

## FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER POSITION PAPER

### 1. BACKGROUND

Foetal Alcohol is the most common cause of birth defects and brain damage in children. It is a lifelong disorder caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

There are no interdisciplinary diagnostic teams in Australia.

The diagnosis of FAS identifies only a relatively small proportion of children effected by alcohol exposure and does not necessarily reflect more severe outcomes for affected individuals.

It is a complex multi-faceted public health and social issue and although there have been only limited studies for the rates of FASD in Australia, it is widely accepted that it is underestimated, under-diagnosed and under managed in our country.

Only 25% of health professionals, routinely provide information about the consequences of alcohol use in pregnancy, only 12% were able to identify the four essential features for a diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and only 2% felt very prepared to deal with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

### 2. WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

There is a large amount of information available on the Net from across Europe and America but little from within Australia.

### 3. WHAT POSITIVE ACTIONS/OUTCOMES ARE OCCURRING?

The federal government's Drug Strategy is a positive teaching model during schooling years to teach students about harm minimisation in terms of drug and alcohol use. This could be further built upon to increase awareness of the effect of alcohol upon the unborn baby.

The federal government is introducing a program for women who have just been confirmed as being pregnant to provide them with information about the effects of drugs and cigarettes and the benefit of taking folate during pregnancy.

### 4. WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

4.1. The Australian ethos towards the consumption of alcohol.

4.2. The lack of diagnosis of FASD by the medical fraternity.

4.3. People do not see that drinking during pregnancy as a problem.

4.4. Alcohol is promoted by some fraternities during pregnancy.

- 4.5. The lack of knowledge about FASD within the educational sector.
- 4.6. Information about the effects of alcohol on the unborn child is not widely distributed and people seem unconcerned about it.

## **5. ASEPA POSITION/POLICY**

### *5.1. What is ASEPA'S preferred position or policy?*

ASEPA considers this to be a serious issue, which could be an underlying contributing cause for the increase in behaviour problems being experienced across the country during the past decade.

- The federal funding of a research project, to investigate the FASD situation within Australia.
- That warning messages, relating to the effects of alcohol on the unborn child should be included as part of the labels on alcoholic beverages.
- That the effects of alcohol consumption during pregnancy can have upon the development of the fetus be included as part of Personal Development curriculum for high school students.

### *5.2. What further research does ASEPA need to do in this area*

Educational implications of FASD as to similarities and differences with teaching strategies for students with other disabilities/disorders.

## **6. ACTIONS FOR ASEPA**

### *6.1. What actions do we need to undertake?*

To present the facts about FASD to government agencies so that policies can be developed and programs funded so that the cause and effect of FASD can be better known within the medical and educational spheres as well as the impact of the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy being better known and understood by women of child bearing age.

### *6.2. Who do we need to influence?*

Politicians, heads of government departments, educational associations, parent groups, etc

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### 6.3. *How do we take this agenda forward?*

- Representations to Members of Parliament and Departments of Education and Health
- Conference Keynote Speakers and Workshops
- Website
- Articles in National Association publications

## 7. **REFERENCES RELATED TO POLICY/POSITION**

- Research Papers – Report on Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol by Professor Peter Hepper of Belfast, Ireland
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome – AN Overview of the Literature
- Dr Raja Mukherjee St Georges Hospital Medical School, London
- Organisations/Contact Details
- Web Sites – [www.nofasard.org](http://www.nofasard.org)
- [www.fasstar.com](http://www.fasstar.com)
- Individual Contacts: Sue Miers – Spokesperson NOFASARD
- Kym Crawford – Principal, Karrawatha Education Support Centre

## 8. **MEMBERS OF ASEPA WORKING PARTY**

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