach that needs to change to achieve this because a child with alcohol-related brain damage cannot.

“The Ministry of Health estimates FASD affects one in every 100 children, and we are certain that what our experienced and skilled Canadian colleagues bring will benefit our affected kiwi families and those who work with them so they can move forward positively. We are very grateful for their generosity.”

Fostering Kids New Zealand Chief Executive Linda Surtees says caregivers need to be supported and equipped with the knowledge and strategies to be able to provide the best care for these very vulnerable children. This is an opportunity for everyone to be moving in the same direction and create a consistent response to issues associated with FASD.

The series of workshops – entitled *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): Moving Forward* – are being held in Whangarei (16 February), Rotorua (18 February), Nelson (23 February) and Christchurch (25 February). The workshops are possible thanks to the collaborative efforts of

Alcohol Healthwatch (funded by the Ministry of Health), Fostering Kids New Zealand, FASD-Care Action Network (FASD-CAN) and a grant from the Health Promotion Agency.

Register to attend at <http://fasdconference.org.nz/>

Ends.

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Ms Mastrangelo and Dr Pei are available for media interviews during their stay. Arrangements can be coordinated through Ms Rogan.



FASD-CAN Incorporated