

## **Re: Neglect of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder must end**

Dear Editor

Aiton describes the recent UK government needs assessment for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) as 'a wake-up call to a wide range of health professionals'. More than just waking up professionals, substantial investment will be needed to improve from the current situation where, in the words of the UK government, 'provision of services for diagnosis and support of FASD is limited'.<sup>[1]</sup> The UK could do with following Australia's recent example in terms of commitment to FASD prevention, diagnosis and support.

Australia, like UK, has an estimated prevalence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) of over 2%.<sup>[2]</sup> Australia has recently responded by committing substantial investment of AUS\$37 million (£20 million) for FASD diagnostic services, as well as launching a new national awareness campaign.<sup>[3]</sup> In its recent (30 November) announcement, the Australian government describes how the awareness campaign will increase awareness of the risks of alcohol consumption in pregnancy among health professionals and women. Critically, a substantial proportion of the funds will be spent on boosting FASD services, so that individuals affected by this condition can get the diagnosis and the support that is vital to reduce longer term adverse outcomes.

The UK needs to make a proportionate investment to make sure that the needs of people with FASD are adequately supported, similar to that committed by the Australian government.

### **References**

[1] Department of Health and Social Care. Guidance: fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: health needs assessment. 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-health-needs-assessment/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-health-needs-assessment>

[2] Popova S, Lange S, Probst C, Gmel G, Rehm J. Estimation of national, regional, and global prevalence of alcohol use during pregnancy and fetal alcohol syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Global Health*. 2017 Mar 1;5(3):e290-9.

[3] Australia Department of Health. \$37.2 million for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder support and awareness. Media Release, 30 November 2021. <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/372-million-for-foetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-support-and-awareness> [Accessed 13/12/2021]

### **Conflicts of interest**

Cook and Mukherjee were expert contributors to the Department of Health and Social Care's report, 'Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Health Needs Assessment'. Cook and Mukherjee have received funding from the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership to estimate the prevalence of FASD in Greater Manchester, and from the Medical Research Council to develop an intervention for families affected by FASD. Mukherjee has received honoraria from speaking for various pharmaceutical companies related to ADHD including Takeda, Flynn and Janssen, as well as support for entry to an international conference related to ADHD. Mukherjee is also a non-paid advisor to various ASD, ADHD and FASD charities in England and Internationally (Australia and Europe). He has organised conferences and obtained non educational grants from various sources including Pharma and private hospitals. Cook is an unpaid member of the Steering Board to oversee Greater Manchester's Preventing Alcohol Exposed Pregnancy Programme.