



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

**Children's
Commissioner**

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Drinking and drug use in pregnancy: It's not OK

"We have campaigns against drinking and driving. We have a powerful social campaign against family violence. But where is the focused campaign to stop drinking and drug use during pregnancy?" says Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft.

Judge Becroft was commenting on the illuminating document "It's never too early, never too late: A discussion paper on preventing youth offending in New Zealand" released today. The report, he says, raises a number of huge issues that need to be addressed by the Ministry of Health, families and the wider community.

One is the prevalence and impact of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

"The report from the Office of the Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman, reminds us that it is never too early to address the problem of youth offending. It doesn't shrink from insisting we need to start even before children are born.

"People say to me, 'what does it mean to address some of the factors leading to youth offending before birth? Addressing the reality of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is one simple example among many.

"While we have scant New Zealand prevalence studies, when I was in Western Australia recently my colleagues told me that 36% of the young people in Youth Justice Custodial Residences there have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, something that can only be confirmed by maternal confession. It is generally believed the level is probably twice that. There's no reason to believe the situation in New Zealand would be much different.

"We need to send a loud, clear and focused message and drinking and drug use in pregnancy is never OK. We need to work actively with pregnant women with drug and alcohol problems, women who have no support, who experience violence and where there are high levels of undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues. Their children will be at risk, and will be at risk of becoming youth offenders."

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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 Oranga Tamariki 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.