



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

**MEDIA RELEASE
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Visiting experts on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Youth Justice

Judge Anthony Wartnik, a former Senior Judge for the Superior Court in King County, Washington, United States of America is currently visiting New Zealand. Judge Wartnik is joined by Kathryn Kelly from the University of Washington's Fetal Alcohol & Drug Unit. They will be sharing their knowledge and experience of working with offenders affected by FASD and the court system and how best to address the problems encountered.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a hidden disorder that may be affecting young people and adults caught up in our criminal justice system. Preliminary studies carried out in Canada and the USA suggest that up to 30% of offenders may be affected by this disorder. FASD is caused by exposing an unborn baby to alcohol. This exposure affects the way in which the central nervous system develops and alters the way the person behaves and functions.

Up to 20% of pregnant women in New Zealand may consume alcohol during pregnancy, and 50% believe it is okay to do so.

It is the inability of people affected by FASD to fit into and understand the social norms and boundaries that get this vulnerable group of individuals into difficulties. A longitudinal study from the USA of 400 adolescents and adults with FASD, found that among the host of other secondary disabilities like being diagnosed with a mental health disorder, experiencing serious school disruption and having difficulties maintaining employment, 60% had been in trouble with the law.

This topic and its implications are being discussed for the first time in New Zealand at a Youth Offending Conference in Wellington this week and at a seminar in Auckland on Monday 3rd Dec.

Judge Wartnik and Ms Kelly's visit opens the door to exploring just how much FASD could be an underlying factor in this country's offending and re-offending rates.

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The briefing paper "*Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in New Zealand: Activating the Awareness and Intervention Continuum*" can be found at www.ahw.co.nz