

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**DOCTORS AND DRINKWISE REMIND MUMS-TO-BE TO SAY NO TO ALCOHOL AS PANDEMIC PREGNANCIES SOAR**

With the Covid-19 birth rate surging<sup>1</sup>, DrinkWise and medical practitioners have joined forces to urge women to abstain from alcohol when planning a pregnancy, during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

The timely reminder is in support of International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day on September 9<sup>th</sup> – and follows recent government research that indicates 30% of Australian women report consuming alcohol while pregnant<sup>2</sup>.

Prenatal exposure to alcohol can reduce the size and weight of the fetal brain. It can also directly damage regions of a baby's brain that are critical for learning, memory, behaviour, language and decision-making.

Obstetrician Dr Vicki Woodward, who has seen the devastating effects of alcohol on new-born babies first-hand, believes all Australians need to know the facts.

"FASD is a preventable condition that can cause irreparable damage. This isn't just an issue that women should know about, it is just as important that their partners and families know about it too," said Dr Woodward.

"With July birth rates in Victoria up 20%<sup>1</sup>, it's an important time to remind anyone planning a pregnancy or pregnant about these important issues."

DrinkWise CEO Simon Strahan acknowledged that while rates of abstinence in pregnancy were going in the right direction (from 58% in 2013 to 70% in 2019), there is a lot more to be done.

"The statistics are heading in the right direction, with more and more women saying no to alcohol when pregnant, but we won't be satisfied until that number is 100%," said Strahan.

"DrinkWise is committed to educating the community around the importance of not drinking alcohol if planning a pregnancy, pregnant or breastfeeding."

Zoe Marshall, wife of NRL star Benji Marshall who had their second child just weeks ago, is supporting DrinkWise's mission to educate more Australians about the issue of FASD ahead of International FASD Awareness Day.

Marshall, who gave birth to her daughter, Ever, in June abstained from alcohol during her pregnancy and breastfeeding journey.

"Like many mums, I want to give my babies the best possible start in life, and for me, that involved not drinking alcohol when pregnant, and now while I breastfeed too,"

"The pandemic has presented so much added worry to pregnancy, birthing and those precious early new-born months for us mums, and even though I've been here before with

my first child Fox, it can be extremely overwhelming and hard to filter the relevant information,”

“Standing together and educating each other on important issues like FASD is the way forward. I’m delighted to help promote this important message” added Marshall.

-ENDS-

For more information on DrinkWise’s work in preventing FASD, or interviews with Dr Vicki Woodward, Zoe Marshall, or DrinkWise CEO, Simon Strahan, please contact:

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### Notes to editors:

<sup>1</sup> Source: [Births, deaths and marriages Victoria.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Source: AIHW, Measuring risky drinking according to the Australian alcohol guidelines.

### ABOUT DRINKWISE

DrinkWise is an evidence-based social change organisation dedicated to changing the Australian drinking culture to one that is safer and healthier. We do this through national education campaigns, partnerships with community leaders and organisations, and the development of practical strategies and resources that better support the community in relation to the responsible use of alcohol. DrinkWise is funded through voluntary industry contributions across the alcohol sector and has previously been in receipt of funding from both Coalition and Labor governments.

### ABOUT INTERNATIONAL FASD AWARENESS DAY

International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day is a global initiative designed to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy and the plight of individuals and families who are affected or have been impacted by the disorder.

September 9<sup>th</sup> was chosen so that on the ninth day of the ninth month of the year, the world will remember that during the nine months of pregnancy a woman should abstain from alcohol.