

Alcohol disorders cause brain damage in newborns

Research has shown as many as 30 babies a day are born in Australia with alcohol spectrum disorders but the government has failed to listen to or act on this alarming statistic the Collaboration for Alcohol Related Developmental Disorders (CARDD) says.

The group has called on the federal government to meet with them to discuss the rise of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the community.

CARDD coordinator Dr Jan Hammill said the meeting was essential to develop policies and services to prevent or deal with FASD and evaluate their effectiveness and their economic and other advantages.

“FASD is seen in increasing numbers of children in out-of-home care, early school dropout, young parenting, involvement with the juvenile justice system and then into incarceration as adults,” Dr Hammill said.

“Often FASD is found to be transgenerational reflected in family unemployment and larger families as women may not have the capacity to manage their fertility.

“People with FASD add greatly to statistics around domestic violence, educational failures, arson by juveniles, mental health problems and suicide.

“The costs to all human services are overwhelming and no doubt will be seen in significant registrations on the National Disability Insurance Scheme.”

Dr Hammill said research has established a prevalence rate of between 5-10% - a figure which has grown as more precise diagnostic tools become available.

“Even based on a rate of 3.6%, 30 babies per day are being born with FASD in Australia,” she said. “In the past decade, among the total of 3 million births in Australia, at least 105,000 have been born with brain damage due to alcohol exposure before birth. “This is more babies than with all other congenital abnormalities combined.”

Australia's first accredited multidisciplinary FASD Diagnostic Centre is based on the Gold Coast at the Community Child Health Service and is keen to support expansion of FASD Diagnostic Centres across Queensland.

Churchill Fellow, Medical and Clinical Director, senior lecturer at Griffith University and founder of the centre, Dr Doug Shelton, said “We have tried so hard to raise awareness of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) by contributing to two government inquiries,” he said. “One was in 2012 and another in 2015 yet nothing has changed in the prevention of FASD and at least 30 babies per day are being born with this preventable brain-based disability.

As Dr Sharman Stone, Liberal member for Murray, said in an interview on ABC Radio National several years ago, "it is the power of the alcohol lobby".

How do we tell the alcohol industry that the brains of babies are not negotiable for dollar donations to the coffers of politicians?

These sad statistics of brain damage in vulnerable babies, where the costs are then borne by all taxpayers, call into question why all the major political parties continue to accept donations from alcohol manufacturers for their election campaigns?”

Background:

FASD refers to a group of conditions that can occur in a person whose parents drank alcohol during pregnancy.

FASD is a disability due to the direct toxic effects on the brain during development. It primarily manifests as behavioural and learning problems, the can also include significant physical deficits such as hearing, eye, kidney, dental, skeletal impairments, and heart abnormalities.