



Submission
National FASD Strategy
2018-2028

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About the Brewers Association

The Brewers Association of Australia is the peak industry body representing Australia's premier beer makers – Carlton & United Breweries, Lion Beer Australia and Coopers Brewery.

With 93% of all beer sold in Australia being made in Australia, the brewing sector underpins some 90,000 Australian jobs and generates \$15.3 billion a year in economic activity – accounting for 1% of GDP. The industry makes a substantial contribution to the Australian economy through the manufacturing, hospitality, retail, transport and tourism sectors.

The Brewers Association is committed to initiatives that address foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and we strongly support the Australian Government's consultations to inform the development of the National FASD Strategy, with an emphasis on evidence-based interventions.

This consultation will allow all stakeholders, especially in the health sector and the alcohol industry, to work together to combat FASD.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our submission, and have outlined both current initiatives undertaken by the beer industry and possible directions for future FASD programming.



FASD in Australia

The Australian Government's FASD Strategy will provide a national approach for all levels of government, organisations and individuals on strategies that target the reduction of alcohol related harms relating to FASD, reducing the prevalence of FASD in Australia and providing advice on the support which is available for those affected by the disorder.

The objectives of the National FASD Strategy 2018-2028 are:

- Strengthen efforts and address the whole-of-life impacts of FASD
- Address the whole-of-population issues
- Support collaborative cross sectoral approaches required to prevent FASD in Australia
- Provide information and support those living with and affected by the disorder

The Brewers Association acknowledges that FASD is a preventable but incurable condition caused by foetal exposure to alcohol in the womb. While awareness of FASD is on the rise in Australia more can and should be done to boost awareness of the condition. In keeping with this the Brewers Association recently met with the Commonwealth Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, and committed to work with the Federal Government to help deal with the scourge of FASD.

We welcomed the Government's Commonwealth Action Plan to reduce the Impact of FASD 2013-14 to 2016-17¹ and recognise that the Government's FASD Strategy will build on much of this existing work.

In 2012 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs stated, "... the causes, effects and the prevalence of FASD are largely unknown or hidden in Australia."² Although that report was tabled in 2012 there continues to be limited data available on the prevalence of FASD.

The Victorian Government suggests researchers estimate that FASD occurs in one in 100 children, but the incidence of FASD varies from study to study for a number of reasons.³ Although accurate statistics are difficult to pinpoint it is widely understood that the levels of FASD are significantly higher for Indigenous Australians. As such, the Brewers Association believes responses must be tailored to community needs, including specific responses that address FASD in Indigenous communities.

¹ Australian Government Department of Health, Commonwealth Action Plan to reduce the Impact of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/0FD6C7C289CD31C9CA257BF0001F96BD/\\$File/FASD%20-%20Commonwealth%20Action%20Plan%20MAY%202014%20\(D14-1125690\).pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/0FD6C7C289CD31C9CA257BF0001F96BD/$File/FASD%20-%20Commonwealth%20Action%20Plan%20MAY%202014%20(D14-1125690).pdf)

² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, FASD the Hidden Harm, 2012

³ Victorian State Government, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd>



Partnering with industry

The Brewers Association's members are unanimous in their desire to play a proactive role in helping to inform and drive actions under the FASD Strategy 2018-28.

While it makes sense for the industry to continue and build upon its awareness work as demonstrated through pregnancy warning labelling and DrinkWise campaigns, the beer sector is also open to partnering with government, health groups, community groups, clinicians and GPs, as appropriate, to assist in developing resources to inform and educate pregnant women and women who may be preparing for pregnancy.

We note that significantly fewer pregnant women in Australia are drinking and those who do are drinking less. However, it is clear more needs to be done.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013*, the rates of abstention among pregnant women have increased from 40% in 2007 to 52.8% in 2013.

The AIHW Survey also found that women (aged 14-49) who did consume alcohol during pregnancy are doing so at low levels, with 95.8% consuming 1-2 standard drinks over the course of their pregnancy, 2.7% consuming 3-4 standard drinks, 1.4% consuming 5-6 standard drinks, and none consuming 7+ standard drinks.

The Brewers Association is keenly aware of the long-term commitment required to make further inroads into the incidences of FASD, and that to be effective, evidence-based targeted interventions will require a combination of resources and effort from government, industry and the community.

The beer industry is committed to working to achieve a reduction in the incidence of FASD.



Existing industry initiatives

The beer industry has the expertise and knowledge to speak directly to consumers in a way that public health campaigns are often unable to achieve. Over nine million Australians will drink beer at some stage over the course of a year, giving industry a unique opportunity to directly communicate with a large cross-segment of Australia.

The Brewers Association believes our connection with consumers puts the industry in a position of responsibility when it comes to promoting safe drinking messages; it's our belief that industry and the health sector should collaborate on the best way to deliver these messages.

