



Rising women's drinking highlights importance of FASD Awareness Day

Alcohol Healthwatch media release, 8 September 2017

Alcohol Healthwatch says more New Zealand women are now drinking hazardously so we must address our wider drinking culture to support women to have alcohol-free pregnancies.

Fetal Alcohol Network New Zealand (FANNZ) coordinator, Alcohol Healthwatch's Christine Rogan says that since 2011, there has been a 43 percent increase in the number of women being classified as hazardous drinkers. Consumption among women drinkers is higher today than in 2006 and she says of particular concern is that a study has found that young New Zealand females consume the highest amounts of alcohol.

"This situation demands much better recognition of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a term used to describe a cluster of developmental disorders that can happen to an unborn baby when a pregnant woman consumes alcohol," Ms Rogan said.

Tomorrow (9 September) is World FASD Awareness Day. The aim of this day is to have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) more widely recognised, prevented and supported.

"Everyone participating in FASD Awareness Day is invited to share in a 'Moment of Reflection' at 9:09 am - *the ninth minute, of the ninth hour, of the ninth day, of the ninth month* – to symbolise the nine months of pregnancy in which to have a healthy baby and to reflect on those living with fetal alcohol disorders," Ms Rogan said.

"People need to understand the link between drinking during pregnancy and the difficulties this can lead to as children grow up. We are concerned about binge drinking but no amount of alcohol is safe for a developing baby.

"We know many pregnancies are unplanned pregnancies and that the risk of alcohol exposure during pregnancy is high, so we want all our young people to understand the risk and be supported in a non-judgemental way.

"That means we all need to look at our drinking. It is simply unacceptable the way women are blamed for drinking in a culture that is awash with alcohol and where its promotion as an essential element of socialising."

In 2016 the Government launched the 'FASD Action Plan 2016-2019'.

Ms Rogan says the Whole of Government plan including, Health, Education, Social Development and Justice, intends to address prevention, intervention and support.

"Families living with FASD are gathering this Awareness month to discuss the support needed to keep their vulnerable young people with FASD safe from harm and thriving. We all have a role to play in supporting them in this."

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Contact

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FANNZ is a network of professionals and families connected through a shared vision to promote alcohol-free pregnancies and ensure better support for those who have been affected. Our motto is

"Everyone is part of the solution". FANNZ is coordinated by Alcohol Healthwatch. We hope you can join in the spirit of the day by bringing it to the attention of communities around New Zealand.

Key Facts about FASD

- Alcohol can damage a fetus at any stage of pregnancy.
- Alcohol consumed during pregnancy increases the risk of birth defects and central nervous system impairment that are behind the behavioral and intellectual disorder of FASD.
- The cognitive deficits and behavioral problems resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure are lifelong.
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a medical term used to describe a cluster of significant adverse effects when a baby is exposed to alcohol before birth.
- Studies have consistently shown that identifying and providing early intervention is a protective factor for life.
- The Ministry of Health estimates that over 50 percent of pregnancies are alcohol exposed.
- While most women cease drinking when their pregnancy is known, approximately 25% continue to drink past that point and 10% binge drink.
- The number of individuals affected by FASD in New Zealand remains unknown.