

Supporting health workers to raise awareness about FASD in Aboriginal communities

Prepared by **Amanda Holt**
Centre for Population Health
June 2015

Background

- Babies born in Australia are at risk of FASD - one in five women in Australia continuing to consume alcohol after knowledge of pregnancy.
- FASD is more prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with the incidence of FASD being between 2.76 and 4.7 per 1,000 births, - four times the rate of FASD among the general population.

What is FASD?

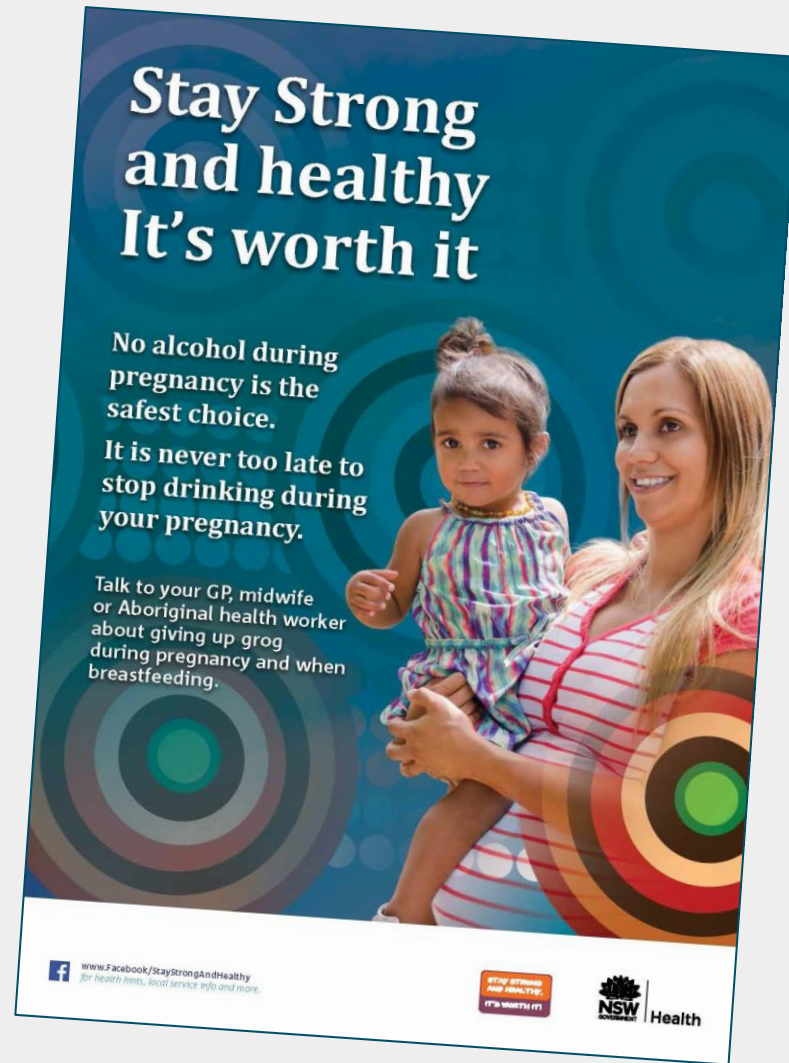
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders or FASD is a term used for a group of conditions caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Children with FASD can have a range of problems including brain damage, slow physical and emotional development, learning problems such as poor memory, and have trouble controlling their behaviour.

The disabilities associated with FASD are permanent and preventable.

Aboriginal Alcohol in Pregnancy Project

The project aims to address consumption of alcohol by Aboriginal women who are pregnant, considering pregnancy or sexually active, by delivering Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) prevention messages to these women and their partners and family members.

The campaign is an extension and adaptation of the NSW ***Stay Strong and Healthy*** Campaign developed and implemented in 2012 – 2013.



Objectives

- To raise awareness among Aboriginal women and their peers, partners and key influencers, of the potential risk of FASD through drinking alcohol during pregnancy
- To increase awareness among Aboriginal women and their partners of drug and alcohol services available during pregnancy.



