



Playgroup Australia

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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.

Glossary

TERM OR ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
AECD	Australian Early Developmental Census
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BETTER START	A Federal Government Program providing funding for children with a disability. Playgroup Australia is funded by DSS to promote the Better Start Program through holding events
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS	Local playgroup organised by local community parents and/or carers
CPS	Children and Parenting Support [referring to a DSS Contract held by Playgroup Australia]
DEX	DSS Data Exchange
DSS	Department of Social Services
EO	Executive Officer
MACH (Nurses)	Maternal Child and Family Health (Nurses)
MP	Member of Parliament
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
PLAYCONNECT	A Supported Playgroup funded by DSS designed for families who have a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder symptoms
PLAYGROUP AUSTRALIA	Not-for-profit National Peak Body Representative for Playgroup State & Territory Organisations
STOs	State & Territory Organisations
SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS	Playgroups administered and led by paid coordinators



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About Playgroup Australia

Playgroup Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that was established in 1984 as the national representative body for our members, the Playgroup State & Territory Organisations (STOs). In 1984 Playgroup Australia was called the “Playgroup Council” and operated with volunteer assistance only. Today Playgroup Australia employs a CEO and staff, and is the national peak body of a Federation that is made up of our Playgroup STO members.

Playgroup Australia Objectives



**Long-term
Strategic Planning**



Advocacy



**Contract
Management**



Research



**Support Services
for STOs**

Playgroup Australia supports the UN Convention on the Rights of Children. Playgroup Australia would like to highlight the UN Convention reference to the right of all children to play and to live in an environment that is free from violence and the threat of violence. We acknowledge that principled, courageous and valued-based leadership is essential to support the rights of children.

Currently the Department of Social Services (DSS) contracts Playgroup Australia as the national representative for the STOs for three national level programs.



Playgroup
Australia

At a glance

Playgroup Australia is a Public Company Limited by Guarantee.

The member organisations of Playgroup Australia are the STOs.

The Playgroup Australia Board is comprised of both STO linked Directors and Independent Directors.

Our purpose

To connect families and communities to raise children through play.

Our vision

All young children in Australia access playgroups.

Our strategy

Support and connect STOs to build strong communities through high-quality playgroups across Australia.

“Australian Playgroups epitomise many archetypal Australian values like mateship, pulling your weight, lending a hand, helping out our friends and are a reflection of our diversity of people and culture”

Quote by Kirsten Cross (EO ACT Playgroups) from the 40 Years of Playgroup book





What drives us?

Playgroup State & Territory Organisations (STOs) provide support services to playgroups across Australia. The role of Playgroup Australia is to support our STOs, and to demonstrate leadership in activities such as national level advocacy and commissioning research. Playgroup Australia has developed core values that guide how we seek to represent playgroups at a national level. Our core values when representing playgroups are
01. Reconciliation,
02. Community,
03. Inclusiveness and
04. Peer Support.

01.

Reconciliation

We recognise the heritage and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the need for action which advances reconciliation and justice for Indigenous Australians.

02.

Community

We understand that a sense of community plays an important role in the development of children and families' sense of connection, belonging and security and we value the strengths that individuals and families contribute to the wellbeing of their community.

03.

Inclusiveness

We believe that diversity, including cultural and family diversity, contribute to a rich and vibrant society and so value and promote acceptance of diversity in our work with children and families.

04.

Peer support

We believe that peer support is an integral part of the community playgroup experience allowing participants to share experience, learn from each other and feel connected.

How we behave

The effectiveness of Playgroup Australia depends upon how well we work with our State & Territory Organisation (STO) members. In 2017, the Playgroup Australia Board worked with the STO Chairs to develop a set of values that have been adopted by Playgroup Australia representatives (staff and directors) to guide how we interact with STO representatives (staff and boards).

When Playgroup representatives interact with our STOs members our values are to engage in a manner that is: Friendly, Future-focused, Flexible and Fun.

01 Friendly



We work together as a team to achieve common goals. We are approachable, collaborative and respectful of others. We support each other and recognise and embrace our differences.

02 Future-focused



We have a realistic vision and strive every day to reach it. We plan our work and set achievable, measurable goals and objectives. The decisions we make today are for a better tomorrow for all our stakeholders.

03 Flexible



We are agile and responsive to the needs of people around us. We act with a sense of purpose and urgency. We respect the balance between work and life.

04 Fun



We enjoy what we do and this reflects in the quality of our work. We take time out to celebrate our success. We are creative and innovative in everything we do.

Community Playgroups and their Benefits

A Playgroup involves a group of mums, dads, grandparents and caregivers coming together with their babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers to engage with the children in interactive and fun play-based activities. Playgroups are a social forum providing numerous benefits for parents/caregivers and children.

Local Community Playgroups are primarily funded and run by volunteer parents and carers. Therefore, the most important ingredient of a quality Community Playgroup is the time, effort and resources of the many families who attend them.

How do State & Territory Organisations Support Community Playgroups?

Playgroup State and Territory Organisations (STOs) offer volunteer Community Playgroup organisers a range of support benefits. For example, STOs help volunteers negotiate venue costs and assist them in developing their coordination, facilitation, and administration skills. STOs also help local playgroups with promotional activities (i.e. promoting a newly formed Community Playgroup). STOs provide Community Playgroups with a range of ideas for play-based activities designed to advance early learning and meet the varying developmental needs of children. STOs also help local playgroups develop valued social/peer support networks. In delivering support to Community Playgroups over a 40-year period, STOs have developed very high levels of trust within local communities across Australia.

The STO Community Playgroup support model is a cost-effective volunteer service delivery model. Every STO recognises that the existence of Community Playgroups depends upon the goodwill of local playgroup volunteers. Playgroup Australia and STOs are passionate advocates for ensuring that the administrative requirements of running Community Playgroups have only a minimal burden for the volunteers.

