



Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team



PREVENTION



DIAGNOSIS



THERAPY & MANAGEMENT

RESEARCH SUMMARY

FASD:
Knowledge, understanding and practices in the WA justice system

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is characterised by brain damage from prenatal alcohol exposure, the effects are lifelong and may not be seen at birth.

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What did we do?

We conducted an on-line survey of staff across the four sectors of the Western Australian (WA) justice system.

Who took part in this research?

- Judicial officers (judges & magistrates)
- Lawyers
- Department of Corrective Services (DCS) staff
- WA Police officers

Researchers:

- Professor Carol Bower
- Dr Raewyn Mutch
- Dr Rochelle Watkins
- Heather Jones

How did consumers and the community participate in this research?

We had two consumer representatives on our Reference Group, to assist us in providing the lived experience of a family caring for a child or young person with FASD.

What did we find?

- Over 90% of judicial officers, lawyers and DCS staff, and almost 75% of police officers were aware of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

- Awareness of FASD was lower than for FAS across all sectors.
- More than 75% of judicial officers, 85% of lawyers and DCS staff, and almost 50% of police officers perceived FASD as relevant to their work.
- Approximately 60% of participants from the judicial and legal sectors, 67% of staff from the corrections sector, and 43% from the police sector reported ever dealing with a person who may have been affected by FASD.
- Widespread agreement among judicial officers (79%), lawyers (92%) and DCS staff (84%) that the assessment and diagnosis of FASD would improve the possibilities of appropriate consequences for unacceptable behaviour.
- Most participants (72%) also indicated a need for more information about FASD, including information to improve the identification of individuals in need of specialist assessment, and guidelines on how to deal with people with FASD.
- Strong support across all sectors for the development of appropriate alternative or diversionary sentencing options for people with FASD.

Read the [Final Project Report](#)

What did we do next?

Since the completion of this project we have:

- met with judges and magistrates and lawyers to plan educational opportunities and continuing professional development
- made presentations at judicial and legal conferences and seminars
- met with judicial officers to discuss the establishment of assessment and diagnostic facilities

This has resulted in:

- invitation to update the FASD section in Chapter 4 Disabilities in the WA Equality before the Law Bench Book
- invitations to present at legal and judicial conferences – working in collaboration with lawyers and magistrates to explain how FASD affects a child's development and abilities, how these may present and implications for people working in the justice system
- successful National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant application to study FASD in the juvenile justice system in WA

[Read more](#)

- successful grant application to develop on-learning education packages, short videos and resources for justice professionals

[Read more](#)

This project was funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE).

Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research Team at Telethon Kids Institute

We have a comprehensive program of research in partnership with community & stakeholders to achieve our goals of developing prevention strategies; building the capacity of health, justice and other professionals to recognise and diagnose FASD; and implementing and evaluating programs for children and young people with FASD and their families.

For information on alcohol & pregnancy, FASD, our research projects, resources and publications visit our website: www.alcoholpregnancy.telethonkids.org.au

There is no safe time or amount of alcohol to drink while planning a pregnancy, when pregnant and when breastfeeding which is why the Australian Guidelines state 'not drinking alcohol is the safest choice'.

