

UQ researcher cited in government report on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

3 December 2012

Research conducted by [Professor Heather Douglas](#) of The University of Queensland's [TC Beirne School of Law](#) has been used to support recommendations made in the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee report on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

Released on Thursday 29 November, the report, *FASD: The Hidden Harm*, contains 19 recommendations following the Committee's study of FASD prevention strategies, intervention needs and management issues.

Professor Douglas, an expert on FASD and the law, was cited extensively in Chapter 5 of the report regarding the management of FASD.

Her work supports the Committee's concerns that the reduced culpability of individuals with FASD may not be taken into account by judicial officers in court proceedings, resulting in inappropriate sentencing outcomes.

In their report the Committee stated it had 'received compelling evidence that legislating a clear and inclusive definition of disability would remove the confusion around the eligibility of individuals with FASD for support services and ensure equity before the law for defendants with FASD.'

The report follows a recent inquiry by the Education and Health Standing Committee of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly which identified FASD as the leading cause of non-genetic, intellectual disability in Australia and the Western World.

Professor Douglas was consulted during the West Australian inquiry which also found that those with an FASD are very likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system.

She has also contributed to the [Australian FASD Action Plan 2013-2016](#) produced by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. The Plan sets out a comprehensive program for preventing and responding to FASD over the next few years.

In addition, Professor Douglas is on the organising committee of FASD and the Law: A Conversation about Current Research and Practices, which will bring together international experts to discuss developments and ideas regarding FASD and the law ahead of the 5th International Conference on FASD in Vancouver, Canada next February.

A UQ interdisciplinary team was awarded \$64,000 from the Alcohol Education and Research Foundation to conduct a one-year research project into Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) last year.

The team, led by Professor Douglas, included UQ Centre for Clinical Research (UQCCR) Indigenous ethnographer and child health worker Dr Janet Hammill AO; UQCCR addictions expert Professor Wayne Hall; and author and advocate for parents and carers of individuals with FASD, Elizabeth Russell.

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