

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-11, 25 February 2011

Question: E11-216

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Senator Boyce asked:

Whilst I would like to get the information about prevention, I am more interested in people who actually have fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. What is being done to assist people who have the disorder? Perhaps what I should be doing is putting that question on notice then, should I, to ask for a succinct response across the board.

Answer:

The term 'fetal alcohol spectrum disorders' (FASD) refers to a range of disorders. The most severe is 'fetal alcohol syndrome' (FAS) which is characterised by: characteristic facial abnormalities; impaired growth prenatally and/or postnatally; and structural and/or functional abnormalities of the central nervous system (CNS). Other disorders in the FASD Spectrum include: 'Partial FAS', characterised by some facial anomalies, growth retardation and/or CNS anomalies; 'Alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder' characterised by CNS anomalies; and 'alcohol-related birth defects'. A person affected by FAS may experience a range of difficulties including: low IQ; developmental delays; behaviour problems; learning difficulties; memory problems; increased risk of behaviour problems; increased risk of mental health difficulties such as depression and psychosis; and increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse. People affected by other disorders in the FASD Spectrum may also experience some or all of these difficulties. There is no cure for these disorders.

Accurate diagnosis of FASD is important because it can help ensure people with the disorders are connected to appropriate care and support. In addition, early diagnosis may prevent recurrence in later pregnancies. For this reason, the Department has engaged the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research to develop a diagnostic instrument to assist clinicians in diagnosing babies and children affected by FASD. This project is due to be completed by 30 June 2011.

Supports for people experiencing the difficulties described are available through a range of Commonwealth and state programs outside the Health portfolio. Questions about disability and other supports in early childhood, in the education system and in the job services system should be directed to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations respectively.