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## MEDIA RELEASE

15 February 2018

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Findings from a recent study by paediatricians and researchers from the Telethon Kids Institute has revealed the high rate of neurodevelopmental impairment in young people in youth detention in Western Australia.

Almost 90 percent of detainees suffered from some sort of impairment and over one third showed severe physical and mental impairment due to excessing alcohol consumption by their mothers during pregnancy.

‘We must be concerned about the risk that similar rates of neurodevelopmental impairment and foetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD) exist among young offenders in South Australia’, said Guardian for Children and Young People, Penny Wright.

‘This study highlights the vulnerability of young people, particularly Aboriginal youth, within the justice system and the importance of reliable diagnosis to identify their strengths and difficulties, in order to guide and improve their rehabilitation.

‘Young people with neuro-developmental impairments need early assessment and diagnosis, appropriate interventions and access to support.

‘Knowing if young people are affected by these disorders will enable our community to create more effective diversion programs when they come in contact with the youth justice system and better rehabilitation programs for those who end up in custody.

‘Diagnosing these disorders is a complex process requiring skilled practitioners but the investment would more than pay off in terms of diverting young people away from offending and helping those who do offend return as positive members of the community.

‘A submission made by the National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and Related Disorders to the South Australian Inquiry into the Sale and Consumption of Alcohol in 2013 called for all people entering prison or juvenile detention to be screened for FASD.

‘The submission noted that “Current cognitive behavioural approaches used both in custodial settings and in the community are ineffective for individuals with FASD and it is highly likely that this is a contributing factor in high rates of recidivism.”

‘Understanding the prevalence of FASD in youth detention in South Australia is a crucial step in ensuring effective interventions to promote support and rehabilitation.’

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