Primary target audience

- Aboriginal women and women with Aboriginal partners, who are pregnant, planning to get pregnant or are sexually active
- Partners and families of these women
- Aboriginal young people



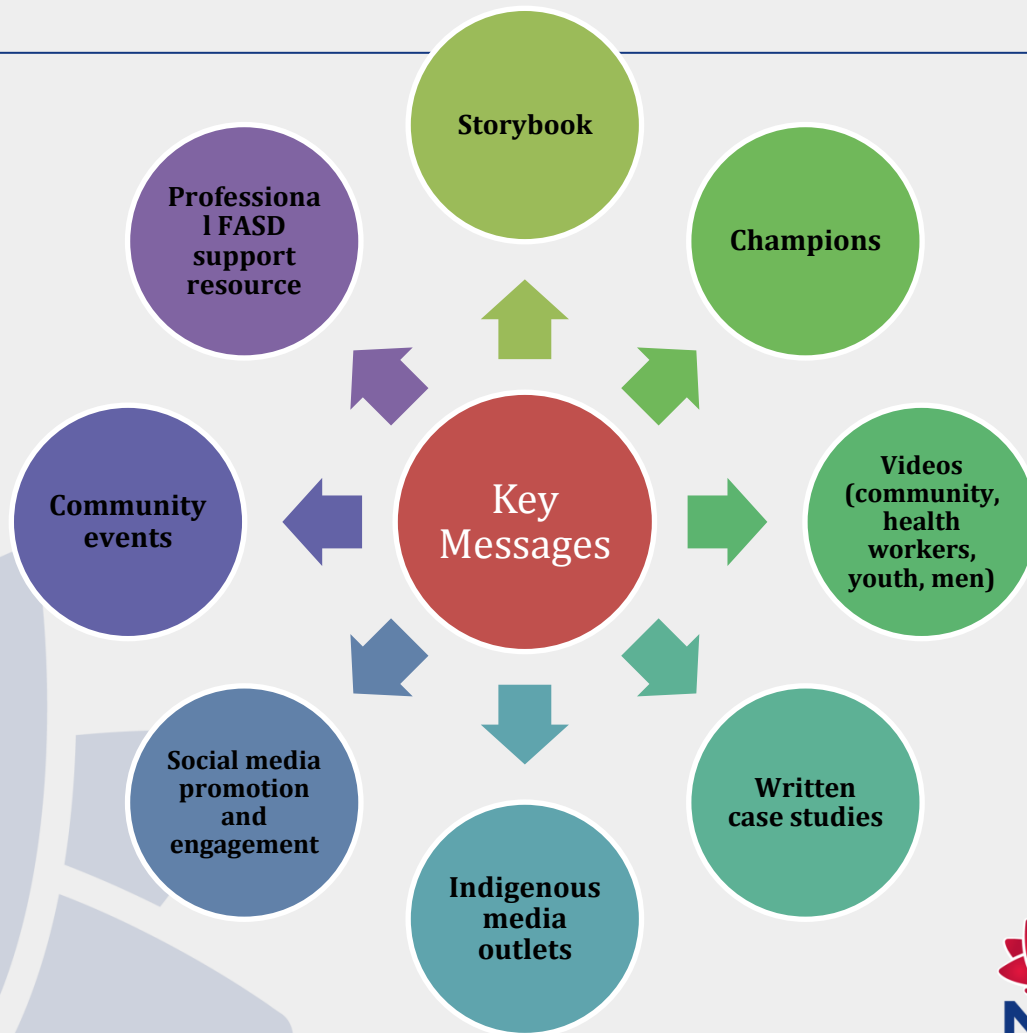
Key messages

- No alcohol during pregnancy is the safest choice.
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders are permanent disabilities caused by the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy and are completely preventable.
- It is never too late to stop drinking during your pregnancy.
- Not drinking alcohol is the safest option when breastfeeding.
- When you get help for yourself you are also giving your baby a better start in life.
- There are services to support you.

