

**Media Release**

## **AER RESEARCH: ONE-THIRD OF WOMEN CONSUME ALCOHOL WHEN PREGNANT**

**7<sup>th</sup> June 2010:** An annual Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER) survey into community attitudes towards alcohol reveals that, despite understanding the dangers of consuming alcohol while pregnant or breastfeeding, new and expectant mothers still choose to drink. One in three Australian women (30%)<sup>1</sup> surveyed admit to drinking while pregnant or breastfeeding, even though the vast majority (90%) of all Australians believe alcohol should be avoided while pregnant, and 87% of Australians believe that alcohol should be avoided when breastfeeding.

“Consuming alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding can have irreversible affects on a child’s health and well-being. AER strongly supports the Australian Alcohol Guidelines\*\*, which clearly state that not drinking is the safest option for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers,” AER Deputy Chairman Scott Wilson said.

Almost one in 10 (8%) survey respondents still think it is acceptable to drink in moderation whilst pregnant and 9% believe it is acceptable to drink while breastfeeding.

According to Mr Wilson, the survey results indicate that people are unaware of the safest option for alcohol consumption when pregnant or breastfeeding. There remains a need for greater public education for Australian women about the dangers of alcohol while pregnant and breastfeeding.

“Based on our survey results, there is still a large percentage of mothers who don’t understand the risks associated with alcohol consumption. Fertility rates are at an all-time high\*, now is the time to educate mothers and fathers about the dangers of mixing alcohol with pregnancy or breastfeeding,” said Mr Wilson.

AER warns that women who drink alcohol during pregnancy or breastfeeding run the risk of their child developing Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASD is defined as a range of structural, behavioural and neuro-developmental abnormalities in a newborn, caused by exposure to alcohol in utero, combined with other factors such as malnutrition, smoking and poverty of the mother. FASD is incurable and has been described as the leading cause of preventable, non-genetic, intellectual disability.

“The current responses to preventing and managing foetal alcohol disorders are far from adequate,” said Mr Wilson. “It’s clear from the limited research conducted in

Australia to date that the prevalence of FASD nationally is still widely unknown, and certainly under-reported.”

Mr Wilson cites a number of AER-funded programs<sup>2</sup> that have researched FASD and other problems associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

“AER supports national and interstate initiatives that address women’s dependence on alcohol, and the potential dangers of drinking while pregnant.” Mr Wilson said.

“FASD is most prevalent in communities where there is a lack of health, social support and educational resources. More support is required from the Government in these areas.”

The national study conducted by Galaxy Research, is commissioned annually by AER, Australia’s leading alcohol harm minimisation body. There were 1014 respondents aged 18 years and above polled in this online survey completed in January 2010.

#### **Key facts for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding \*\*\***

AER supports the NHMRC Australian Guidelines that recommend that **not** drinking alcohol is the safest option during both pregnancy and breastfeeding. For more information see the NHMRC Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol or consult your GP.

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**Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER):** The Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER) is a unique, independent, not-for-profit organisation with a goal to *change the way we drink*. AER collaborates with grass-roots community organisations, all levels of government, police, researchers and the private sector to turn evidence-based research on alcohol and solvent misuse into practical, real-life solutions. Since its inception in 2001, AER has invested over \$115 million in prevention, public education, workforce development, and treatment & rehabilitation projects, underpinned by innovative research. Our dedication to creating a safer and healthier Australia sees AER forming new partnerships and alliances with like-minded organisations, with a focus on youth and Indigenous issues. Looking forward, AER will continue its unwavering commitment to changing Australia’s drinking culture to one of safety and responsibility. For further information: [www.aerf.com.au](http://www.aerf.com.au)

**(1) About the Galaxy Research:** The Galaxy study was commissioned by AER. The online research was conducted between 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> January 2010. It was national survey (excluding NT) and was weighted by age, gender and location (based on ABS population estimates) to the national population. There were 1014 respondents aged 18 years and above.

#### **(2) AER-supported initiatives include the following:**

- **Rio Tinto Child Health Research Partnership** (Telethon Institute for Child Health Research - Kulunga Research Network)
- **The impact of alcohol-related disorders on drivers’ license restriction, suspension, loss: A longitudinal study** (The University of Queensland - Prof Gail Williams)
- **Increased domestic violence an unexpected consequence of new liquor licenses: New licensing model can predict impact on alcohol-related violence** (National Drug Research Institute)
- **Examine the "Influence of alcohol consumption on breastfeeding initiation and duration in Australia"** (Curtin University - Colin Binns)
- **Cyrenian House Out-Patient Services** (WA Council on Addictions)

- **A participatory action program to promote capacity building for women who have been sexually abused and who abuse alcohol** (RDNS Research Unit)
- **Stability and change in women's alcohol consumption: Factors related to alcohol consumption in women from the Women's Health Australia study** (Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre - Sharon Matthews and Susan Clemens)
- **The GROG Program** (Newman's Women Shelter)

More information about these studies and programs is available upon request

**\*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics**

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3301.0Media%20Release12008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3301.0&issue=2008&num=&view=>

**\*\*Source: NHMRC Guidelines**

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/file/publications/synopses/ds10-alcohol.pdf>

The 2009 Australian Guidelines to Reduce the Risks from Drinking Alcohol published by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) advise that not drinking is the safest option for women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy. Not drinking alcohol while breastfeeding is also recommended by the guidelines.

**\*\*\*Source: Australian Breastfeeding Association**

[http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/ABA\\_Alcohol\\_BF.pdf](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/ABA_Alcohol_BF.pdf)