

# STRONG BORN



**ALCOHOL-FREE PREGNANCIES HELP  
EVERY BABY TO BE STRONG BORN**

# CONTENTS

Supporting families to grow strong born babies	3
Prenatal alcohol exposure	5
What is FASD?	7
Yarning with pregnant women	11
Yarning with other community members	13
Yarning with parents whose child might have FASD	15
More information and support	19



# TOGETHER LET'S DO WHAT WE CAN TO CREATE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALCOHOL-FREE PREGNANCIES

Alcohol consumption in communities is not only sensitive, but also highly complex. Often both internal and external factors influence women to drink alcohol when pregnant.

It's critical to recognise that alcohol consumption is at times related to past trauma and it's important to support our women during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Intergenerational trauma, ongoing impacts of colonisation, family and domestic

violence, racism, complex grief and loss and trauma negatively impact on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Acknowledging these factors is vital if we are to genuinely work together with families to address alcohol use in pregnancy.

Our communities want to grow strong healthy babies and need support from health professionals and their community during and after pregnancy to achieve this. Some people may not be able to stop drinking during their pregnancy. It's important not to shame or judge them so they continue to seek support from their health team.



## SUGGESTED WAYS TO YARN

*"I'm here to support you and baby. Do you know much about how grog affects you and baby when you're pregnant and breastfeeding?"*

*"Do you have any family members helping you and baby to be healthy during pregnancy?"*

*"Was this a planned pregnancy? Not for judgement, but 1 in 2 pregnancies are unplanned and women drink as they don't know they are pregnant."*

**Tip:** You might want to consider the questions relating to alcohol consumption in the 715 Health Assessment as a starting point.

# PRENATAL ALCOHOL EXPOSURE

Any use of alcohol by an expecting mum can be dangerous to her and the unborn child.



Women, partners and families need to know the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, so they can make the decision not to drink and seek help and support if they need to.

- No alcohol during pregnancy or when breastfeeding is the safest way for mum and baby.
- Any use of drugs or alcohol by an expecting mum can be dangerous to her and the unborn baby.
- Drinking alcohol while pregnant can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a permanent and life-long disability.
- Drinking alcohol while pregnant can result in miscarriage, premature birth or stillborn babies.



# WHAT is FASD?

**FASD refers to a range of conditions caused by exposure to alcohol before birth. FASD is a permanent and life-long neurodevelopmental disability and often results in cognitive, physical and behavioural issues.**

FASD is primarily a hidden disability. Most people have no characteristic facial features, even when the brain is profoundly affected.

Early supporting primary healthcare services, which includes helping parents to understand their child's behaviour as a symptom of brain damage, can achieve improved outcomes.

## PHYSICAL

Newborns might not be able to breathe properly or sleep. Babies might have weaker muscles and bones, and as babies grow, they could find it harder to jump, run or do things.

**NEWBORNS MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY SLEEPING AND SETTLING**

**NEWBORNS MAY BE UNDERWEIGHT**

**DAILY ACTIVITIES CAN BE DIFFICULT**

**A SMALL NUMBER OF BABIES MAY HAVE SPECIFIC FACIAL FEATURES, BUT THIS IS LESS COMMON**

**People with FASD need you to recognise their strengths as well as the physical challenges they may face.**

# NEUROLOGICAL

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy can cause defects in the development of the central nervous system. This can lead to long term cognitive and behavioural issues.

**SLOW COGNITIVE PROCESSING WHICH LEADS TO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

**HARD TO CONCENTRATE AND REMEMBER THINGS**



**A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH FASD EXPERIENCE SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES, SUCH AS SENSITIVITY TO PARTICULAR SOUNDS**

**DAILY ACTIVITIES CAN BE HARD**

People with FASD need you to be calm and patient, so they can learn and do things at their speed.

# COGNITIVE

FASD results in cognitive difficulties which can lead to issues relating to learning, planning, language, memory and/or controlling emotions.

Young ones affected by FASD may face mental health challenges, feel worried all the time, or struggle to yarn with others.



People with FASD need you to be calm, listen and take time with them so they feel heard and understood.

# SPIRITUAL

People with FASD could feel like they aren't part of their community or mob. They may not feel connected to culture and cultural ceremonies.

You may want to link families living with FASD to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) team.



People with FASD might like you to take time to be with them during cultural gatherings and explain what is happening so they can feel more connected.

