



ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY: PREVENTIVE HEALTH CAMPAIGN A SUCCESS BUT LESSONS LEARNT

29 September 2016: A rigorous and independent evaluation of a project that encouraged health professionals to discuss the risks of alcohol and pregnancy with women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, has judged the campaign a success, and delivered important recommendations for future health promotion projects.

The project, developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) in collaboration with leading health professional bodies, was supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and was the first, and to-date, the only national campaign targeted at health professionals since the National Health and Medical Research (NHMRC) *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol* which were last updated in 2009.

The NHMRC Guidelines state that maternal alcohol consumption can harm the developing fetus or breastfeeding baby, and therefore recommend that for women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause damage to the unborn child. Alcohol consumption during pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage, lower birth weight, stillbirth and premature birth, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn will present the findings from the *Women Want to Know* project evaluation at GP16 - the RACGP Conference for General Practice, in Perth today, and says the evaluation by Hall and Partners Openmind can be used to influence future practice in this area to successfully engage with health professionals around key public health campaigns.

“Health promotion projects are rarely, if ever, evaluated, so it is significant and valuable that the *Women Want to Know* project has been scrutinised so carefully. And it is encouraging that the project was partially successful in raising awareness of the alcohol guidelines among GPs and specialists, had a positive impact on their attitudes and behaviours, and successfully developed and delivered accredited training programs,” Mr Thorn said.

The WWTK project was comprised of two main components; accredited training to health professionals delivered online by the Australian College of Midwives, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), together with leaflets and videos to support health professionals discuss alcohol and pregnancy with women.

The evaluation comprised of an online survey of 257 health professionals, two online discussion forums with WWTK training participants, three focus groups with GPs and one with midwives, in-



Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education

depth interviews with midwives and project stakeholders as well as an analysis of project documents and administrative data.

The evaluation found the training component, rather than the wide-scale distribution of standalone resources to be the most effective part of the campaign, and recommended the continuation of the campaign.

Hall and Partners and Openmind also found that a separate but complementary campaign aimed at raising awareness of the alcohol guidelines among the general public would enhance the effectiveness of the *Women Want to Know* campaign.

Mr Thorn said the evaluation was an endorsement of the *Women Want to Know* project and made a strong case for continued funding to allow for a more comprehensive rollout of the program.

“The evaluation tells us the *Women Want to Know* program has been successful in encouraging and supporting health professionals to positively influence a woman’s choices about alcohol during pregnancy. That’s so vital because ensuring those conversations take place will help prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), the most common preventable cause of birth defects in Australia,” Mr Thorn said.

Media notes:

Mr Thorn is available for interview.

Contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges. To find out more visit www.fare.org.au.