

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Understanding the impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and what they need

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Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) describes a range of physical, cognitive, behavioural and neurodevelopmental impairments that can result from maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy. FASD is a global public health concern, and for those living with the condition, the effects are lifelong. A range of difficulties can be experienced as a result of impairments in brain function that affect memory, language and communication, as well as the ability to plan, pay attention, control inhibition and think flexibly.

As a consequence of these impairments, young people diagnosed with FASD are highly likely to have secondary disabilities, which can result in adverse life outcomes. Secondary disabilities include emotional, conduct and sleep disorders that are persistent over time, and decreased social skills which can result in victimisation, bullying and disrupted schooling. Over the longer term, people with FASD more commonly experience homelessness, unemployment, and alcohol and other drug use, difficulties with self-care and financial management and mental health problems.

Difficulty with attention and impulsive behaviour exposes young people to unsafe situations in which they are unable to determine the consequences or judge the effect of their behaviour, increasing their risk of trouble with the law. Children can be exposed to higher-than-normal levels of family dysfunction and environmental stressors and live in foster care or are adopted. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with FASD, these challenges are compounded by intergenerational trauma and complex disadvantage that has resulted from colonisation. This presentation will explore the impact of FASD for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and what they need to manage FASD in order to live healthy and fulfilling lives.