



IAHA statement on the introduction of mandatory pregnancy warning labels

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Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) welcome the 17 July decision of the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation to endorse a mandatory pregnancy warning label on alcohol products sold in Australia and New Zealand. The new label will clearly advise women to not consume alcohol during pregnancy.

This decision is a critical step towards minimising the impacts of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a range of physical, cognitive, behavioural and neurodevelopmental disabilities, resulting from alcohol consumption during pregnancy. IAHA Chairperson and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Representative on the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) Consumer and Public Health Dialogue, Nicole Turner, said of the decision

“The introduction of the mandatory warning label has been a long time coming and we are pleased to see the decision reflect the advice of FSANZ and other stakeholders. This is just one action required within comprehensive and culturally informed approach to reducing rates of FASD for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, with a focus on prevention through support and empowerment.”

The decision of the Ministerial Forum is also recognition of the serious impact which FASD can have on the development of young people, their mental health and the lifelong impact of disability. Holistic and cross sectoral supports are required to support individuals, families and communities to manage the impacts of alcohol misuse and FASD. The growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce can support an increase in awareness of FASD and improve the accessibility of services and care to manage its impacts.

However, this is not an issue confined to the health sector. A wide range of justice reforms are required, including better screening for FASD in health justice settings, treatment of alcohol as a health and social issue (decriminalisation), consideration given to FASD during sentencing, and supports for individuals affected by FASD to minimise risk of initial contact with the justice system and to address reoffending.



For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, alcohol misuse and interaction with the justice system occurs within a broader context of the social determinants of health and the ongoing impacts colonisation, dispossession, and intergenerational trauma. Healing and founding efforts on the cultural determinants of health will be essential to successfully combating the significant health and wellbeing impacts of FASD.

IAHA encourage governments to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and organisations, under a new framework for Closing the Gap, to achieve meaningful and lasting change.

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