

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Coalition urges Executive to combat alcohol use during pregnancy**

A coalition of charities and expert groups\* is urging the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive to prioritise research and action to deal with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is the name for the various types and degrees of brain and nervous system damage that is caused by women who drink alcohol during pregnancy. The extreme condition consisting of all three symptoms is called Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The condition cannot be cured and the negative effects will follow these children into adulthood. Not all fetuses develop Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder as a result of exposure to alcohol, but it currently is unknowable which babies will be harmed.

Dr Maggie Watts, vice-chairperson of the Scottish Association of Alcohol and Drug Action Teams, and a member of the coalition, said:

“Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is an incurable lifelong medical condition that can prevent children from succeeding in school, leading healthy lives and becoming productive adults. Raising a child with this disorder can be difficult for parents or carers. It also has serious resource implications for health and education services.”

She added: “Unlike most birth defects and health problems, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome can be eradicated entirely by behaviour change. When it hasn’t been prevented, more should be done to ensure that these children get the treatment and services they deserve.”

The coalition is calling on the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive to:

- ***Commit to comprehensive and long-term research on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in Scotland***

- **Revise health guidelines relating to alcohol consumption during pregnancy to emphasise abstinence as the safest course.**
- **Support the uniform application of this message by a public and professional awareness raising and education campaign**
- **Follow the American and French example by requiring the alcohol industry to be socially responsible and place clear warning labels on all of their products**
- **Develop and implement uniform guidelines for diagnosis and referral for those with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**
- **Develop the coordination of multidisciplinary treatment and support for children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.**

The call for action comes in advance of a special conference on how to challenge attitudes to alcohol in Scotland, to be held in Edinburgh this week.

*Unhappy Hours: A Culture of Binge Drinking and Violence* will explore what actually needs to happen to change the drink culture in Scotland; provide an understanding of the risks children and young people face with alcohol; consider how to realise robust alcohol policies to encourage an attitude of responsible drinking; and hear from specialist front line staff who will showcase current innovative practice from across Scotland.

The conference is being held at the Grosvenor Hotel, Edinburgh, on 14 February. Speakers include Jack Law, chief executive, Alcohol Focus Scotland, and Liz McMahon, service manager, Aberlour Childcare Trust.

For more information, go to [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/uhh](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/uhh)

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Note for editors:

- Children in Scotland is Scotland's national children's agency, bringing together voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals to improve the lives of Scotland's children and their families.

- \*The coalition includes: Jonathan Sher, Children in Scotland; Barbara O'Donnell, Alcohol Focus Scotland; Susan Robertson, Royal College of Midwives; Kelly Bayes, Aberlour Childcare Trust; Alastair Mackinnon, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Forward; and Tom Turner, Consultant Pediatrician.
- Children in Scotland served as the coordinators for this coalition, but the statements made and positions taken should be attributed to the coalition itself, not to Children in Scotland.