Advisory Group

- Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council
- Drug and Alcohol Population and Community Programs
- Maternal Child and Family Health, NSW Kids and Families
- Aboriginal Maternal Infant Health Services
- TSU for Aboriginal Mothers, Babies and Children, HETI
- Mental Health Children and Young People , MHDO
- National Drug and Alcohol Research Council
- Aboriginal Health Manager, LHD
- Drug & Alcohol Clinical Standards & Design, MHDAO
- Community member with personal experience

Approach



Stakeholders

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
who receive copy of
Health Professional
resource and video

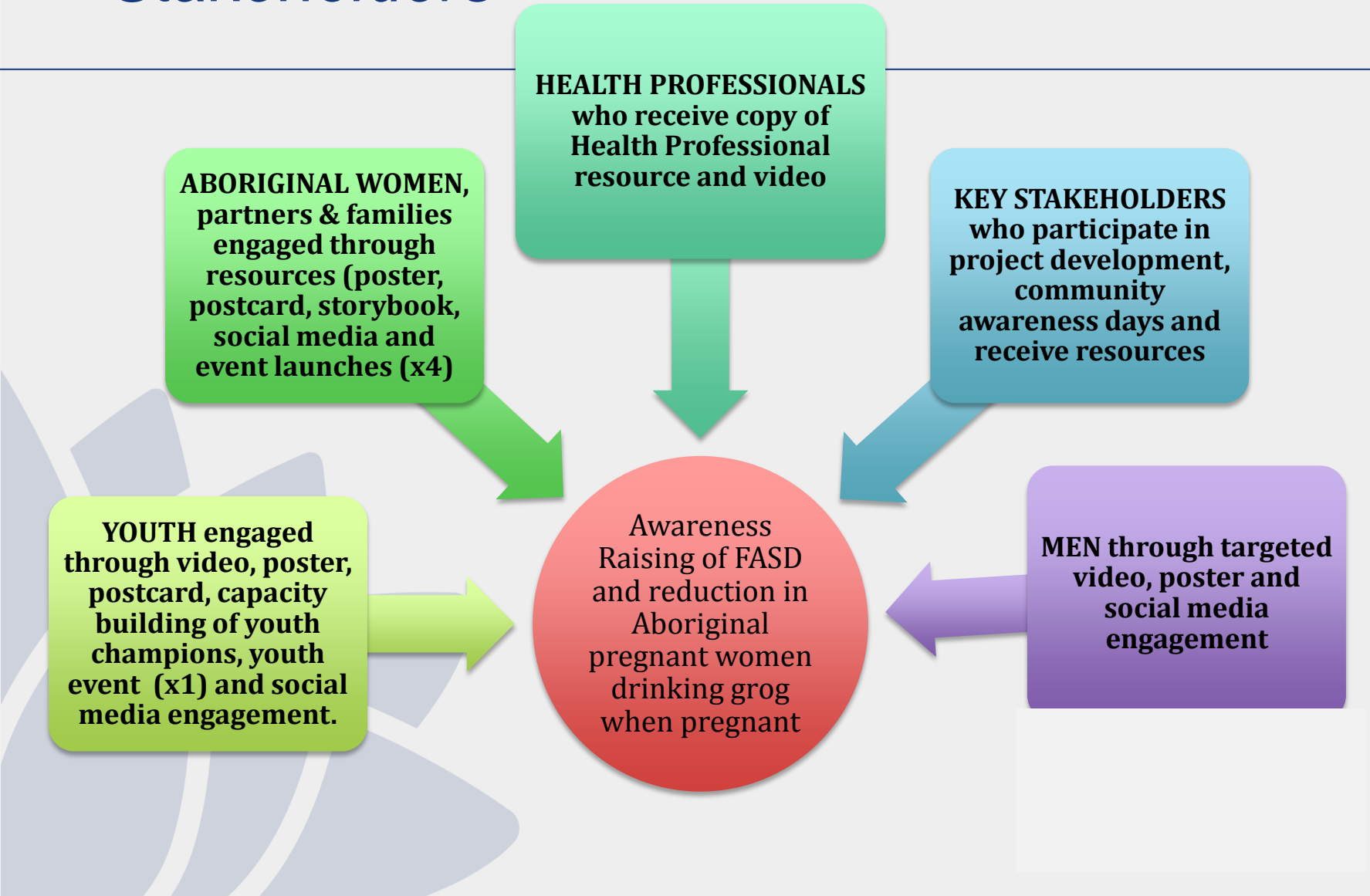
ABORIGINAL WOMEN,
partners & families
engaged through
resources (poster,
postcard, storybook,
social media and
event launches (x4)

KEY STAKEHOLDERS
who participate in
project development,
community
awareness days and
receive resources

YOUTH engaged
through video, poster,
postcard, capacity
building of youth
champions, youth
event (x1) and social
media engagement.

