



### 'Marinated' babies lead to suicide disaster

The Western Australian by Tim Clarke, Legal Affairs Editor 5 July 2017 2:35AM

One of the world's leading researchers of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder says he is convinced the affliction is one of the main causes of the staggeringly high youth suicide rate in northern WA.

James Fitzpatrick says WA authorities have been "asleep at the wheel" in letting the Kimberley region become the world's worst region for babies being "marinated" by alcohol in the womb.

Dr Fitzpatrick's work in researching and reducing FASD in the Kimberley made him one of the finalists in the 2017 WA Australian of the Year.

He gave evidence yesterday at an inquest in Perth into the suicide deaths of 13 young people in the Kimberley in just over three years, the youngest aged 10.

The Telethon Kids Institute researcher said that for many in the region "the shortest route out of their own hell is to take their own lives".

He said while his research had proved there were ways of preventing FASD, they were not being introduced quickly enough, leading to fears he would be at another inquest into youth suicide in years to come.

"It is a preventable tragedy, and probably the most potent driver of social disadvantage and suicide in remote communities we are dealing with today," Dr Fitzpatrick said.

"These children were being marinated in grog. So I am arguing for bold and seismic community-endorsed, government-supported interventions."

Dr Fitzpatrick said that last week he assessed a 10-year-old boy for FASD who had told teachers and his grandfather he wanted to kill himself.

"His circumstance is tragically common and it's happening on our watch," Dr Fitzpatrick said.

Of nine children he evaluated on that visit to Derby, eight showed signs of FASD. Wider research show around one in five children in the Kimberley have FASD — with 14 per cent of them having talked of suicide.

Along with FASD expert Professor Carmela Pestell, Dr Fitzpatrick told Coroner Ros Fogliani the time had come to provide more resources to a strategy in the Fitzroy Valley.

The Making FASD History campaign, using alcohol restrictions, media campaigns, clinics, and midwife training, has reduced the rate of drinking by pregnant Fitzroy women from 55 per cent in 2010 per cent to 15 per cent this year.

"The Federal Government has committed \$4 million to scale up the strategy around Australia," Dr Fitzpatrick said.

"As yet the State Government have not significantly contributed to this issue, so that is what we need to happen next," he said.

He called for universal screening for FASD in at-risk people who come to the attention of child protection authorities or the justice system.

The inquest was told the financial cost to the community of just one person with FASD was \$2.5 million over their lifetime.

The average cost to screen children and adults for FASD was \$3000.

**If you or anyone you know is thinking about suicide call Lifeline on 13 11 14**