



**Playgroup  
Australia**

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ELECTION  
P O L I C Y  
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*Playgroup Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to their culture and to the elders both past and present.*

# Playgroup Australia

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Playgroup is a central element of the fabric of Australian society. Playgroup brings together children and their caregivers to play with and support each other. It enables local connections between families which support child development, parent to parent support and community cohesion and development. Playgroup has been a fundamental building block of Australian society for more than 45 years. As a universal service, playgroup is accessible to everyone in our community.

Currently we support over 8000 supported and community playgroups reaching 80% of Australian postcodes. In 2016 there were 1.18 million families which included a child aged under five (46% of all families). The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children estimates that 40% of Australian children aged under five attend a playgroup.

**Playgroup Australia calls for all political parties and parliamentarians to demonstrate that they value the contribution of playgroup to the Australian community by:**

- 01.** Supporting a national policy agenda for child, family and community wellbeing for 2020 — 2035 to include recognition of the role of play and playgroup for children’s development and family outcomes;
- 02.** Developing a whole of government ‘Early Years Strategy’ which recognises the importance of family support, early childhood development and play based early learning across home, community and early childhood settings, noting the important role of playgroup in home and community settings;
- 03.** Increasing investment for community playgroup (by an additional \$3m per annum ongoing);
- 04.** Establishing a national supported playgroup program which includes a focus on supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and families, and on growing intergenerational playgroups (\$3m per annum ongoing).
- 05.** Investing in the evidence base to build our understanding of early childhood and families, including the role of playgroup.

## Playgroup Australia Policy Priorities

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### **01. National Policy Agenda for Child, Family and Community Wellbeing**

Playgroup Australia supports the call by Families Australia for the development of a comprehensive new strategy to succeed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. Such a national policy agenda should go beyond child protection and give strong priority to early prevention with a focus on enhancing the wellbeing of children, families and communities experiencing the greatest vulnerability.

Playgroup Australia calls for this strategy to value play as a fundamental right of all children and to adequately resource playgroup as a vital building block of child, family and community wellbeing.

### **02. Developing an 'Early Years Strategy' which recognises the importance of Playgroup**

Playgroup Australia supports the call by Early Learning Everyone Benefits for a whole of government 'Early Years Strategy'. Such a strategy needs to focus on the needs of families with young children, including the role of the full spectrum of playgroup models, alongside formal early learning environments, as a universal service that should be adequately resourced and available to all Australian families. The policy will need to enshrine the importance of play-based learning; parent understanding of child development; and the important role of parents' skill and involvement in play within home and community settings, as well as in early childhood settings.

### **03. Increase Investment for Community Playgroups**

Community playgroups are established and led by their participants. In this age of increasing pressure on the financial and time resources of families, more needs to be done to support community playgroups including those families who undertake volunteer roles in their local playgroup. The cost of venues and resources for playgroups is an increasing barrier to playgroup sustainability.

This additional investment will target decreasing the financial barriers to community playgroup participation for families and increase the range and reach of support, by state and territory playgroup organisations, to community playgroup. This will ensure that they continue to be vital community building blocks across Australia.

### **04. Establish a National Supported Playgroup Program**

Ongoing funding for the introduction of a national supported playgroup program would recognise that some vulnerable and disadvantaged families experience barriers to participating in universal community playgroups. Evidence shows supported playgroups encourage stronger parenting skills, increased school readiness, greater levels of family support and reduced welfare dependency. Potential target populations include mothers with post natal depression, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families living with disability, specific gender, age or cultural cohorts and targeted place-based groups. This level of funding would support around 80-100 new supported playgroups nationally.

Intergenerational playgroups provide positive outcomes for older people in residential settings as well as for the participating families and children. Recognising the unique needs involved in supporting frail older people as well as young children, intergenerational playgroups would be a specific focus of a national supported playgroup program.

### **05. Investment in Research to Build an National Evidence Base for Playgroups**

The evidence is clear that investment in early childhood leads to savings across the lifespan. We need to continue to grow our understanding of what works for young children and their families. Playgroup Australia supports the calls by ARACY for more and better data about children, including about playgroup, and a national survey of parenting practices and beliefs.

Playgroup  
Australia,  
a valued  
partner  
connecting  
communities  
in Australia

## ‘Creating a Village through Play

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Playgroups are supported by State and Territory Playgroup organisations and Playgroup Australia. This support is essential to the ongoing availability of quality playgroups throughout Australia. Playgroup is a flexible model which responds to the needs of individuals and communities and ranges from play events and community playgroups through to increasingly targeted and more intensively supported playgroups for identified families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

### **Research has shown that playgroup participation:**

- Increases children’s readiness for school (Gregory et al 2016);
- Improves parental outcomes, including parents in disadvantaged families (Hancock et al 2016);
- Is associated with community capacity-building and higher levels of community trust. (McShane et al 2016);
- Results in children performing better on all Australian Early Development Census measurements including physical, social, emotional, language communication and cognitive development (Gregory et al 2016).

As a universal service, playgroup can provide a soft entry to services for families with additional needs, including pathways into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Early Childhood Early Intervention if required.

Ensuring good family and child outcomes requires an integrated policy and program response which values and supports the role of the family as the basic unit of social capital and the role of play in achieving significant developmental outcomes for children.

# About Playgroup Australia

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Playgroup Australia is the peak body representing and supporting state and territory playgroup organisations (STOs) and community playgroups across Australia. With approximately 100,000 participating families, Playgroup Australia is one of Australia's largest volunteer movements.

The playgroup movement has been providing and supporting playgroups for more than 40 years through volunteerism and the outreach work of each STO in ensuring that all families with young children in Australia have access to quality playgroups.

## Key Facts

- Children who attend playgroups are half as likely to have developmental vulnerabilities when they start primary school
- Over 20% of the most hard to reach groups of children, indigenous children and children with a language other than English, attend playgroups;
- Children under 3 learn through play – Playgroups are the only community platform that provides this
- The benefits of playgroups are seen for all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development, and communication.
- Child abuse can't be solved by child protection and welfare services alone. It requires population-based measures and the strengthening of protective factors such as parent-child attachment and social support. (Scott, 2012). Many welfare and family support agencies use supported playgroups to work closely with the family unit. [Lambert 2015].

# Playgroup Australia Creating a Village through Play



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