Awareness
Raising of FASD
and reduction in
Aboriginal
pregnant women
drinking grog
when pregnant

MEN through targeted
video, poster and
social media
engagement



Story book



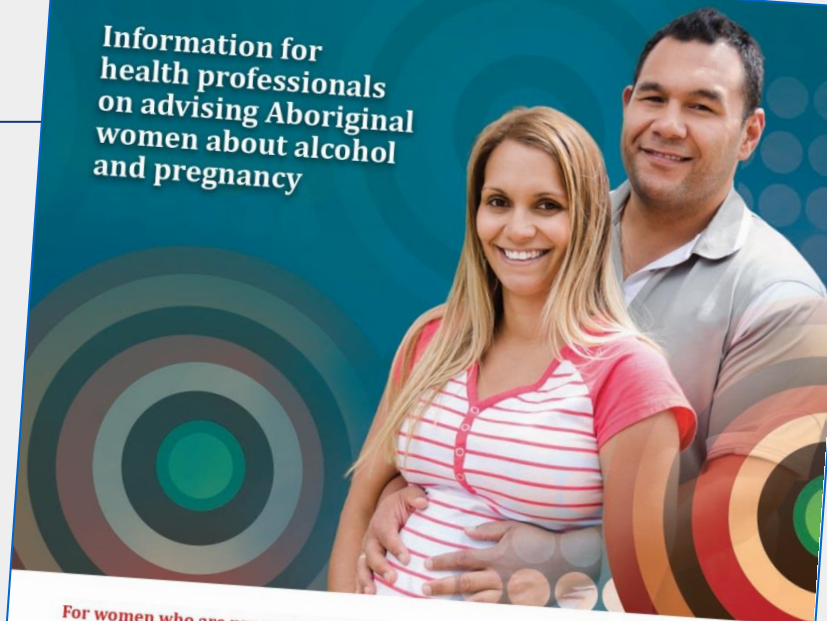
Videos and posters

- Community - women
- Youth
- Men
- Health professionals



Professional resource

Information for health professionals on advising Aboriginal women about alcohol and pregnancy



For women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy not drinking is the safest option

The National Health and Medical Research Council's *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* specify that:

- Maternal alcohol consumption can harm the developing fetus or breastfeeding baby.
- For women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy not drinking is the safest option.
- For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.¹

Some babies exposed to alcohol during pregnancy may be born with conditions known as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders (FASD). Babies born in Australia are at risk of FASD, with one in five women in Australia continuing to consume alcohol after knowledge of pregnancy². The disabilities associated with FASD are permanent and preventable and can include poor memory, impaired language and communication, poor impulse control and mental, social and emotional delays. These disabilities are directly linked to the underlying brain damage caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Thinking about the health of their developing baby, many women will be willing to change their alcohol consumption if advised to do so³. As a health professional you can positively influence a woman's choices about alcohol during pregnancy and help her have the healthiest baby possible.

Before you provide women with information about drinking alcohol during pregnancy it is important to know how much she is drinking. **Ask all pregnant women and women planning pregnancy about their alcohol consumption.**

Knowing how much and how often a woman is drinking will assist you in giving the support she needs to stop or reduce alcohol use in pregnancy and prevent harms from drinking alcohol such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).⁴

STAY STRONG
AND HEALTHY.
IT'S WORTH IT!

Launches

- North Coast NSW (Ballina)
- South Coast NSW (Nowra)
- Western NSW (Bourke)
- Sydney (Campbelltown)
- Broken Hill (TBC)

Thank you

For more information or feedback contact

Amanda Holt

On 9382 7658

Or amandaholt@sesiahs.nsw.health.gov.au