# YARNING WITH PREGNANT WOMEN

A big challenge with keeping mum engaged with healthcare, is making sure she does not feel shamed. If a woman discloses drinking alcohol, making them feel guilty about drinking can sometimes result in disengagement for the duration of their pregnancy.

- **CREATE A SAFE SPACE** – Keep mum engaged with healthcare by making sure she does not feel shamed. If a woman discloses drinking alcohol, making them feel guilty about drinking can sometimes result in disengagement for the duration of their pregnancy.
- **DO** spend time talking with mum and anyone with her to get to know her and build rapport. Building trust is vital.
- **DON'T** go straight into focussing on any substance use, this will help them feel safer to yarn through any issues or concerns.
- **ENCOURAGE** them to yarn with Aunties, Elders or other trusted people who can support them in reducing any alcohol, let them know that they aren't alone, and everyone wants to support both their health and that of their baby.
- **BE AWARE** - Depending on your local community it might not be most appropriate for a male to be talking with a female, or appropriate to speak in English without a translator or support person present - in those instances work with your health team to have the right people there. Aboriginal Health Workers and Health Practitioners are critical members of the health team and are best placed to advise.



## SUGGESTED WAYS TO YARN

*“Would you feel more comfortable if we had one of our health workers in here while we talk, or would you like a friend or family member here as well?”*

*“What are you most excited about, being pregnant?”*

*“Thank you so much for being honest with me about you drinking alcohol, let’s yarn through some information of what you need to know and how we can get you and baby the best support.”*

# YARNING WITH OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Our communities have a collective culture, many people are involved in raising babies and supporting the wellbeing of others. This means that everyone can come together to support healthy pregnancies.

- Partners can really influence if a mum drinks or not. Spend time yarning through the benefits of them not drinking while mum is pregnant too, so they can both be healthy role models.
- Elders and other respected and trusted community members have a special role in supporting community members. This could include encouraging others not to drink alcohol at events and celebrations.
- As mum is pregnant, research has shown that having a supportive partner or male to yarn with is helpful. Try to find opportunities to talk with them about what they can do too.
- Just because somebody is young by age doesn't mean that they aren't mature or that they don't understand things, so if you are supporting younger people talk to them and treat them as you would others.

## SUGGESTED WAYS TO YARN

*"Hey it's so good to have you here supporting mum while she's pregnant, have you heard about what FASD is?"*

*"There is lots to think about when our family member or loved one is pregnant, have you thought about what you can do to support them, have you considered not drinking alcohol while they aren't drinking too?"*

*"If you have time, I'd like to show you these diagrams that help to explain what FASD is and why it's important for mum not to drink alcohol while she's pregnant or breastfeeding."*

# YARNING WITH PARENTS WHOSE CHILD MIGHT HAVE FASD

If you have noticed signs and symptoms that a baby or child might have FASD, it's important to talk with their parents and approach them in a non-judgemental way.

- Ensure that you start off celebrating the strengths of the child then maybe ask them to identify anything that they may have noticed that they see them struggling with.
- Remember, when discussing the pathway to a potential FASD diagnosis that you also talk through what support services are available.
- Emphasise that early diagnosis of FASD will support the family to have a child who grows up as strong and healthy as possible with the right support required.
- Children diagnosed with FASD are eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Refer them to an NDIS Community Connector to get information and support.



## SUGGESTED WAYS TO YARN

*"The past couple of times that we have caught up you have mentioned some things that you are noticing with your child, I'd like to yarn with you about what this might be so we can see how we can help?"*

*"We don't have to rush this, why don't you tell me what you are most worried about now?"*

*"It's important for you to understand that if your child has FASD there are many services that can provide support to you, your family and for your child."*

# SUPPORTING PEOPLE AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY FASD

- Caregivers often report feeling under-supported, misunderstood, and at times, blamed by service providers for the challenges of their family member with FASD.
- It's important to recognise that the challenges of life can be overwhelming, and families might be unaware of what support is available. Tell families about available support services, local programs, NDIS Community Connectors and make referrals where possible.
- Encourage yarning with family, friends, leaders and teachers so all the right people know how best to offer support.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture maintains a strong belief in the connectedness of kinship and family. Involvement of families and communities is important to build trust and maintain relationships between support workers and families affected by FASD. When talking to families, consider whose presence in their lives might strengthen their health and wellbeing.
- Plan regular check-ups and connection with the health service to follow the person's development, so their needs and family's need for support can be identified as they grow up.