History of Community Playgroups

The playgroup movement grew out of an increasing awareness during the 1960's and 1970's of the value of play and social interaction in children's development. During this time there was also a growing appreciation of the importance of creating peer support networks for parents and caregivers. Community Playgroups became a desirable activity for parents/caregivers with young children, and by 1975 every State and Territory had set up a Playgroup Association (now our State & Territory Organisations or STOs). STOs have provided support to millions of Australian families who have attended Community Playgroups since the 1970's. This year there were more than

150,000 Community Playgroup sessions supported by our STOs and hosted at venues such as church halls, public parks, local government buildings and wherever else a venue could be found in metropolitan, regional and rural communities.

Over the last two decades there have been significant societal changes that have had an impact upon Community Playgroup participation. For example, safe child appropriate venues are becoming increasingly more expensive to hire. STOs provide support to local Community Playgroups by helping them find child appropriate venues, and by advocating to local venues on behalf of the playgroups for low cost hire. Demographic changes have required STOs to innovate their Community Playgroup support model. A high proportion of women now participate in the workforce, and Australian society has become more multicultural and diverse. Working patterns have also changed as demonstrated by a significant Fly in Fly Out (FIFO) workforce. STOs support diverse types of Community Playgroups including father playgroups, intergenerational playgroups, Rainbow playgroups, indigenous playgroups, FIFO workers playgroups, and playgroups for a range of language specific and culturally diverse groups. Every Community Playgroup is unique, and reflects the local community and the personalities of participants. Our Community Playgroup model values diversity.



Community Playgroup Benefits for Children, Families and Communities

Benefits of Play

Children participate in playgroups at a stage when their brain is growing. During the act of play, children develop a sense of meaning of the world around them because play encourages children to actively think, plan, create, experience, investigate, learn and physically interact.

Positive Education Outcomes

Community Playgroups are often a child's first educational experience outside the home. In playgroups children learn through playing in a social setting where they simultaneously interact with other children and adults. The quality of children's early relationships and levels of trust with adults influences future development and learning. An example of this impact is children who experience regular play opportunities in a nurturing social environment such as playgroups, on average, have better later life educational outcomes. Research studies have found that children who attend playgroups are less likely to have developmental vulnerabilities when they start primary school and children who have participated in playgroups enter their first year of school with more highly developed social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills (Telethon Institute, 2016; 2017).

Social support for Parents and Carers

When facing parenting challenges, isolation or development issues, playgroup can be a valuable source of social support. Playgroup allows parents to take time out of a busy life, to slow down and enjoy playing with their child, to watch and delight in the amazing steps their child takes while making sense of the world around them. Parents and carers connect and bond, and a common topic of discussion is how to manage common parenting challenges. The Community Playgroup experience helps reduce feelings of anxiety and isolation for many parents and carers.

Playgroups Strengthen Communities

Community Playgroups make a unique contribution to Australian society – and have done so for more than 40 years. When our STOs support Community Playgroups across the country, they are also supporting one of Australia's largest volunteer movements. Volunteers are the backbone of a healthy community because they willingly give up their time without an expectation of financial gain to contribute to the common good. Community Playgroups expose many young parents to the concept of volunteerism and in many cases becoming a playgroup volunteer is a stepping stone to other

volunteering and community engagement roles (especially with one's children).

Parents and carers who set up and run local playgroups also benefit from development opportunities (e.g. learning how to facilitate a group) and greater community connection.

Community Playgroups are also a social forum where both adults and children make life-long friendships.

“Learning to read and write doesn't begin at kindergarten or the first grade. Developing language and literacy skills begins at birth through loving interactions – sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, and talking to one another”

Quote from Playgroup South Australia publication
STATE OF PLAY magazine
September 2017 issue

Supported Playgroups

Supported Playgroups, not to be confused with Community Playgroups, are initiated and led by a paid facilitator (often an early childhood educator/teacher, family support worker or other human service professional). The paid facilitator coordinates the playgroup sessions and oversees the planning and activities.

Supported Playgroups are established to address an identified need or vulnerability within a community and many Supported Playgroups have been designed to provide support and guidance for children and families who would not otherwise attend a Community Playgroup.

While most Supported Playgroups are funded by State & Territory governments, Playgroup Australia is contracted by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to administer PlayConnect Programs across Australia (To find out more see pages 20-22). PlayConnect is a Supported Playgroup program delivered by our STOs that is designed to provide support to families with young children who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or who present with ASD-like characteristics.



Letter from our Chair



From our market scan, it is quite clear that ‘play’ is a big and growing concept. Every year there is more evidence confirming the benefits of playgroup. The recent Telethon Kids Institute research, for example, concluded that children who attend playgroup are twice as ready when they start school.

It is for this reason, that the federation is putting forward a bold vision of making playgroups accessible to all families across Australia. We see ourselves as integral across the entire educational sector and our CEOs are making great progress in their engagements.

“It takes a village to raise a child”, and the federation of Playgroup organisations plays a significant role in creating communities (those villages). We’ve seen consistent examples of playgroups’ parents, grandparents, carers and whole communities benefiting long term from the initial connections that playgroups make.

It is clear to us, that playgroups perform a critical role in defining no less than the future success of Australia itself. It is for this reason that we are passionate in ensuring Playgroup’s success across Australia.

Our purpose is underpinned by our culture, which is the driving force for our overall strategic success. In 2017, the Playgroup Australia Board worked intimately with all the Chairs and CEOs of each State and Territory to embed a culture of collaboration, innovation, as well as, fun, and we will make culture an integral part of our strategy.

As part of our strategic 2017 reset, the federation engaged in a three-step strategy development process to position us for success over the next five to ten years. This strategy is expected to be in place in the 2018/19 financial year.

Throughout the year, Playgroup Australia also worked closely with the Australian Institute of Company Directors to continuously adapt governance improvements, with many directors receiving further training, where it proved beneficial.

We took the opportunity to look at the whole performance of the federation and actively questioned what is working and what is not and made deliberate improvements to set the federation up for long term strategic success.

With our member Chairs and CEOs, I have seen no shortage of passion. We believe that with a strong focus on enabling more collaboration, innovation and to do so in a safe and enjoyable manner, the Playgroup federation will make a significant impact on Australian society and communities in years to come, as we have done in the past.

Speaking of past service, this period has seen the retirement of long serving Chair Pam Cahir, Company Secretary Michael O’Hehir, former CEO Anne Marie Mioche and Director Austin Begg.

Looking ahead to 2018 we have an exciting program of engagements as we look toward making playgroup accessible to all families and communities across Australia.

Yours Sincerely

Taylor Tran
Chair Playgroup Australia

Letter from our CEO



Throughout 2017, Playgroup Australia has been planning for the future with our State & Territory Organisations (STOs) members. In an environment where our funding is only guaranteed until 2020 and the playgroup landscape is rapidly evolving, it is important that we develop robust and future-orientated playgroup strategies that not only ensure sustainability, but also encourage every Australian child to attend a playgroup.

The history of Community Playgroups is worthy of celebration. Every year thousands of Community Playgroup volunteers dedicate their time and efforts to help out at their local playgroup. For over 40 years our State & Territory Organisations (STOs) have provided highly valued support to playgroup volunteers, and each STO has developed a refined volunteer support service delivery model. Millions of Australian families have benefited from the playgroup support and programs delivered by our STOs, and our STOs have developed deep levels of community trust. The STO volunteer support model is unique, flexible to local conditions and cost effective. It is from this platform that we are planning the future of the Playgroup Federation.

During 2017 Playgroup Australia worked closely with STOs on a series of strategic exercises designed to understand future trends (e.g. increasing venue cost, incentives for volunteers) with the goal of developing a Community Playgroup support model that will be the foundation of high impact Community

Playgroup support ten years from now. We identified there is scope to develop a greater appreciation of the value of our volunteer powered Community Playgroup model with key stakeholders, and especially within Federal Government Departments. This financial year, our \$5.5m federally funded Community Playgroup contract supported a volunteer model that has delivered approximately \$160m worth of services across Australia.

On behalf of everyone from the Playgroup federation I would like to thank the Department of Social Services (DSS) for their continued support. In all of my communications with DSS staff there has been a strong appreciation of the value of our Community Playgroup model and associated playgroup initiatives.

In May 2017, DSS granted a two year extension for the PlayConnect contract. The PlayConnect contract funds 41 Supported Playgroups across Australia. PlayConnect playgroups are designed to support families who have a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) like symptoms. Playgroup

Australia and the STOs have been working on further refining PlayConnect and setting up the program so it will be a high impact complementary services for the NDIS that is currently being rolled out across the country.

Furthermore, we would also like to thank DSS for also renewing the Better Start contract until 2019. In 2016-17 the Better Start Centre funded 68 fun events across Australia that promoted inclusiveness for children with a disability that were attended by over 64,400 families. Our Better Start events are well placed to promote disability services and the NDIS in the future.

Playgroup Australia will continue to work diligently with our STOs towards our long term vision that every Australia family with a young child young child is able to access a Playgroup. If we achieve this objective, then local communities across Australia will be even more vibrant and our children's future will be brighter.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Anthony Ryan
Interim CEO Playgroup Australia

Our key partner – the Department of Social Services

The majority of our national level funding is provided by the Department of Social Services (DSS). DSS funds Playgroup Australia to deliver three national level contracts.

1. **The Children & Parenting Support Contract is funded until June 2020**
2. **The PlayConnect Contract is funded until June 2019**
3. **The Better Start Contract is funded until June 2019**

All three contracts provide support so that families and children across Australia benefit from a playgroup experience.

Playgroup Australia would like to thank DSS for their support. We appreciate that DSS works collaboratively with us. We also appreciate it when DSS staff members discuss their own personal positive experiences with our playgroup model that they have had with their children.

Playgroup South Australia

HIGHLIGHTS

International Playgroup Leadership – Playgroup South Australia and the Pacific Early Age Reading and Learning Project

Playgroup South Australia staff have partnered with The World Bank Group and Global Partnerships for Education on a project that will set up playgroups on the Pacific Island of Tuvalu. Playgroup South Australia EO Carley Jones visited Tuvalu in February 2017 to introduce the



Children in Tuvalu enjoying a playgroup experience set up by Playgroup South Australia CEO Carley Jones

small island to the concept of playgroups to the Tuvalu Government and to scope the capacity of preschools to host playgroups. In May 2017 Carley Jones returned to Tuvalu and commenced training locals on how to establish and deliver playgroups. Some locals travelled for up to 24 hours by boat to attend sessions that provided practical advice, information and playgroup resources. Sensory play is a new concept in Tuvalu, and the Playgroup South Australia initiative is already having a positive impact on the children of Tuvalu.

www.playgroupsa.com.au

Community Playgroups: The Children & Parenting Support Contract

The Department of Social Services (DSS) provides funding to Playgroup Australia for Community Playgroups to be supported in a way that strengthen relationships, supports families and improves children’s wellbeing. Playgroup Australia has sub-contracting arrangements with each State & Territory Organisation to provide Community Playgroup support.

Under the CPS Contract, the STOs are required to report information into the DSS Data Exchange (DEX). Several STOs made significant IT investments to increase the compatibility between their data collection and the DEX requirements. Playgroup Australia also invested in a data conversion tool designed to help STOs transform their data into a format that would be compatible with the DEX data submission requirements.

In our July-December 2016 DEX submission we reported that there were 95,250 clients attending 6,192 different community playgroups across Australia that our STOs support. It is likely that in our submission to DSS that we have significantly underestimated the number of Community Playgroup clients that we are supporting. While STOs provide support to

playgroup volunteer leaders, Community Playgroups are staffed by volunteers. Many Community Playgroups are organised as informal gatherings in a comfortable child safe setting, and are attended by some families who are not interested in filling out regular paperwork requirements. In other words, a lot of people attend our grass roots volunteer led Community Playgroups, and under our volunteer model it is not possible for us to track every participant attending and receiving valuable benefits. The majority of clients who are recorded in the table below are adult participants. It is likely that there are 50,000 children participating in Community Playgroups that have not been included in the recent DEX submissions.

PlayConnect: Supporting Families with Additional Needs

PlayConnect is a cornerstone Supported Playgroup program providing highly valued support to families who have a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or ASD-like characteristics.

PlayConnect playgroups are facilitated by a State & Territory Organisation (STO) employed development worker in a safe, supportive and friendly environment that has been specifically designed for young children with an ASD or ASD-like characteristics to experience rewarding play activities and to learn through play.

During PlayConnect sessions, parents are encouraged to actively participate in activities such as setting up the play environment, being involved in play activities, suggesting ideas for activities, tidying up, and talking and sharing ideas with other parents.

PlayConnect playgroups are located throughout Australia.

PlayConnect Addressing Developmental Needs

Play in a social environment can be challenging for children with ASD due to their difficulties with communication, managing change and understanding others.

During playgroup sessions, parents, carers and children participate in a variety of play activities and experiences specifically structured to the

needs of children with ASD. PlayConnect sessions focus on the key developmental needs of children with ASD such as:

- communication
- sensory processing
- play skill development

Support for Families

PlayConnect offers families the opportunity to:

- connect with resources in the local area and through the Helping Children with Autism package
- gain support from other parents
- support other parents
- provide rewarding play experiences for their child
- be part of their wider community
- develop leadership and organisational skills.

“Parents need to know they are not alone. My PlayConnect group is run by a highly dedicated and knowledgeable team who provide support to families navigating disability services for the first time, who are waiting for a diagnosis for their child, or are exploring the various intervention avenues. Parents and carers who attend PlayConnect all face similar everyday challenges with their children, and PlayConnect provides an opportunity for these families to establish important informal support networks and friendships.”

Quote by a mum with three children attending PlayConnect

Playgroup Queensland

Locations of active PlayConnect playgroups

	Metro	Regional	Partnership
ACT	Scullin 2614 Namadgi 2913	-	Playgroup ACT
NSW	Currans Hill 2567 Dapto 2530 St Marys 2760 West Gosford 2250	Bathurst 2795 Casino 2470 Dubbo 2830 Orange 2800 Parkes 2870 Taree 2430 Wagga Wagga 2650	Playgroup NSW
NT	-	Marrara 0812	Playgroup NT
QLD	Ascot 4007 Booval 4304 Holland Park 4121	Cairns 4870 Rockhampton 4700 Townsville 4800	Playgroup QLD
SA	Aldinga Beach 5173 Parafield Gardens 5107	Mount Gambier 5290	Playgroup SA
TAS	-	Invermay 7248 Hobart 7000 Penguin 7316	Playgroup TAS
VIC	Laverton 3028 Brighton 3186 x3 Ferntree Gully 3156 Coburg 3058 Werribee 3030 x2 Geelong 3219 Glen Waverley 3150 Sunbury 3429 Thomastown 3074	Bairnsdale 3875 Romsey 3434	Playgroup VIC
WA	South Lake 6164 Forrestfield 6058 Balcatta 6021 Mullaloo 6027	-	Playgroup WA

HIGHLIGHTS

- The delivery of a 4WD vehicle to Mt Isa that will be used for both the Playgroups in the Park initiative and the delivery of Sing&Grow sessions to remote communities.
- Successful one-off \$40,000 funding received from Queensland Government's Department of Education and Training for the development of a 30-second television advertisement for Domestic Violence Week. The advertisement was used by free-to-air television stations in Queensland as a community service announcement; it was also uploaded on to Playgroup Queensland's website and distributed to members via social media.
- Collaborated with an aged care provider to launch intergenerational playgroups in Queensland.
- Launched Playgroup Queensland's first LGBTIQ Playgroup in Cairns under the Accessible Playgroup Initiative; the group has since transitioned to a Community Playgroup with over 15 families and 30 children attending each week.

www.playgroupqueensland.com.au

PlayConnect

The PlayConnect Capacity Building Project

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is currently being rolled out across Australia. PlayConnect is a program that is well placed to sit alongside and provide value adding support to the NDIS. For example, there is scope for PlayConnect to provide valued support for families with a child who has not yet received an official diagnosis, and to be a family support for families with a child with special needs who may not be eligible for NDIS funding.

During 2017, Playgroup Australia and the STOs strategically reviewed the PlayConnect program, with the view of developing innovative high quality nationally standardised PlayConnect materials.

A working group was formed to oversee this project. Representatives from Playgroup Australia and STOs participated in a resource mapping exercise (e.g. collating all the resources being used across the STOs), and a benchmarking exercise.

As part of the PlayConnect Capacity Building project a two day workshop was held in Adelaide that included presentations from ASD experts.

“A large outdoor playgroup was held in Glenelg during National Playgroup Week. Over 500 families attended this event. The event included activities such as a sensory walk, a box city, a mobile craft stations, sensory play stations, music and dancing, and a baby play area.”

Playgroup Northern Territory

HIGHLIGHTS

Playgroup NT worked closely with the Northern Territory Government on a pop-up playgroup initiative which included a school holiday activity program for children birth-12yrs. The initiative targeted the growing number of young families based in and around the Darwin CBD where there are few suitable venues available for playgroup activities and was held in the Darwin Botanic Gardens. The sessions were extremely popular and well attended with NT Government providing the shade structures, furniture and toys and Playgroup NT programming the activities and supplying the craft. A van was purchased and is currently being branded to facilitate further pop-up playgroups. Pop-up playgroups will be supported in different locations to engage geographically isolated families, dads, grandparents, Aboriginal communities and nursing home residents in community playgroup activities.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Playgroup NT supported a Teddy Bears Picnic at George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens. Over 3,000 families attended this event
- 350 families attended a Playgroup NT sponsored Palmerston Childrens Week event held at the Palmerston Recreation Centre YMCA

www.playgroupnt.com.au



Better Start Events

The Department of Social Services (DSS) funds Playgroup Australia to hold community events to promote the Better Start package.

The Better Start Package

The Better Start initiative provides access to early intervention funding for families/ carers with children up to the age of seven with a confirmed diagnosis on one of the following disabilities:

- *Cerebral palsy*
- *Deafblindness*
- *Down syndrome*
- *Fragile X*
- *Hearing impairment*
- *Sight impairment*
- *Prader-Willi syndrome*
- *Williams syndrome*
- *Angelman syndrome*
- *Kabuki syndrome*
- *Smith-Magenis syndrome*

- *CHARGE syndrome*
- *Rett's Disorder*
- *Microcephaly*
- *Cri du Chat syndrome*
- *Cornelia de Lange syndrome*

Children under the age of six registered with Better Start can access up to \$6,000 to pay for early intervention services such as audiology, occupational therapy, orthoptics, physiotherapy, psychology and speech pathology.

Events Promoting the Better Start Package

Between 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017, Playgroup Australia funded the State and Territory Organisations (STOs) to deliver 68 events that promoted the Better Start package across Australia, including 32 events that were held in regional and remote locations.

Playgroup Queensland attracted more than 3000 people to the National Playgroup Week's series of Messy Play Days in Ipswich, Redland-Bayside, Sunshine Coast, Rockhampton, Cairns and Mt Isa.

Number of Better Start events held

	Number of events held
ACT	4
NSW	11
NT	10
QLD	8
SA	4
TAS	14
VIC	10
WA	7
Total	68

The 68 Better Start events catered for a range of ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds offering an inclusive experience through various themes and sensory experiences. In 2016-17, over 64,800 children from 64,402 families attended a range of events promoting a positive playgroup experience for children with additional needs, many for the first time.

Over 439 local disability support agencies were invited to attend the Better Start

events, with a total of 281 representatives from key organisations from the following disability sectors:

- NDIA
- Factor X
- Autism
- Down Syndrome
- Global Disability
- Learning Disability
- Physical Disability

Number and Types of Information Packs Distributed at Better Start Events

	Information packs distributed
Better Start Packs	5,166
Disability Services Packs	2,479
Community Playgroup Packs	7,029
Total	14,674

HIGHLIGHTS

Playgroup WA completed a playgroup mapping exercise in the Great Southern and South West. In the Perth metropolitan area, Playgroup WA completed playgroup mapping of 72% of the Community Playgroups. This has provided insight into venue usage, leasing and hiring arrangements and costs by Local Government Area. Whilst Playgroup WA was already aware there was a great variation in venue arrangements and costs, the mapping exercise has provided Playgroup WA with additional hard data to draw upon and will guide future decision making and strategies.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Over 5,000 families attended a Playgroup WA sponsored event held at Whiteman Park
- Over 3000 people attended the Annual Playgroup Fun day for members
- Playgroup WA participated in several major regional events including the Kalgoorlie Kidsfest and the Wagin Woolorama

www.playgroupwa.com.au

Celebrating National Playgroup Week

Every year Playgroup Australia and the State & Territory Organisations (STOs) celebrate National Playgroup Week. The purpose of National Playgroup Week is to raise awareness of the role of playgroups in providing parent support and to promote the significance of play for young children.

This week is also an opportunity to celebrate the wonderful work undertaken all over Australia by dedicated parent and carer volunteers to keep playgroups running, and an opportunity to raise general awareness about playgroups.

In 2017, National Playgroup Week was celebrated from Sunday 26 March to Sunday 2 April. Both Playgroup Australia and the STOs held events during National Playgroup Week.

National Playgroup Week Events

STOs held National Playgroup Week events in a wide variety of locations of metropolitan and regional locations including:

- Bathurst
- Mudgee
- Morpeth
- Rockhampton
- Ipswich
- Cairns
- Mt Isa
- Bendigo
- Geelong
- Ballarat

Engagement with elected federal parliament members

On 29th March 2017, Playgroup Australia presented members of parliament with a Playgroup Week Fun Pack.

During National Playgroup Week several members of parliament responded expressing public support for the playgroup movement including:

- Hon Cathrine King (Member for Ballarat, Shadow Minister for Health and Welfare)
- Hon Ross Hart (Member for Bass)
- Hon. Jason Wood (Member for Latrobe)
- Adam Bandt (Member for Melbourne)
- Senator Louise Pratt (Senator for Western Australia, Shadow Assistant Minister for Families and Communities)



Facebook post by Senator Louise Pratt, Senator for Western Australia

World Biggest Playgroup Events

Our STOs held a number of community events during National Playgroup Week, including the World's Biggest Playgroup Day celebrations.

In 2017, the World's Biggest Playgroup Day was held in metropolitan locations including:

- Darling Harbour (NSW)
- Whiteman Park (WA)
- Museum of Democracy at Old Parliament House (ACT).

Each World's Biggest Playgroup events included a range of play activities for children such as painting, music, storytelling, and other fun educational activities.

Over 1,200 families participated in an Adelaide based Better Start Event.



