

Are Australians aware of the risks of drinking during pregnancy and breastfeeding? Results of a baseline survey prior to a national campaign

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Introduction and Aims: Alcohol consumption during pregnancy can cause lifelong harms, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The Commonwealth Government has funded the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) to run a national campaign to increase Australians' awareness of risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy/breastfeeding and increase the proportion of Australian women who intend not to drink during these times. Our group was commissioned to assess population awareness of these risks prior to the national campaign.

Design and Methods: A nationally representative cross-sectional survey (Life in Australia™) of $n=2,991$ Australians was undertaken in October 2021, prior to the launch of the national campaign on 30 November 2021. The response rate was 77.9%, with the majority of responses online (96.7%) and 3.3% via telephone. Respondents reported their awareness, attitudes, and intentions regarding alcohol consumption during pregnancy/breastfeeding.

Results: The majority of Australians (73.3%) were aware that pregnant women should not consume any alcohol, but only 32.7% were aware of the current NHMRC Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol. Only 21.2% of those who had planned their most recent pregnancy reported abstaining from alcohol when trying to conceive, and 66.3% of respondents who were currently pregnant/breastfeeding reported abstaining from alcohol after confirmation of pregnancy.

Discussion and Conclusions: To reduce harms to future generations, there is a need to improve awareness of the harms of alcohol, and reduce consumption, among women trying to conceive and those who are pregnant and breastfeeding. Social marketing campaigns may address this need.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This research was supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Health via FARE.