Voluntary adoption of labelling

The beer industry has been at the forefront of adopting voluntary measures aimed at educating and reminding Australian women that it is safest not to drink when pregnant.

In 2012, Australia's major beer producers – CUB, Lion and Coopers – voluntarily adopted pregnancy warning labels on products and did so quickly, with 90% covered by July 2013. This means that the leaders in the beer industry were well ahead of the original timetable of 80% coverage by the end of 2013.⁴ All products made by Brewers Association members now bear this important and well recognised logo.



Adopting NHMRC standards

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends that the safest option for women is to abstain from drinking if they are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding.⁵ This advice is adopted and clearly provided for in DrinkWise's

⁴ Evaluation Report on Voluntary Pregnancy Labelling, Australian Government Department of Health, June 2014

⁵ NHMRC, Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol-guidelines>

communications and on its website, including the following passage from Professor Alec Welsh:

“There is confusion about how much one can safely drink during pregnancy. We know very clearly that excessive amounts, either in isolated binge drinking or in prolonged drinking, are very harmful. What we don’t know for sure is the lowest possible level that you can drink safely. We therefore say, for that reason, the safest possible thing that you can do is to not drink at all during pregnancy or while you’re breastfeeding. We also encourage women and their partners to see a doctor when they are planning a pregnancy, so that this and a number of other important issues can be discussed.”⁶

Red Dust Role Models

DrinkWise, of which the Brewers Association members are major funders, provides funds to Red Dust Role Models in Alice Springs. Red Dust Role Models focuses on at-risk women and works to break the cycle of alcohol abuse. Through its strong emphasis on community integration and consultation, Red Dust Role Models can provide locally tailored interventions that have the support of at-risk communities.

The Red Dust Role Model’s Strong Young Women’s program is moving into its second year of delivery (and is part of an ongoing evaluation by the NT based Menzies School of Health Research).

⁶ Professor Alec Welsh, Information about Alcohol & Pregnancy with Professor Alec Welsh, <https://drinkwise.org.au/parents/how-alcohol-consumption-can-affect-your-baby/#>



Potential interventions

Effective policy approaches ensure that individuals at risk of harm are directly targeted through a range of interventions supported by education and cultural change campaigns.

The Brewers Association recommends that the Strategy should feature a keen focus on education and awareness programs, and we would like to share some insights in relation to developing effective campaigns.

Firstly, any new education campaign around FASD should make use of existing evidence and research around alcohol consumption, and specifically consumption by pregnant women. The Australian Government should seek to work with independent organisations, grass-roots community organisations and industry education efforts to leverage existing skill and expertise.

Secondly, campaigns need to be designed with a clear and specific target in mind, with effective research and comprehensive measurement and review.

Thirdly, gaps in existing knowledge about FASD should be filled with further research. This will allow for better targeting of key demographics in line with their behavioural motivators and drivers; there is little detail on the behaviours of women consuming alcohol while pregnant and that makes it difficult to develop clear recommendations on how harmful behaviour should be addressed.

We note that research on FASD globally and in Australia is limited, and the experience of FASD in Australian communities varies. However, we do know that some studies suggest there are areas in Australia where FASD rates are among the highest per capita in the world, including Fitzroy Crossing in WA.⁷

Education for communities

Alcohol education can be provided through a range of tools and channels depending on the message of the education, the target audience of the education and the likely effectiveness of different approaches.

In Canada, the beer industry has provided significant funding to the Motherisk program through the Toronto Sick Kids Hospital. This is a national toll-free helpline that connects new and expectant mothers with medical personnel who can answer questions about alcohol and direct them to support services when needed.

We would be pleased to provide further information on the effectiveness of this program which is supported by AB InBev, the parent of CUB.

⁷ <https://theconversation.com/factcheck-ganda-does-australia-have-some-of-the-highest-rates-per-capita-of-fetal-alcohol-syndrome-in-the-world-57736>



Education for health professionals

In specific at-risk communities across the country, including in Indigenous communities, opportunities exist to increase local medical professionals' engagement with pregnant women and women who may be preparing for pregnancy.

Putting together resources and tools for medical professionals so that they are equipped to ask the right questions, provide families with relevant information about the risks of maternal alcohol consumption and refer women with potential alcohol disorders or high risk consumption is critical.

Further targeting indigenous communities

The Red Dust Role Models program is operational in Alice Springs and other remote communities across the Northern Territory. Similar programs operate in Indigenous communities in WA and Queensland, and there are opportunities for greater coordination between programs.

Canada again provides a useful model; the Native Physicians Association in Canada (NPAC) Caring Together Program prioritised educational health resources for expectant mothers in Indigenous communities with specific warnings on FASD, as well as encouraging a supportive role for fathers and communities.



Contact

The Brewers Association looks forward to continuing to work with the Federal Government on this important project and beyond.

For more information, or to follow up on any aspect of our submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,



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