

# Yarning about Alcohol use in Pregnancy



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A toolkit for health workers supporting  
Aboriginal pregnant women and families

Updated July 2024

Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs, NSW Ministry of Health

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

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# 1

## About this toolkit



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## 1.1 About this toolkit

Resources have been developed in NSW and across Australia to support health workers to have conversations about alcohol and pregnancy with Aboriginal expecting parents in a culturally safe way. These conversations play an important role in preventing alcohol-related harm to both the unborn baby and the pregnant woman. This toolkit identifies several resources that support health workers to have these conversations around pregnancy with Aboriginal women in a culturally safe way. This toolkit also identifies mainstream pregnancy and alcohol resources and training. As well as links to further information on the assessment and diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

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## 1.2 Background

Pregnant women or women trying to conceive will turn to health workers for clear and consistent advice on pregnancy. Having conversations early about alcohol can be important for behaviour change. These conversations can be uncomfortable and may stem from a lack of knowledge and confidence to speak about alcohol and pregnancy, as well as concern about causing further harm or stigmatisation (1). However, if approached with respect and sensitivity, these conversations can be vital in improving health and well-being outcomes for women, infants, and communities.

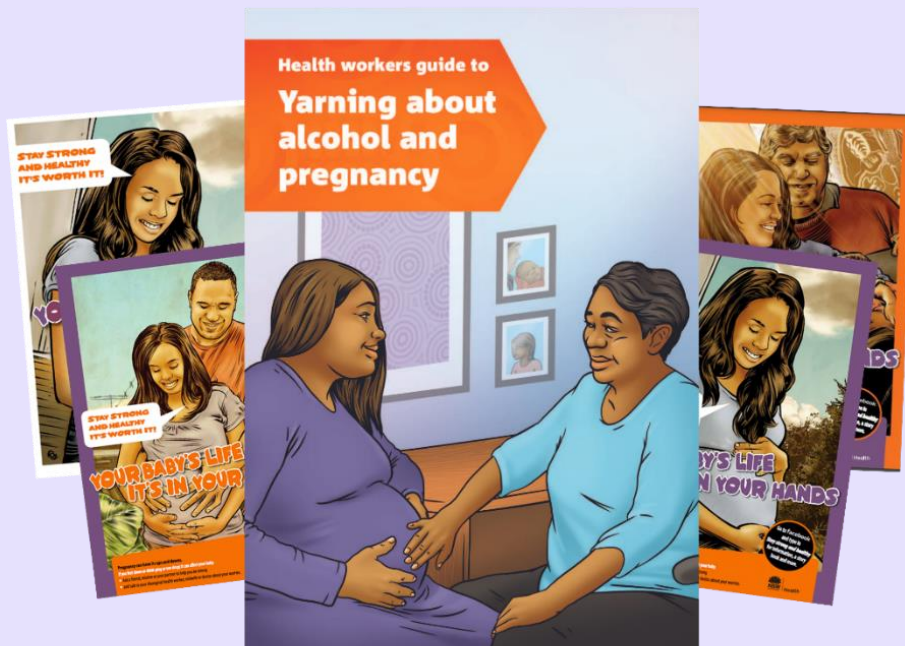
Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, premature birth and low birth weight babies. It can also disrupt fetal development resulting in an array of outcomes collectively known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD results in cognitive, physical and behavioural disabilities. The disabilities associated with FASD are permanent but preventable. The [National Health and Research Council's guidelines](#) are clear in advising that women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol. No safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been identified.

FASD is a concern for all communities where alcohol is consumed. However, care for Aboriginal communities differs from mainstream care, especially in building trust, rapport, and maintaining relationships. It's also important to acknowledge the impact of colonisation and the general mistrust of health services due to child removal. The resources in this toolkit have been developed by or in collaboration with Aboriginal people, taking these factors into account.

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# 2

## Stay Strong and Healthy Resources – NSW Health



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## 2.1 Stay Strong and Healthy Resources – NSW Health

The Stay Strong and Healthy suite of resources were developed for and by Aboriginal people. They are designed to support health workers in having conversations about alcohol and other drugs with Aboriginal pregnant women and raise community awareness of the harms of alcohol and other drugs during pregnancy. These resources are available to order on the [Your Room website](#).

