



## 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.*

**Project contact:**  
[Heather Jones](#)  
08 9489 7724

### 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](http://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'.

