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**New research finds Australian children who attend ‘Playgroups’ are more likely to be developmentally on track**

New research has found Australian families must be supported to prioritise play in the playgroup setting, with children who attend a ‘Playgroup’ 47 percent more likely to be developmentally on track when they start primary school.

The report [Playgroups post-pandemic, a snapshot of playgroup attendance and child development](#), released today found that children who attend playgroups experience protection against developmental vulnerability and have a head start on being developmentally on track across the five Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains.

“The first 1000 days of a child’s life are absolutely critical to building solid foundations for their life-long development, and this data examination found those who attended Playgroup increased their odds of scoring higher across physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication and general knowledge domains,” Professor Sally Brinkman from the University of South Australia said.

“This report shows how vital playgroups are in tipping the odds in favour of children starting school on track and ready to learn. It provides the hard data that playgroup is a critical stepping stone in the establishment of strong developmental foundations, Playgroup Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia O’Donovan said.

“It also highlights that Playgroup attendance delivers benefits for children and families without prejudice, regardless of income bracket or where they live.


“Playgroups have a fifty-year presence in the Australian early years’ ecosystem. They are the gateway to a village of early years support. They create social connections and community networks, and their value as a contributor to social capital cannot be overstated.

“We recognise that parents face on-going challenges, balancing work and family life.

“We must explore new ways to support families to engage in play with their child and participate in playgroups as a social connector and learning enabler in early childhood.

“As a nation, we must acknowledge that play is serious business for children and provides significant benefits that will ripple throughout their lives. These benefits include the capacity to engage socially in their community, engage successfully with education, and with society as economic participants and contributors for decades to come.

“Families need time to invest in play as a critical activity that supports their children’s lifelong health and wellbeing. World-class paid parental leave is an important enabler in this strategy.

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“This is why we are committed to working with the Government to explore creative ways to encourage families to engage with playgroups with their young children during these important early years.”

Minister for Social Services Amanda Rishworth said since coming to Government Labor’s \$12.4 million investment into playgroups and toy libraries has resulted in more than 27 new intergenerational playgroups established nationally.

More broadly, the funding will enable the establishment of an additional 273 new playgroups over the next three years to meet community needs.

“The thousands of playgroups and toy libraries across the country provide welcoming spaces for children and their families to learn to love learning and bond through play,” Minister Rishworth said.

“Our Government is committed to a better future for all Australians, and that’s why we prioritised Federal funding for Playgroup Australia to expand to new locations to support families with multiple and complex needs.

“At the heart of this is Australia’s children. We want them to thrive, to love to learn and to help parents and carers have time to connect with the community, and this is exactly what the Helping Families Learn and Grow with Playgroups measure continues to do.”

“We look forward to working with Minister Rishworth and the Government to ensure play is elevated to the serious business this new research shows it to be,” Playgroup Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia O’Donovan said.