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CIS disappointed by Executive's action plan on alcohol

Children in Scotland is disappointed that the Scottish Executive's Updated Plan for Action on Alcohol Problems, published today, does not prioritise Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and fails to propose major actions that will reduce the harm caused to children by parental alcohol misuse. Paula Evans, policy and parliamentary information officer at Children in Scotland, said: "While we welcome the overall direction of the Executive's Updated Plan, we are disappointed that there was no explicit commitment to fully inform women that drinking during pregnancy could harm their baby."

She added: "We are calling on the Executive to commit to long-term research on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in Scotland, and to developing and implementing uniform guidelines for diagnosis and referral for those children born with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder."

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is the name for the various types and degrees of brain and nervous system damage caused by women who drink alcohol during pregnancy. The condition cannot be cured and the negative effects will follow these children into adulthood. Not all foetuses 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, said: "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 affected children get the treatment and services they deserve."

In the light of the Updated Plan for Action, Children in Scotland also suggests that the current practice of giving advice on family planning (and providing addiction recovery services) to those with drug addictions be extended to cover people with alcohol dependency.

An estimated 40,000 to 60,000 Scottish children are placed at risk by their parent's drug misuse – but up to 100,000 are affected negatively by parental alcohol misuse. *Kelly Bayes, head of policy and communications, Aberlour Childcare Trust, said: "While we welcome some of the actions proposed in the Plan for Action we are disappointed that there does not appear to be any additional resources specifically targeted at problematic parental alcohol use. Aberlour's recently published think tank report, *A Matter of Substance*, highlighted the fact that the impact on children living in families where there are alcohol problems is as significant as it is for those living with problematic parental drug use."

"We would have liked to have seen more emphasis on early intervention including, for example, advice and support through family planning, and greater recognition of the need for alcohol and drug services to be much more closely integrated."

Children in Scotland also urged the drinks industry to be more proactive in countering alcohol misuse, while calling on the Executive to do more to include children and young people in the debate about how to transform Scotland's alcohol culture.

Paula Evans said: "The alcohol industry bears some responsibility for three problems that adversely affect children in Scotland: drinking during pregnancy, parental alcohol misuse and underage drinking. The industry needs to make a much more robust and meaningful effort to help solve the problems caused by their products. A sense of social responsibility must accompany their pursuit of profits."

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* 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.

* From *A Matter of Substance*, Aberlour Childcare Trust. www.aberlour.org.uk