

Input into the
Parliament of Australia
House of Representatives
House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Inquiry into Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Submitted by:

Ms. M. Crichton, Chair

ACWW/International and Community Support Committee

The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc.



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The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. is pleased that this inquiry is being held and appreciates the opportunity to provide input.

About this Association

- The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. was formed in 1928, with today having a membership of over 5000, each member belonging to one of approximately 300 branches state-wide.
- It is a non-party political and non-sectarian organization for country and city women.
- The Association aims to improve conditions by community service, more especially as they affect the welfare of women and children.
- Members work for the welfare of all women and children through representations to all levels of government, undertaking fundraising events, providing networking opportunities and teaching life skills.
- Throughout Victoria the branches take on a number of initiatives – be it fundraising for causes, lobbying for better services for women and children, helping out in times of emergencies and natural disasters, sharing in interest groups to develop skills in areas such as craft, cooking, gardening, dancing, singing, public speaking and many others.
- The Association assists in crises and administered funding provided by the Federal Government to assist people in time of drought. Continual support has been given to those affected by the fires and floods through provision of 'pamper packs' crafted goods and financial support. Emergency and welfare support is provided to those in need.
- The Victorian Association is a member of the Country Women's Association of Australia (CWAA). Across Australia the Association has a membership of more than 25,500 in 1500 branches.
- The Victoria Association is a member of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), which has over 9 million members in 70 countries around the world. ACWW has non-governmental consultative (NGO) status with several United Nation agencies including UN Woman.

The subject of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and associated issues was discussed at our 2011 State Conference, and it was agreed that this Association should support a process of recognition, prevention and the provision of appropriate resources.

The best interests of the child/adult with this disability should prevail at all times.

Terms of Reference

Prevention Strategies

For those not yet conceived, prevention is of paramount importance.

Alcohol is a legal product in our society, it is widely promoted and consumed however there needs a greater awareness that it can be a toxin to the human body. Largely community messages are about limiting/not drinking alcohol when driving. There are lesser messages on safe consumption levels however for women they can be confusing and do not articulate the risk of alcohol to a developing 'in utero' baby. As a comparative example, generally it is stressed to women of the risks of being exposed to and contracting rubella in early pregnancy, awareness about alcohol consumption should be the same; appropriate information and education is vital.

Education and information should be directed across communities; however it could be particularly targeted within secondary schools - to boys as well as girls. Labels on all alcohol products should contain warnings.

Intervention Needs

For those living with this disability, recognition, diagnosis and appropriate interventions are vital. In July 2008 the Australian Government ratified the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Within Article 25 of this Convention it is required to

b. 'provide those health services needed by persons with disabilities specifically because of their disabilities including early identification and intervention as appropriate, and services designed to minimize and prevent further disabilities, including among children and older persons;'

Early diagnosis should be the aim followed by swift provision of interventions thus supporting optimal outcomes - for the person with the disability, their family and the community. The saying 'a stitch in time saves nine' is pertinent.

Due to the wide ranging aspects of this Spectrum Disorder that a person may have, each person should be assessed individually and appropriate intervention strategies developed.

Management Issues

People with disabilities and their families should be supported to participate to the best of their abilities in all aspects of their community.

Again the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities is applicable particularly of Article 25

c. 'provide these health services as close as possible to people's own communities including in rural areas;'

It is hard enough to have a disability; not to have supports and interventions available locally increases the burden.

We support the development of a national approach to address the many aspects of this issue and hope also that, in the future, as a disability its occurrence is greatly reduced.