ACT Playgroups

HIGHLIGHTS

ACT Playgroups has independently sourced additional funding to run innovative playgroup initiatives that include the Paint and Playgroup program and Mighty Movers (with the Bluearth Foundation)

Awarded a NDIS Information Linkage & Capacity Building Grant to fund a support program to facilitate inclusion in Community Playgroups

Facebook reach more than doubled in the past year, with some posts reaching over 10,000 users

COMMUNITY EVENTS

- More than 1200 families attended the World's Biggest Playgroup at the Museum of Democracy (at Old Parliament House) in Canberra.
- Over 1200 families attended a Better Start funded event held in Cook

www.playgroupact.org.au

The MACH nurse conference

The Maternal and Child Health Nurse (MACH) community provide health assistance to families with a young child. MACH nurses are often the first professionals working closely with families with new born babies. For decades, highly skilled MACH nurses have been referring families to their local STO playgroup association and encouraging them to participate in Community Playgroups.

Playgroup Australia is grateful for the help and care the MACH nurse community provides to families and we are very thankful for their continued support of Community Playgroups.

Playgroup Australia supported the 7th Biennial Maternal Child and Family Health Nurses Australia Conference held in Melbourne (1st-3rd June 2017) and sponsored a stall where Playgroup Australia staff interacted with MACH Nurses.

Playgroup Australia ran a competition at the MACH Nurse conference for the most fun social media post on the Playgroup Australia Facebook page. Some snapshot frames from the video that won the best social media post is presented on the following page.

Playgroup Australia would like to thank the MACH Nurse community for their wonderful support in promoting community playgroups.

Screenshots from the “Best Social Media Post” competition winner. MACH nurse Karina Baigrie posted a video of her 11 year old son Patrick holding up cards that tell the story of his positive playgroup experience.

Playgroup NSW

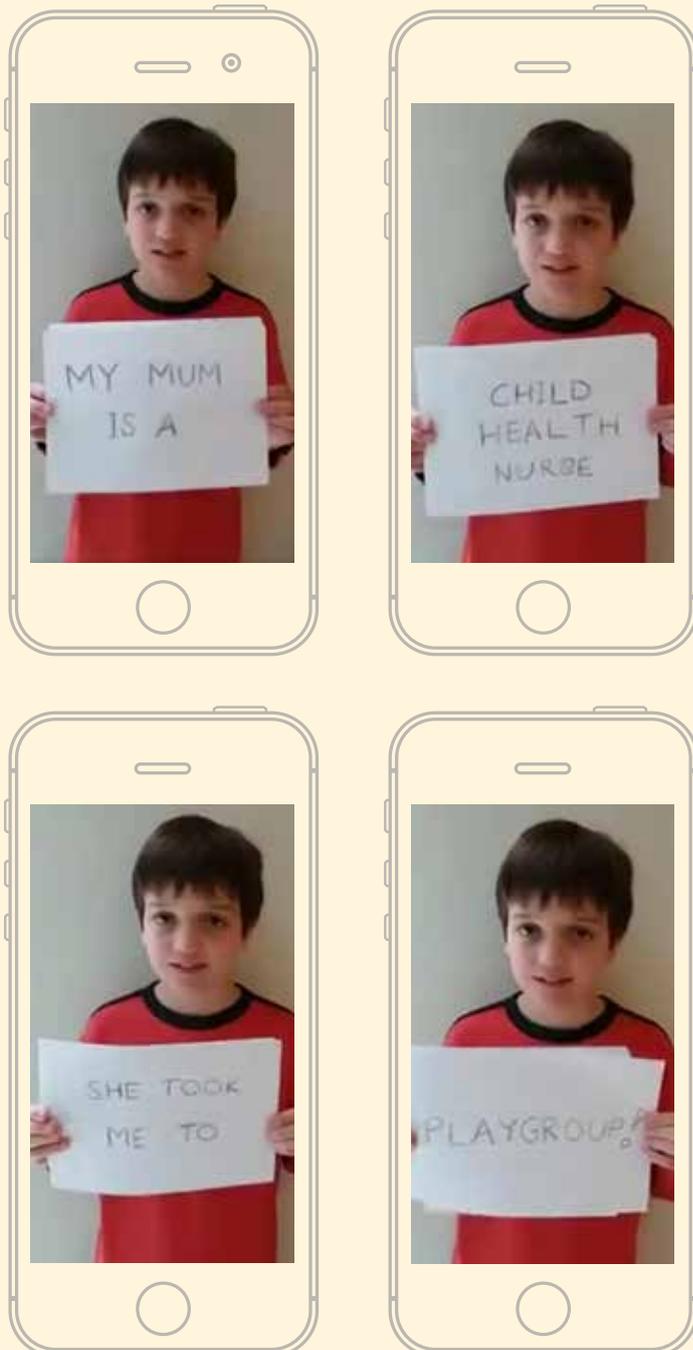
HIGHLIGHTS

Play Baby is a Playgroup NSW initiative where every baby born in NSW is offered a gift playgroup membership for 12 months. In February 2017 Play Baby was launched in at the NSW Parliament House with the support of playgroup members, several State MP's and various community leaders. As of June 2017 Playgroup NSW had signed up 5417 new baby memberships. A dedicated webpage www.playbaby.org.au has been set up to enable fast smooth connection to parents of young babies.

Playgroup NSW was awarded a grant from the NSW Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care to support intergenerational playgroups in aged care facilities. This funding has been used to bring together seniors with children and their parents in a relaxed and often joyful environment.

Playgroup NSW received a Seeds of Renewal grant from ANZ Bank's Deniliquin branch, to fund a trial program to recognise playgroup volunteers by offering academic credits in return for the valuable work they do.

www.playgroupnsw.org.au



Telethon Research Finding – Playgroup Benefits

In 2016, Playgroup Australia commissioned the Telethon Kids Institute to independently analyse playgroup attendance data from the 2012 and 2015 Australian Early Developmental Census (AEDC). The report was published in 2017 and demonstrated playgroups are universally beneficial for all children regardless of their background, and children who do not attend playgroups are less likely to be ready for school.

Children who had attended a playgroup were found to perform better on all AEDC child development domains including: Physical, Social, Emotional, Language, Communication and Cognitive Development. AEDC domains are a key indicator for potential problems in the later school years. The report also found that children who did not attend a playgroup were 1.7 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the AEDC domains during the period when they were transitioning into primary school.

The report concluded that approximately 65% of children across Australia still do not attend playgroups. A noteworthy implication of this research is that many Australian children would experience better early primary school outcomes had they attended a local playgroup. Furthermore, the report reviewed teacher feedback from 2015 AEDC data. Children who did not attend a playgroup prior to commencing school were almost twice as likely to be rated by their teacher as having trouble adjusting to primary school than children who had attended a playgroup.

Playgroup Australia promoted the Telethon report via a press release on the 17th March 2017. You can access the full report at: <https://playgroupaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Impact-of-playgroup-on-child-development-Jan-2017-Telethon-Kids-Institute.pdf>

Educational Benefits of Playgroup Attendance



Physical



Social



Emotional



Language

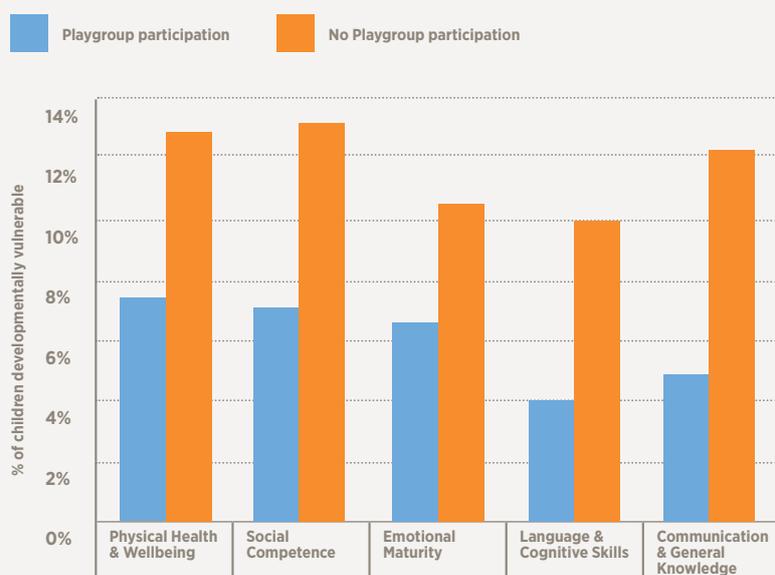


Communication



Cognitive development

Children who attend Playgroup are less vulnerable on all Australian Early Developmental Census domains



Playgroup Australia Sponsorship

Playgroup Australia is committed to supporting and working with organisations that advocate for providing a brighter future for young children and their families.

Everyone Benefits Campaign

Playgroup Australia sponsored the “Early Learning: Everyone Benefits” campaign that has been organised by Early Childhood Australia. This campaign recognises playgroups as an important early learning activity.

The goals of the Everyone Benefits Campaign are:

- To have all Australian children benefit from participating in early learning, particularly vulnerable children who will gain the most.
- To have political parties commit to policies that will support 100 per cent of four year olds and 90 per cent of three year olds to attend early learning for at least two days per week, and for younger children to be able to attend as needed by their families.
- To change the national conversation on the value of early learning and convince our politicians that supporting attendance in early learning today will increase the future prosperity for all of us.



www.everyonebenefits.org.au/

An expo Playgroup NSW attended at Olympic Park had a stand that was visited by 3000 people.

Pro-Bono Support

We would like to thank the organisations that provided Playgroup Australia with pro-bono support; in particular Phil Butler, Sector Leader, Not-For-Profit from the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Nous Group.

Playgroup Tasmania

HIGHLIGHTS

Playgroup Tasmania conducted a comprehensive review of the current Tasmanian playgroup environment. The review also outlined future opportunities.

Playgroup Tasmania trialled a range of innovative playgroup approaches. Playgroup Tasmania developed playgroup models with local Aboriginal and CALD communities.

Intergenerational playgroups were established with Presbyterian Care. New nature playgroup sessions were also held.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Playgroup Tasmania once again hosted the Annual Children’s Week Teddy Bears Picnics in Burnie, East Devonport, Launceston and Hobart. Hundreds of families, caregivers and children enjoyed all the wonderful activities that Playgroup Tasmania and partner organisations provided.

www.playgrouptas.org.au

Playgroup Australia and STOs



Over 5,000 babies, toddlers, preschoolers, parents and carers attended Playgroup NSWs' annual National Playgroup Week event - World's Biggest Playgroup Day. The event was held at Tumbalong Park in Darling Harbour. During the day, families enjoyed free performances by popular children's entertainers, including ABC Kids TV's SplashDance, Nay Nay and Bananas in Pyjamas.

Playgroup Victoria

HIGHLIGHTS

In 2012 Playgroup Victoria commenced a Connecting Schools and Communities Through Supported Playgroups Pilot Project. It was a unique partnership including the Catholic Education Office, Ballarat Best Start, Australian Catholic University the then DEECD and 5 regional government and Catholic primary schools. Evaluated by ACU the project highlighted the important role that playgroups play in improving:

- children's social, emotional development and school readiness
- social connections for families
- positive parental perception of their local school
- teacher effectiveness and enhanced skills to engage with vulnerable families

During 2016 Playgroup Victoria worked with Australian Catholic University to submit a successful Australian Research Council grant. Other partners in this project include: Oxford, Deakin and Monash Universities. .

<https://lsia.acu.edu.au/projects/a-best-practice-framework-for-playgroups-in-schools/>

www.playgroup.org.au







State & Territory Playgroup Organisations

Playgroup Australia manages the National Community Playgroup funding from DSS through sub-contracts with State and Territory Playgroup Associations which provide direct support services to playgroups

STO's :

- Support parents/carers to establish a playgroup or link with existing groups.
- Underwrite the risk and compliance accountabilities of local Community Playgroups through umbrella insurance coverage.
- Ensure the quality of playgroup practice through provision of mentoring, research and policy advice and resourcing of members.
- Broker relationships between playgroups and other agencies and services.
- Advocate to respective state, territory and local governments and the wider community on early childhood and parenting matters.
- Ensure access to specific knowledge, expertise and support as necessary for parents and carers.
- Promote the playgroup model within remote, rural, urban and/or regional communities.
- And so much more.

