

**Question on Notice  
No. 213  
Asked on 27 February 2008**

MRS STUCKEY asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

**QUESTION:**

With reference to the emerging problem of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)-

- (1) How many patients treated by Queensland Health in 2006-07 were noted to have suffered with some form of FASD?
- (2) What amount of funding, if any, has been directed to research, treatment and awareness of this problem (reported separately)?
- (3) What steps has the Government taken to establish appropriate diagnostic and support services for people with FASD?

**ANSWER:**

- (1) I am greatly concerned about the impact of alcohol on the health of Queenslanders and, in particular, the impact of drinking during pregnancy. I strongly support the new draft alcohol drinking guidelines which recommend that for women who are pregnant, not drinking is the safest option.

Alcohol use in pregnancy adversely affects the unborn child, causing a range of birth defects including Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, Alcohol-related Birth Defects, and Alcohol-related Neurodevelopmental Disorder. These all fall under the umbrella term 'Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder' or FASD.

There is no objective laboratory-based diagnostic test for FASD. The current diagnosis relies on examining a range of the features including facial abnormalities, growth retardation and the central nervous system. For this reason, it is not possible to routinely conduct an 'FASD test' of all people who become Queensland Health patients (or have a central data collection).

- (2) Queensland Health spent approximately \$860,000 during the four-year period 2004-05 to 2007-08 on the 'Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership Initiative' in three trial sites. This included the development and delivery of educational health resources to increase parental awareness of FASD.

Commencing next financial year, Queensland Health will provide \$250,000 per annum in recurrent funding for the three Rio Tinto sites to sustain maternal and child health services.

In addition, Queensland public hospitals provide case management for pregnant clients with alcohol and drug problems. This involves regular antenatal care, counselling and support for expectant mothers and encouraging safe alternative behaviours for the unborn child. Follow-up care can also be provided to both mother and child for up to 12 months after delivery.

Recruitment of new clinical positions to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal and child health is also currently underway. This is part of a Queensland Government commitment of \$21 million over four years.

In addition, nine 'Young Parent Support Worker' positions will be tendered out in 2008-09 to the non-government health sector to deliver culturally and age appropriate antenatal care. This includes antenatal education addressing key risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol use. The positions will also provide home visiting and group education programs that provide parental support.

- (3) Queensland Health is an active member of the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Working Party. This working party has brought together Australia's leading experts in FASD including Professor Elizabeth Elliott and Professor Carol Bower.

The Working Party is currently:

- contributing to the review of alcohol drinking guidelines;
- undertaking an international audit of models of service for FASD;
- supporting the development, delivery and evaluation of education programs for FASD prevention and management;
- reviewing the prevalence of FASD in Australia;
- convening a national forum to plan and co-ordinate future efforts; and
- publishing an expert monograph.

Queensland Health is particularly interested in the work around models of service for FASD. The objective of this audit, the first to be undertaken internationally, is to identify diagnostic and management service models for children at risk of FASD. The results will inform planning in Australia, including the cost of services, the personnel required and the training needs of health professionals.