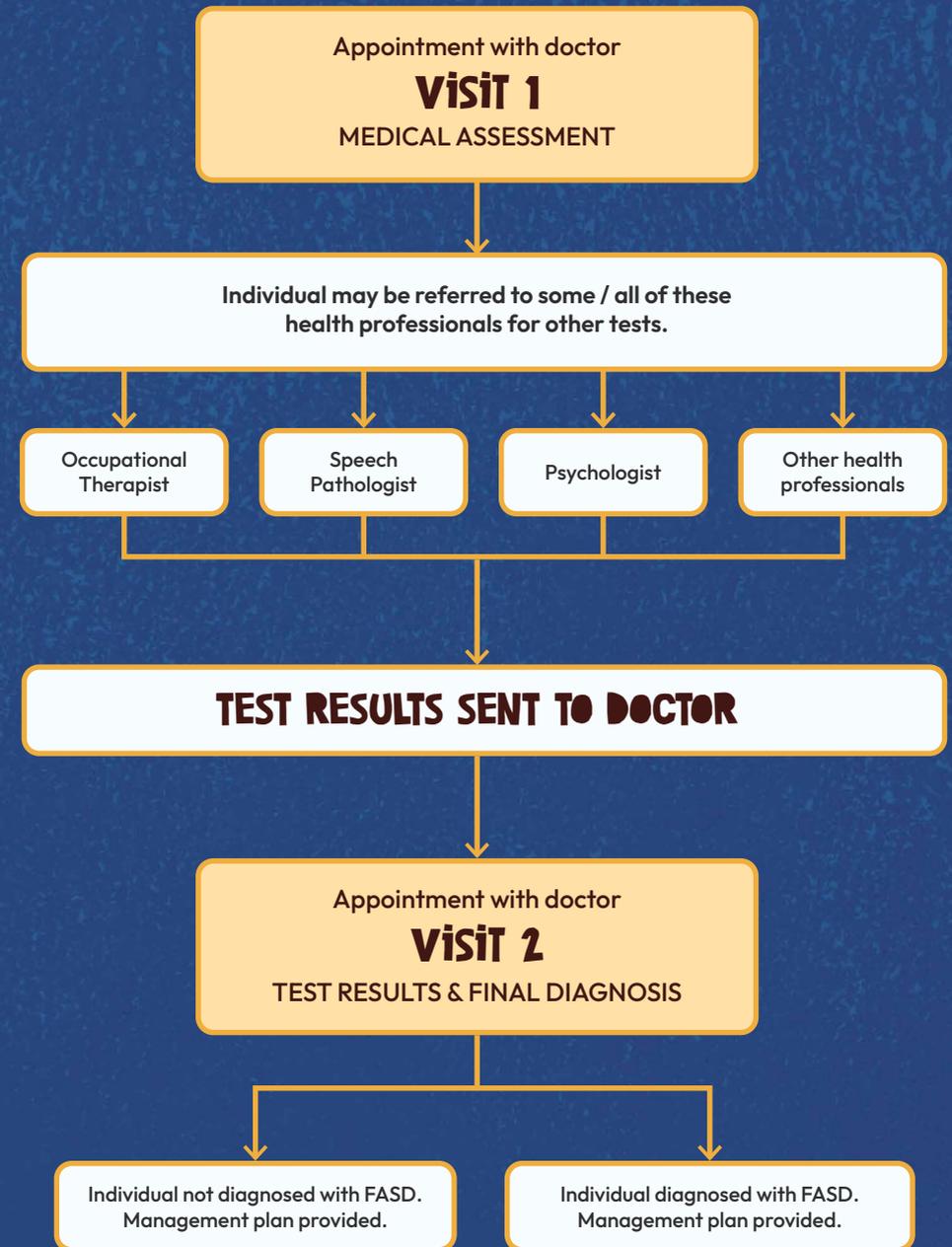
## SUGGESTED WAYS TO YARN

*"There are always so many stresses in life, I'm here to help you and make sure that we connect you to available support."*

*"I really appreciate and value how important your culture is and how everyone helps each other out,*

*if you want I can be one of those people who can help?"*

*"One of the things that you can do to support this young one and your family is to remember to bring them in for regular check-ups?"*



Visit [naccho.org.au/fasd](http://naccho.org.au/fasd) for more clinical information and links to support and diagnostic services.

Connect with Alcohol and Other Drugs (AoD) services in your local area so you can refer women to support if they are continuing to drink alcohol while pregnant.

You can also find the Every Moment Matters campaign at [everymomentmatters.org.au](http://everymomentmatters.org.au)

This resource was created in collaboration with:

The National FASD Working Group

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