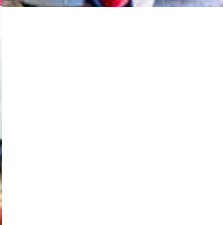
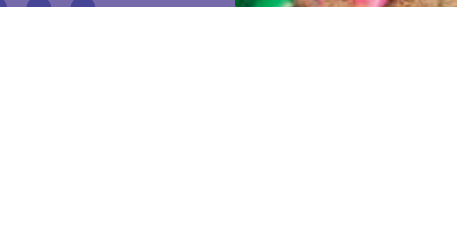
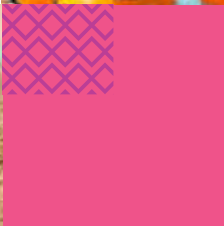
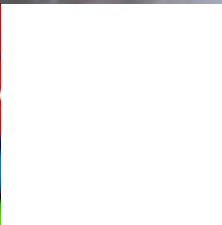


It takes a village to raise a child:

THE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT OF
PLAYGROUPS ACROSS AUSTRALIA





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*“children who attend
playgroups during
early childhood have
significantly better child
development when they
start school”*

Executive Summary

The importance of play for a child's development is well established, indeed, play is considered so important for childhood development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a basic right of every child [1]. Accordingly, parents and caregivers should be encouraged to provide opportunities for their children to engage in regular, unstructured play, however evidence suggests that today's children are engaging in much less play with other children than previous generations due to a range of factors, such as demographic changes in family structures, an increased focus on literacy and numeracy, an increase in passive entertainment, as well as the perception of a lack of safe outdoor areas for children to play [2]. Playgroups provide a safe environment where children can play with similar aged children on a regular basis, and as such they offer an important opportunity for parents to assist in their child's development. In addition, playgroups also have a range of positive effects on parents and caregivers which are likely to translate into better outcomes for children, such as reduced social isolation, improved parenting skills and self-confidence, increased knowledge of relevant community services, and a greater awareness of their child's needs [3-5].

Though the importance of play is clear, there is limited research quantifying the specific impact of attending playgroup on childhood development and wellbeing. The Telethon Kids Institute was engaged by Playgroup Australia to undertake a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative evaluation of Community Playgroups across Australia in order to examine the role of playgroup in the lives of Australian families, and how this might impact on a child's early development.

The overall objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Explore the facilitators and barriers that influence Community Playgroup attendance, and
- Examine the impact of attending playgroups on children's early development.

The first qualitative component of the evaluation was completed in 2014 with the aim of exploring the factors that have contributed to the gradual decline in membership of Community Playgroups since 2006 [6]. Focus groups and interviews with parents and carers both attending and not attending Community Playgroups were conducted in order to explore families' experiences of playgroup and the factors that contribute to playgroup attendance.

The second quantitative component of the evaluation aimed to understand: (1) how many Australian children attend playgroups, the types of children and families that attend playgroup, whether some children were missing out, and (2) the impact of attending playgroups on children's early development. This work utilised a national dataset measuring child development for all Australian children who started school in 2012 (the Australian Early Development Census). The results of the quantitative component of the evaluation are presented in this report.

Results demonstrate that children who attend playgroups during early childhood have significantly better child development when they start school, and that while a considerable number of children across Australia are attending playgroup, there are opportunities to increase the reach of playgroups to extend these benefits to an increased number of children.

Key findings about the reach of playgroups across Australia and playgroup participation for different sub-groups of children are:

- Nationally, 36% of children attend playgroups prior to starting school.
- Depending on the jurisdiction, between 30% and 66% of children attend some form of playgroup prior to school.
- Playgroup attendance is higher for children living in more regional and remote areas of Australia than for children living in the major cities.
- Playgroup attendance increases incrementally for children living in less socio-economically disadvantaged communities from 26% in the most disadvantaged communities to 44% in the least disadvantaged communities.
- Boys, Indigenous children and children with a language background other than English are less likely to attend playgroups.
- Playgroups have a wide reach impacting about 20% of disadvantaged children and close to 40% of less disadvantage Australian children.

Importantly, findings also demonstrate that playgroup is universally beneficial to all children from a range of different backgrounds. Specifically, findings from analyses on the impact of playgroup on child development demonstrate that:

- The benefits of playgroup are seen across all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development, and communication.

- Children who do not attend playgroups are 1.78 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains of the AEDC at school entry, after adjusting for socio-economic and demographic differences between the two groups.
- Playgroups are universally beneficial for children from a range of different backgrounds, with adjusted odds ratios ranging from 1.48 to 1.86 for different population groups
- There are big differences between jurisdictions in the beneficial impacts of playgroups, with adjusted odds ratios ranging from 1.28 in the Australian Capital Territory to 2.71 in Tasmania.

This research provides Playgroup Australia and the Playgroup Associations with insights into the current state of play and where they can best focus their attention to increase memberships moving forward. Moreover, this evaluation fills the gap in knowledge around the impact of playgroup attendance on early child development in Australia, and provides Playgroup Australia with a strong evidence-base on which to advocate for the importance of playgroups in the lives of Australian families, and the positive impacts that can be experienced by all Australian children when participating in playgroup.



2

INTRODUCTION



“Play is considered so important for childhood development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a basic right of every child”

Introduction

BACKGROUND


The importance of play for a child's development is irrefutable [7-9]. There are a range of different definitions of play, but it can be broadly defined as behaviours that are freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated and pleasurable [10]. Children engage in a variety of different play activities including dramatic play, physical play, and constructive play, each of which can impact on different aspects of childhood development including fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, language skills, social skills such as co-operation and taking turns, as well as problem solving skills [11]. Empirical studies have demonstrated that play helps improve children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development [2, 12-15]. Specifically, a review on the benefits of play found that it contributes to "verbalization, vocabulary, language comprehension, attention span, imagination, concentration, impulse control, curiosity, problem-solving strategies, cooperation, empathy, and group participation" [16]. Indeed, play is considered so important for childhood development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a basic right of every child [1].

Given the important role of play in early childhood development, parents and caregivers should be encouraged to provide opportunities for children to engage in regular, unstructured play. However, evidence suggests that today's children are engaging in much less play with other children than previous generations due to number of factors including demographic changes in family structures, an increased focus on literacy and numeracy for young children, an increase in passive entertainment – for example, TV and video games – as well as the perception of a lack of safe outdoor

areas for children to play [2]. Playgroups provide a safe environment where children can play with similar aged children on a regular basis and as such they offer an important opportunity for parents to assist in their child's development.

Community Playgroups, led by parents and carers, are one of the most common forms of playgroup. These gatherings for parents and young children under school age generally meet once a week for one or two hour sessions. They provide an opportunity for children to learn through unstructured play and enable parents to develop social networks and improve parenting skills [3, 17, 18]. Playgroup attendance is likely to have an impact on child development through several pathways. Stimulating play environments have well known positive impacts on children as detailed above, but in addition, playgroups also have a range of positive effects on parents and caregivers which are likely to translate into better outcomes for the child. For instance, parents attending playgroup with their children report reduced social isolation, improved parenting skills and self-confidence, increased knowledge of relevant community services, and a greater awareness of their child's needs [3-5].

Though the importance of play and stimulating play environments is clear, there is limited Australian and international research quantifying the specific impact of attending playgroup on childhood development and wellbeing. Most existing research has focussed on exposure to preschool education, which may include playgroups but analyses do not focus on the specific effects of play or playgroups alone. Further, the research that does exist tends to have mixed results in terms of positive later outcomes. While studies have shown that exposure to preschool has positive effects on



child development, school readiness and school assessments [19-21], positive impacts on health outcomes are not as apparent. For instance, two recent reviews of the effects of preschool on later child and adult health find that, while there is some evidence of the positive impacts of preschool attendance on later adult health behaviours such as smoking, exercise and safety behaviours as well as a reduced risk of poor mental health, overall there is limited and inconsistent evidence of the beneficial health outcomes later in life [22, 23]. Moreover, the most recent evidence about the benefits of preschool confirm that these positive effects are not experience universally for all children. Rather, children from disadvantaged families benefit from preschool much more than children from advantaged backgrounds because they have less access to stimulating home environments and alternative high quality care [24]. Whether the same findings would emerge for playgroups remains unknown.

It is also important to note that international playgroup systems differ from the Australian setting. For example, in the UK, most children attend playgroups or nursery (only 2% attending both), with children from higher SES backgrounds likely to attend playgroups while children from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to attend nursery or preschool [19]. In Australia, children tend to go to a playgroup prior to age four and then transition into a more formal preschool or kindergarten program prior to school entry.

Given the limitations of previous research, and also the limited research conducted in Australian playgroup settings, it was necessary to investigate the impact of playgroups on child development in Australia. This is the first comprehensive evaluation of the Community Playgroup program in Australia. Overall, it seeks to examine the role of playgroup in the lives of Australian families, and how this might impact on a child's early development.

The Playgroup Sector in Australia

In Australia there are a number of different types of playgroups available led by a range of organisations and funded by different government departments. This diversity is not accurately documented and as such has been a significant barrier to research. According to the Department of Social Services, Australia has Community Playgroups, Supported Playgroups, and Intensive Supported Playgroups [17]. Community Playgroups are run by parents and caregivers, and can be thought of as a community activity. Supported and Intensive Supported playgroups are facilitated programs or services run by trained staff and, as such, are significantly more expensive programs to deliver.

These three types of playgroups each differ in the level of support they provide to children and families, and this approach is in line with giving every child the best start in life while providing more intensive services to those in greater need (progressive universalism) [25, 26]. Some playgroups target specific types of families, such as new immigrants, young mothers, or Indigenous families, while others are open to all families. There is large variation in the training provided to playgroup leaders, and playgroups also vary in their focus with some groups aiming to develop specific skills for children such as language and communication skills, or coordination and fine motor skills, while others focus more on helping parents to improve their parenting skills. Playgroups vary significantly in size ranging from small groups with less than five children to large playgroups of 30 to 50 children meeting at one time, and together, these factors are likely to vary the impact that playgroups have on the children and parents who attend them.

Findings from the Qualitative Evaluation of Community Playgroups

The first component of our evaluation, reported separately, was conducted in 2014 with the objective of exploring the factors that have contributed to the gradual decline in membership of Community Playgroups since 2006 [6]. Focus groups and interviews with parents and carers both attending and not attending Community Playgroups were conducted across the country, and it is important to briefly synthesise the results of these investigations here in order to provide context for this second report.

Findings from focus groups and interviews demonstrated a number of factors that families identified as influencing their decisions about which early childhood services and activities they attend with their children. These included factors such as playgroup session timing and frequency, parents' work schedules, available transport, the social environment of a playgroup, access to playgroup information, and so on. Overall, the qualitative findings echoed the literature, particularly in terms of the benefits of playgroup for parents and their children. Parents identified the benefits playgroup had for both their children (e.g., encourages child learning and development) and themselves (e.g., building social connections and support networks). Community Playgroups in Australia were said to be meeting the needs of families and were identified as an important and valuable activity that both parents and children looked forward to on a weekly basis.



A number of preliminary recommendations for improvements to the playgroup business model were provided on the basis of these findings, particularly in regards to improving the playgroup membership process to reduce the burden on playgroup leaders, and enable more families to find and join a playgroup that meets their needs. Specifically, it was recommended that:

- Any online search functionality include the ability to search for playgroups based on the style of the playgroup (structured playgroup versus unstructured play environment). Playgroups should be able to provide a summary of the way in which their playgroup runs in order to help new members decide on whether the playgroup may meet their needs.
- An orientation for potential new playgroup leaders be developed to support them to familiarise themselves with the role and its demands, develop the confidence to undertake the role, and provide them with the tools to induct new members with all relevant membership information.
- Support for playgroup leaders to address the factors that prevent new members from integrating into the playgroup setting within the first free visits (up to three free visits is recommended).
- Playgroup Australia investigate options for partnering with other agencies who provide playgroups. This may entail investigating Playgroup Association membership models that could be applied to an organisation that provides playgroups rather than to individual parents who attend that playgroup.
- Playgroup Australia investigate options to provide a range of playgroup types with varied costs.



Although the first component of the evaluation yielded rich qualitative data, the magnitude of the extent to which some of the identified factors are influencing participation in Community Playgroups is better determined by quantitative data. The quantitative investigations presented herein sought to provide a more robust understanding of playgroup usage upon which final recommendations can be based.

Aims of the Quantitative Evaluation of Community Playgroups

The aim of the quantitative evaluation was to understand: (1) how many Australian children attend playgroups, the types of children and families that attend playgroup, whether some children were missing out, and (2) the impact of attending playgroups on children's early development¹. Specifically, we aimed to answer the questions below.

1 Playgroup attendance across Australia.

Of the 300,000 children who start primary school each year in Australia, how many attended a playgroup prior to starting school? Information on the number and percentage of Australian children who attend other education and care programs such as preschool and child care are available. What do the statistics show for playgroup participation and reach in Australia? To work towards increasing the reach of playgroups in Australia, we need to understand how many children are currently attending playgroups, and which children are missing out. For instance, are children living in major cities more or less likely to attend a playgroup than children living in regional centres? Are children living

in the different states and territories equally likely to attend a playgroup? Are Indigenous children, children who speak English as a second language, and children who were born outside of Australia equally likely to attend playgroups as children who do not have these characteristics?

2 Impact of playgroup on child development.

To be able to successfully advocate for the importance of playgroups, we need to have strong evidence about the positive impact that playgroups have on children's development. There is a lot of research on the positive impact of playgroups on parents, including that presented in the qualitative evaluation. However, less is known about the direct impact of playgroups on children's development. This report used information from the Australian Early Development Census – a national census of the 290,000 children who started school in 2012 - to understand the differences in child development for children who did and did not attend a playgroup prior to starting school. The impact of playgroups on physical, social, emotional, and language development was explored, as well as the impact of playgroups for children with different background characteristics. The impact of playgroups on child development was estimated separately for each of the jurisdictions providing both national and jurisdiction specific evidence that Playgroup Australia and the Playgroup Associations can use when advocating for the importance of playgroups for children's development.

¹ A second set of quantitative analyses exploring trends in playgroup memberships over time for different Australian jurisdictions is presented in a separate report.

3

METHOD

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national census of early child development conducted once every three years on all children in their first year of full time schooling.

Method

The aim of this report was to understand playgroup attendance across Australia and the impact of playgroups on child development. Detailed information on the importance of these two issues for Playgroups Australia and the Playgroup Associations are provided in the Introduction section.

Understanding the reach of playgroups across Australia will provide insights for where the Playgroup Associations can best focus their attention to increase memberships moving forward. Understanding the impact of playgroups on child development will provide national and jurisdiction specific evidence that Playgroup Australia and the Playgroup Associations can use when advocating for

the importance of playgroups for children's development.

- ① Playgroup attendance across Australia
- ② Impact of playgroup on child development

To investigate **playgroup attendance across Australia** we utilised data from the 2012 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to estimate the number and percentage of children attending playgroups at the national level and within each of the states and territories. We additionally explored differences in playgroup attendance for children living in metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Australia, children living in areas of high and low

socio-economic disadvantage, and children with different demographic characteristics such as boys and girls, and children with English as a Second Language.

We investigated the **impact of playgroups on child development** by exploring the relationship between playgroup participation prior to school and children's development at school entry as measured by Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

In this section, we provide information on the Australian Early Development Census, which is the key data source used to measure playgroup attendance and child development. Appendix A provides detailed technical information on the methodology used to answer these two questions.

Australian Early Development Census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national census of early childhood development conducted once every three years on all children in their first year of full

time schooling. In 2012, AEDC data were collected on 289,973 children providing a rich population wide data source. Results from the AEDC are publicly available (www.aedc.gov.au) and provides data at the national and jurisdictional level, and community level. Information is available about children's development on five developmental domains as shown in Figure 1.

In 2012, teachers were asked whether each child in their class had attended playgroups prior to school ("Did this child attend playgroup before entering full time school?"). This item was used as the measure of playgroup participation in Section 4 (Playgroup attendance – population estimates from the AEDC) and Section 5 (Impact of playgroups on child development). It is important to note that teachers were not asked specifically about whether the child attended a community playgroup or a Playgroup Association run playgroup so they will answer 'Yes' if they are aware of the child attending any type of playgroup run by any organisation prior to starting school.

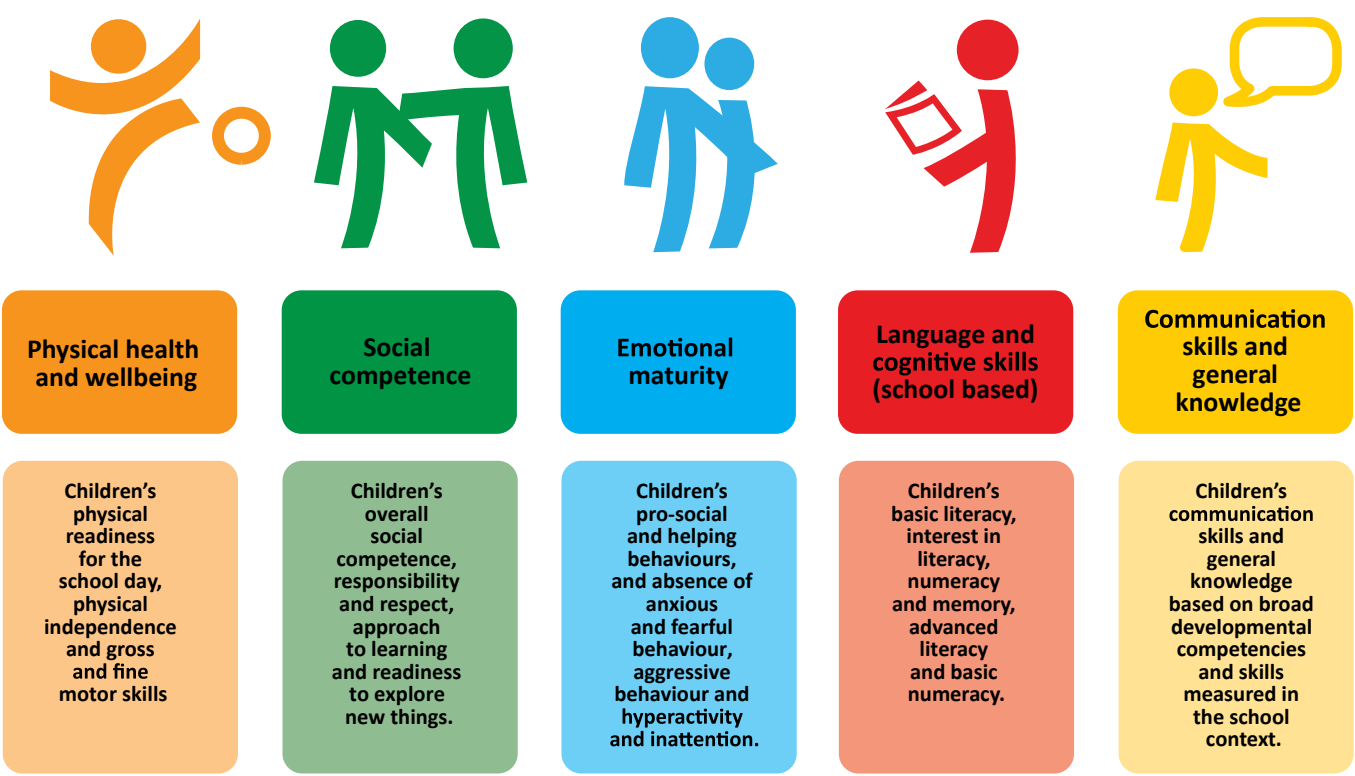


Figure 1. Developmental domains measured in the AEDC

4

PLAYGROUP ATTENDANCE – POPULATION ESTIMATES FROM THE AEDC

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair smiling warmly while holding a young child. The child is wearing a purple jacket with a blue star pattern and is laughing joyfully. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

“One in three Australian children attends playgroups before they start school.”

Playgroup attendance - Population estimates from the AEDC

PLAYGROUP ATTENDANCE IN AUSTRALIA

In the 2012 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data collection, teachers were asked whether children attended playgroup before entering full-time school. Their responses are presented in Table 1 and contrasted for children living in each of the different states and territories. Not surprisingly, many teachers did not know whether their students had attended playgroups prior to starting school. At the national level, teachers responded “don’t know” to this item for almost 60% of children, and this varied from 49% for children living in Queensland to 72% for children living in South Australia.

The variation in these figures is likely to be accounted for by jurisdictional differences in available playgroup programs and providers. For instance, in some jurisdictions playgroups are provided as a government initiative

through schools and this may impact how well informed teachers are of children’s playgroup attendance. For example, the Tasmanian Government runs a playgroup program through their schools with the aim of connecting families with their local school and other families in the area. This may explain why a larger proportion of teachers in Tasmania knew whether children had previously attended playgroup. Further, variation may also be accounted for by differences in transition practices across jurisdictions (i.e. information sharing between early years and school programs vary).

While lots of teachers selected “don’t know” very few left this item blank (i.e. missing) with missing data on fewer than 1,500 children (< 1%) in the whole 2012 AEDC cohort. Given that “don’t know” was a viable option, we can be confident that those teachers who did not select this option had credible information about whether or not children attended playgroups.

TABLE 1. Playgroup attendance prior to school for 2012 AEDC cohort (n = 289,973)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?				
	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Australia^a	42,952 (14.9%)	76,293 (26.4%)	169,342 (58.7%)	288,587 (100.0%)
NSW	10,483 (11.1%)	27,429 (29.1%)	56,324 (59.8%)	94,236 (100.0%)
VIC	10,530 (15.5%)	13,560 (20.0%)	43,654 (64.4%)	67,744 (100.0%)
QLD	9,957 (16.2%)	21,300 (34.7%)	30,040 (49.0%)	61,297 (100.0%)
WA	5,772 (18.0%)	8,647 (27.0%)	17,584 (54.9%)	32,003 (100.0%)
SA	3,114 (16.7%)	2,214 (11.8%)	13,365 (71.5%)	18,693 (100.0%)
TAS	2,133 (33.3%)	1,087 (16.9%)	3,195 (49.8%)	6,415 (100.0%)
ACT	516 (10.6%)	987 (20.3%)	3,365 (69.1%)	4,868 (100.0%)
NT	447 (13.4%)	1,069 (32.1%)	1,815 (54.5%)	3,331 (100.0%)

Note: ^a Data on playgroup attendance were missing for 1,386 children.

There are two different ways to look at the statistics presented in Table 1. The first is to ignore the “don’t know” category and simply ask – what percentage of children living in each jurisdiction do we know attended playgroup at some stage prior to starting school? From the “Yes” column, it is clear that about 15% of Australian children attended playgroups prior to starting school. Playgroup attendance was below the national average for children living in the Australian Capital Territory (10.6%), New South Wales (11.1%) and the Northern Territory (13.4%). Between 15% and 18% of children attended playgroups in each of the other jurisdictions, except for Tasmania where

one third of all children attended playgroups prior to starting school.

The second method is to ask – of those children whose playgroup attendance status we know (i.e. the Yes and No columns in Table 1), what percentage of children attended playgroups prior to school? This approach takes into account the fact that teachers working in different jurisdictions were more or less likely to know whether their students attended playgroups, and gives a better population estimate of playgroup attendance. Table 2 allows us to explore this second question .

TABLE 2. Playgroup attendance prior to school for 2012 AEDC cohort (n = 119,245)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?			
	YES	NO	TOTAL
Australia	42,952 (36.0%)	76,293 (64.0%)	119,245 (100.0%)
NSW	10,483 (27.7%)	27,429 (72.3%)	37,912 (100.0%)
VIC	10,530 (43.7%)	13,560 (56.3%)	24,090 (100.0%)
QLD	9,957 (31.9%)	21,300 (68.1%)	31,257 (100.0%)
WA	5,772 (40.0%)	8,647 (60.0%)	14,419 (100.0%)
SA	3,114 (58.4%)	2,214 (41.6%)	5,328(100.0%)
TAS	2,133 (66.2%)	1,087 (33.8%)	3,220 (100.0%)
ACT	516 (34.3%)	987 (65.7%)	1,503 (100.0%)
NT	447 (29.5%)	1,069 (70.5%)	1,516 (100.0%)

Note: ^a Children were excluded where playgroup attendance was missing or the teacher answered “don’t know”.



One in three Australian children attends playgroups before they start school

² All subsequent analyses in this report will be based on the sub-set of children in the 2012 AEDC cohort who have valid data on the playgroups question (n = 119,245) and exclude all children with “don’t know” or “missing” responses.

At the national level, 36% of children attended playgroups prior to starting school. Playgroup attendance was below the national average for children living in New South Wales (27.7%), the Northern Territory (29.5%), Queensland (31.9%) and the Australian Capital Territory (34.3%). Between 40 and 45% of children attended playgroups in Western Australia and Victoria. Almost 60% attended playgroups in South Australia, and two thirds of all children attended playgroups in Tasmania.

These percentages can be applied to the full 2012 AEDC sample to estimate the number of children in each state and territory who would have attended playgroups prior to school (see Table 3). At the national level, 36% of children attended playgroups prior to school and there were almost 290,000 children in the 2012 AEDC cohort. This suggests that a little over 100,000 children in this birth cohort attended a playgroup at some stage between their birth in 2006/07 and starting full time school in 2012.

TABLE 3. Estimates of the number of children in the population who attended playgroups prior to school

	Number of children in 2012 AEDC cohort	% attending playgroups	Number of children in 2012 AEDC cohort who attended playgroups
Australia^a	289,973	36.0%	104,390
NSW	94,572	27.7%	26,196
VIC	67,931	43.7%	29,686
QLD	61,593	31.9%	19,648
WA	32,158	40.0%	12,863
SA	18,921	58.4%	11,050
TAS	6,430	66.2%	4,257
ACT	4,898	34.3%	1,680
NT	3,470	29.5%	1,024



100,000 children in the 2012 AEDC cohort attended playgroups prior to school

Playgroup attendance in metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Australia

Community playgroups operate in all parts of Australia from inner city Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, to regional towns such as Dubbo, Townsville, Geraldton, and Launceston, to remote communities in Alice Springs, Mount Isa, and Broome. In this section, we explore how playgroup attendance varies for children living in these different parts of the country.

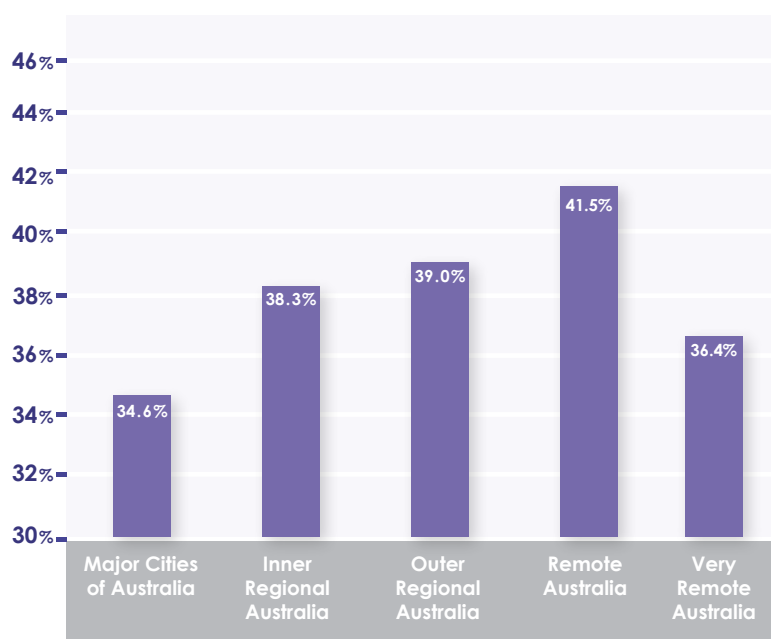


Figure 2. Playgroup attendance by geographical remoteness

Figure 2 shows that playgroup attendance was the lowest for children living in the Major Cities of Australia. Attendance increased incrementally for children living in more regional and remote areas of the country, up to 42% for children living in Remote Australia. However, attendance dropped down to 36% for children living in very remote Australia. While parents living in urban areas may experience fewer barriers to accessing playgroups (i.e. distance to a suitable playgroup), they are likely to also have access to a wider range of competing early childhood activities.

For example, as reported in the qualitative component of this evaluation, parents across

jurisdictions reported attending a number of different activities with their children, including gymbaroo/kinder gym, mothers groups, dance groups, library activities such as story time or baby bounce, as well as early learning centres or early education groups. Generally, parents explained that they liked to do a variety of activities to fill the week and that they sought out these activities for the same reasons they liked to come to a Community Playgroup. It is likely that such a broad range of activities for young children is not as readily available in regional and remote areas, hence increasing the proportion of families who attend playgroup in these areas.

The results presented in Figure 2 combine information across the different states and territories, which might be a little misleading because the local context in very remote Northern Territory is qualitatively different to very remote New South Wales. As such, Figure 3 splits the data further to explore the impact of geographical remoteness on playgroup attendance within each of the jurisdictions.

The general trend holds that playgroup attendance is highest outside of Australia's major cities. In almost all jurisdictions, children living in regional areas (inner and outer) are more likely to attend playgroups than children living in major cities. Nevertheless, this pattern of attendance varies across jurisdictions and this may provide opportunities to compare the ways in which different policies, contexts and strategies impact playgroup attendance. For example, in NSW and NT, playgroup attendance is highest for families living in very remote areas of the state, whereas in WA and SA attendance is highest for inner regional parts of the state, and drops off gradually for families living in more remote areas. Understanding the different ways in which NSW and NT tackle the challenges of facilitating playgroups in areas with limited services and supports, might provide valuable insights that could be used in the other jurisdictions.



Figure 3. