



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

**Children's
Commissioner**

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Children's Commissioner calls for FASD prevalence study

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The Children's Commissioner, Judge Andrew Becroft, is calling for a study into the prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

"We have spectacularly little statistical information about the incidence of FASD and our approach is based on guesstimates."

"We know, for instance, that those with FASD are significantly and disproportionately reflected in the crime statistics – at least overseas. We don't know what's happening in New Zealand because there has been no prevalence study."

"This is a major gap and we've got to fix it. Our office is calling for a prevalence study so that we know the extent of the issue in New Zealand."

September is FASD awareness month and Judge Becroft says the conversation about FASD is long overdue.

"There is a 2015 FASD Action Plan, and to be honest it's high on plan and low on action."

"We want the best start for all children in New Zealand, and we are not moving towards this goal if we continue to leave FASD out of the conversation."

Judge Becroft says we lag behind many western countries on the issue as "it puts a huge drain on health, education and criminal justice services."

"Kids with FASD are likely to disengage from education, they have greater health needs and they are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system."

"I worry that we may criminalise a cohort of young men in particular whose real issue is a cocktail of neurodevelopmental disorders, of which FASD is one."

"We simply haven't gotten to grips with the issue."

One way would be to follow the lead of initiatives like Te Ara Manapou in Hawkes Bay. "It's dealing with pregnant mothers and mothers in the first 1000 days after birth, particularly those mothers with alcohol and drug dependencies."

The self-referral rate for that programme is now 31%, grown from 7%. "It's a programme that uses local resources, local personnel, using central government funding, and it shows how important it is that those services actually connect with women and families who most need help."

“We need good, wraparound services that families and parents can access and we need good diagnosis, which at the moment is prohibitively expensive.”

ENDS

About the Office of the Children’s Commissioner

The Children’s Commissioner is an Independent Crown Entity, appointed by the Governor-General, carrying out responsibilities and functions set out in the Children’s Commissioner Act 2003. The Children’s Commissioner has a range of statutory powers to promote the rights, health, welfare, and wellbeing of children and young people from 0 to 18 years. These functions are undertaken through advocacy, public awareness, consultation, research, and investigations and monitoring. The role includes specific functions in respect of monitoring activities completed under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989. The Children’s Commissioner also undertakes systemic advocacy functions and investigates particular issues with potential to threaten the health, safety, or wellbeing of children and young people. The Children’s Commissioner has a particular responsibility to raise awareness and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children’s Commissioner’s activities must comply with the relevant provisions of the Public Finance Act 1989, Crown Entities Act 2004 and any other relevant legislation.