Any family interested in joining a local playgroup should contact their local STO.

Find a Playgroup

Playgroup ACT

Website

www.playgroupact.org.au

Email

play@playgroupact.org.au

Facebook

facebook.com/PlaygroupsACT

Pinterest

au.pinterest.com/actplaygroups

Playgroup NSW

Website

www.playgroupnsw.org.au

Email

admin@playgroupnsw.org.au

Facebook

facebook.com/playgroupnsw

Twitter

twitter.com/playgroupnsw

Youtube

youtube.com/channel/UCsrjM6CmjQKrRhQogOf53C1Q

LinkedIn

linkedin.com/company-beta/3280549

Instagram

instagram.com/playgroupnsw/

Pinterest

au.pinterest.com/PlaygroupNSW/

Playgroup NT

Website

www.playgroupnt.com.au

Email

admin@playgroupnt.com.au

Facebook

facebook.com/playgroupnt

Playgroup Queensland

Website

www.playgroupqueensland.com.au/contact-us

Facebook

facebook.com/playgroupqueensland

Twitter

twitter.com/PlaygroupQLD

Instagram

instagram.com/playgroupqld

Pinterest

au.pinterest.com/PlaygroupQLD/

Youtube

youtube.com/channel/UCqMhvO5IXB7JyJgZwgmAQgA

Playgroup South Australia

Website

www.playgroupsa.com.au

Email

info@playgroupsa.com.au

Facebook

facebook.com/playgroupsa

Playgroup Tasmania

Website

www.playgrouptas.org.au

Email

admin@playgrouptas.org.au

Facebook

facebook.com/playgrouptasmania

Playgroup Victoria

Website

www.playgroup.org.au

Email

pgvic@playgroup.org.au

Facebook

facebook.com/playgroupvic

LinkedIn

linkedin.com/company-beta/6421811

Playgroup Western Australia

Website

www.playgroupwa.com.au

Email

hotline@playgroupwa.com.au for information about locating, contacting or joining a playgroup, for enquiries about starting a new playgroup, for information and advice regarding playgroups.

membership@playgroupwa.com.au for updating playgroup information and membership details and for membership form enquiries.

admin@playgroupwa.com.au for all general enquiries.

Facebook

facebook.com/PlaygroupWA

Youtube

youtube.com/channel/UCnag6g5-xMuWA0bHhvpCLKg

Pinterest

au.pinterest.com/playgroupwa

Instagram

instagram.com/playgroup_wa

The Playgroup Australia Board



Taylor Tran
Chair

Qualifications:
MBA, PGDipMgt, BBus, MAICD

Experience:
A former corporate strategist with 20 years' global experience in technology and services. Taylor is an author (currently writing on topics such as innovation and co-working), a tech community builder and entrepreneur. With two young kids, the Tran family has a strong passion for education sector spectrum including playgroup, preschool, primary school, high school and university levels. Taylor's motivation for being involved with Playgroup Australia is to support parents across Australia to spend more time with their kids. Taylor currently serves or advises a number of boards including Playgroup Victoria and previously Playgroup NSW, Deakin University and the Australian Marketing Institute. Taylor was previously the Deputy Convenor of The Australian Broadcasting Corporation Advisory Council.



Gloria Sherlock
Deputy chair

Qualifications:
B.E-Commerce University of Qld (Valedictorian), Cert in Governance & Risk, MAICD

Experience:
Gloria's professional career spans over 20 years. Gloria experience working as an accountant, a business analyst, an e-risk consultant and a regional administration manager. Gloria has a Certificate in Governance and Risk and is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Gloria has long-standing community involvement including being former President of the Young Christian Workers group before being appointed to Playgroup Queensland's Board as a director. Gloria held the Vice Chair position before commencing the role of Chair of the Board in 2013.



Gillian Groom
Director

Qualifications:
Dip Occ Therapy, LLB

Experience:
Gillian is a commercial lawyer currently practicing in Hobart. As a former consultant occupational therapist and clinical tutor at La Trobe University Gillian has considerable knowledge of early childhood issues and family dynamics. Gillian brings extensive legal skill and experience in governance and board roles, having served on a broad range of community and not-for-profit organisations at the state and national level.



Karen Jones-Gudmunson
Director

Qualifications:
BComm CPA GAICD

Experience:

Karen is a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA), with experience in wealth management, general insurance, banking and treasury. She has provided advisory guidance in property, fast consumer goods and government. Karen has been involved with Playgroup NSW since 2010 and served as Chair of their Audit, Risk and Finance Committee.



Katrina Myburgh
Director

Qualifications:
B.Comms

Experience:

Katrina is a marketing communications specialist with more than 15 years' of international experience. Katrina is currently Senior Vice President, Head of Marketing, Asia Pacific for Weber Shandwick, one of the world's leading public relations firms. Katrina has also previously served on the Playgroup Tasmania Board.



Camilla Rowland
Director

Qualifications:
Personnel Management Adv Cert, BA Social Welfare, Cert IV in Assessment & Work place Training, Post Graduate Certificate in Adult Education, GAICD, Specialist Certificate in Executive Leadership

Experience:

Camilla is the CEO of Marymead, a highly regarded not-for-profit organisation delivering a range of family support services to children, young people and their families in the ACT and southern and western regional areas of NSW. Camilla is currently the President of the ACT Council of Social Services, and has previously held the roles of President of Families ACT, Vice President of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Association ACT, and the ACT delegate to the Friends of the National Rural Health Alliance.



**Playgroup
Australia**

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