



**A L C O H O L
H E A L T H W A T C H**

**MEDIA RELEASE
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Warning Labels for Alcohol on the Horizon

Yesterday Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) called for comment on an application to amend the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Codes to require labelling of alcohol beverages with a pregnancy health advisory label.

The consideration of the application, made by the Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC), has been awaiting the completion of the review of the Australia Drinking Guidelines. The draft of these Guidelines includes a clear message that alcohol consumption when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy and breastfeeding is not recommended. Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says that this bodes well for the consideration of the warning labels application. She says we now have both countries aligned on the issue.

Previous Australian Drinking Guidelines offered a mixed message regarding drinking during pregnancy and presented a barrier to labelling. If the new Australian Guidelines are adopted they will be consistent with the New Zealand Ministry of Health advice which also recommends women abstain from alcohol during pregnancy.

Williams says that warning labels form an essential part of a strategic approach to preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). It is of paramount importance that there is a clear and consistent message to women of child bearing age that drinking alcohol during pregnancy carries a high risk. There is no known safe consumption level so abstinence is the only way to ensure that alcohol is not damaging a baby's health.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause irreparable damage to the brain of the developing baby and a range of other effects known as FASD.

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Two related briefing papers: "*Alcohol Health and Safety Advisory Statements (Warning Labels) in New Zealand*" and "*Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in New Zealand: Activating the Awareness and Intervention Continuum*" can be found at www.ahw.co.nz

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines for Low-risk Drinking can be found at www.nhmrc.gov.au