



Cutting Edge 2019

Te toka tū moana

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) – looking back, moving forward

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Abstract

FASD is an acquired brain injury caused by prenatal alcohol exposure and characterised by severe neurodevelopmental impairment with lifelong consequences. Over two decades there has been enormous progress in recognition of FASD as a significant but preventable public health problem in Australia. Research has guided clinical practice and policy, the key being a national collaborative approach involving clinicians, researchers, parent support groups, Indigenous communities and NGOs – and funding from Australian and State governments and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

Research has informed NHMRC, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Australian Medical Association and state-based policy and driven political support including a National Inquiry into FASD and national plans for FASD in 2013 and 2018. Australian government funding supported a National Technical Strategic Advisory Group; development of the Australian Guide to FASD diagnosis; national FASD surveillance; a FASD Register and Hub (website); training for health and justice professionals; and prevention program[mes](#). The ANZ Clinical Network has been established and new services developed.

NHMRC has funded a Centre for Research Excellence in FASD (FASD Research Australia); intervention studies, collection of information on alcohol use in pregnancy; school-based interventions for FASD; a positive parenting program[me](#); and a FASD prevalence study in juvenile justice. Epigenetic and 3D imaging studies offer promise as future diagnostics.

Despite progress, we have significant challenges in preventing alcohol use in pregnancy and FASD and building capacity for FASD diagnosis and management. FASD prevention requires political will to challenge the alcohol industry and implement evidence-based policies to minimise alcohol harms.