### 2.1.1 Health Workers Guide to yarning about Alcohol and Pregnancy

This guide supports health workers in assessing and providing interventions for alcohol use with Aboriginal women. It includes the Audit-C tool, which can be used to screen risky alcohol drinking during pregnancy.

[Download guide](#)

### 2.1.2 Yarning about Alcohol and Pregnancy

This booklet can be used with pregnant women to discuss alcohol in pregnancy and develop steps for change.

[Download booklet](#)

### 2.1.3 Stay Strong and Healthy Storybook

This booklet tells the story of a young Aboriginal woman who gets pregnant, and the healthy choices she and her partner make. The story booklet is useful for health workers talking through drug and alcohol issues during pregnancy with clients.

[Download booklet](#)

### 2.1.4 Stay Strong and Healthy Pregnancy Posters

Three posters have been developed to raise awareness of the impact of alcohol during pregnancy. Posters can be displayed across services and at events.

[Download Stay Strong and Healthy Pregnancy poster](#)

[Download Stay Strong and Healthy Sharing Pregnancy poster](#)

[Download Stay Strong and Healthy New Bub poster](#)

## 2.1.5 Stay Strong and Healthy Facebook page

A Facebook page for pregnant Aboriginal women and new mothers that provides key messages around health and wellbeing, with a focus on FASD. This Facebook page can be promoted to pregnant women and women planning for pregnancy.

[Visit the Stay Strong and Healthy Facebook page](#)

## 2.1.6 FASD Aboriginal Awareness Video

These videos aim to inform Aboriginal families that are planning or expecting a baby about the risks of drinking alcohol in pregnancy and support health professionals to discuss alcohol with pregnant Aboriginal women, fathers and community. Videos have been developed for each of these groups:

- General community
- Aboriginal men and Aboriginal young people
- Health professionals

[Watch the awareness videos](#)

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# 3

## Strong Born Resources – NACCHO





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## 3.1 Strong Born Resources – National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

Strong Born is a national campaign that raises awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of FASD and the harms of drinking alcohol while pregnant and breastfeeding. The Strong Born campaign has been developed by NACCHO in collaboration with the National FASD Campaign Working Group. Several resources were developed for health professionals and the community and are available [here](#) and listed below.

### 3.1.1 Health Professionals Booklet

This booklet raises awareness of FASD among health professionals. It explains FASD and suggests ways to yarn with pregnant women and the community about it. It also has information about yarning with parents whose child has FASD.

[Download booklet](#)

### 3.1.2 Yarning about Alcohol and Pregnancy

This booklet is aimed at Aboriginal pregnant women and community members who may play a role in supporting alcohol-free pregnancies or supporting a person with FASD. It raises awareness of the impact of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

[Download booklet](#)

### 3.1.3 Posters

These posters raise awareness of FASD among community members who may play a role in supporting alcohol-free pregnancies. They can be used to display in services or at events.

[Download posters](#)

### 3.1.4 Social Media Tiles

A range of social media tiles have been developed to raise awareness of the impact of alcohol in pregnancy. These can be used on social media handles or by general community members.

[Download social media tiles](#)

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# 4

## Other Helpful Pregnancy and Alcohol Resources

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## 4.1 Yarning about Alcohol and Pregnancy booklet

The Remote Alcohol & Other Drugs Workforce Program in collaboration with Menzies School of Health Research's Aboriginal and Islander Mental Health Initiative (AIMhi)NT developed a simple booklet that can be used by health workers together with pregnant women as a tool for change. It includes a screener for drinking alcohol using the Audit-C tool, discusses motivations, barriers, and plans for change.

[Download Booklet](#)

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## 4.2 Review of FASD among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre

A comprehensive review of [FASD among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#) was produced in 2021, covering the following areas:

- the health impacts of FASD
- the historical, social and cultural context of FASD
- prevention and management of FASD
- relevant programs and services
- policies and strategies
- possible future directions for responding to FASD

A series of accompanying resources including a [summary](#), [video](#), and [factsheet](#) were developed.

[Read the Review](#)

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## 4.3 Websites

- [FASD Hub](#) – The leading source of evidence-based information about alcohol and pregnancy and FASD in Australia. The [Prevention Strategies and Alcohol and Pregnancy Resources](#) pages contain a breadth of information, links and training for health workers.
- [Every Moment Matters](#) (FARE) – This website is for a recent nationwide multi-component communications campaign that aims to prevent FASD. It includes evidence-based information and resources about alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding for community members and health professionals.
- [Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre](#) – This website provides relevant and culturally appropriate resources and information for health professionals and general community members working to

reduce harms from alcohol and other drug use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- [NoFASD Australia](#) – This website provides a range of resources and information about FASD for the community, families, and health workers.

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## 4.4 Training

- [E-learning: Supporting alcohol-free pregnancy and safe breastfeeding](#) – This 90-minute course aims to give healthcare professionals the tools, information, and confidence to discuss alcohol use in a non-judgemental way with patients who are planning a pregnancy, are already pregnant or breastfeeding. It is developed by FARE and Medcast. This course is free and accredited with RACGP, ACRRM, ACM & RANZCOG.
- [Brief Yarns on Alcohol](#) – Four videos have been developed by the University of Sydney on how to have a brief yarn about alcohol with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.
- [WA Health Audit-C Learning Guide](#) – This learning guide assists with self-directed learning on FASD, understanding and using AUDIT-C, and providing pregnancy brief interventions related to alcohol use.
- [RACGP Podcast](#) - Conversations around Alcohol use in Pregnancy: Preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. This podcast is aimed at GPs to support them in having conversations about alcohol and pregnancy.

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## 4.5 Resources for Assessment and Diagnosis of FASD

- [Strong Born – NACCHO](#) - The [Health Professionals Booklet](#) includes information on yarning about FASD and how to support people and families affected by FASD, there is also a [video](#) explaining this information.
- [FASD Factsheets – NACCHO and Dr Robyn Williams](#) have put together the following factsheets for health professionals supporting Aboriginal people.
  - [Aboriginal leadership in the proactive treatment of FASD](#)
  - [FASD a neurodevelopmental disorder](#)
  - [Screening and diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disorders](#)
  - [Advocacy and recognition of FASD](#)
- FUSD Hub has a large range of helpful resources for assessment and diagnosis of FASD including:
  - [Australian Guide to Diagnosis of FASD](#)
  - [A suite of e-learning modules for health professionals to understand, assess and diagnose FASD](#)
  - [FASD Service Directory](#) – To find health professionals and services with FASD experience and expertise.
- [Learning with FASD](#) - Evidence-based resources to help educators understand and support children with FASD in Australian primary schools.

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## 4.6 CICADA Centre NSW – NSW FASD Assessment Service

The CICADA (Care and Intervention for Children and Adolescents affected by Drugs and Alcohol) Centre NSW has a FASD assessment service. The multidisciplinary team at The Children's Hospital Westmead conducts assessments for children and young people with suspected FASD. The service includes a comprehensive medical, developmental, and psychological assessment, as well as recommendations for support and intervention. Aboriginal hospital liaison or education officers can support Aboriginal patients and families in accessing this service.

For more information visit the [website](#).

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## 4.7 References

1. Payne J., Elliott E., D'Antoine H., O'Leary C., Mahony A., Haan E., Bower C. Health Professionals' Knowledge, Practice and Opinions about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Alcohol Consumption in Pregnancy. *Aust. N. Z. J. Public Health*. 2005;29:558–564. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-842X.2005.tb00251.
2. Hewlett N, Hayes L, Williams R, Hamilton S, Holland L, Gall A, Doyle M, Goldsbury S, Boaden N, Reid N. Development of an Australian FASD Indigenous Framework: Aboriginal Healing-Informed and Strengths-Based Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2023 Mar 22;20(6):5215. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20065215.

## Contact Details

If you have any feedback on this toolkit please contact the Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs at [moh-yourroom@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:moh-yourroom@health.nsw.gov.au).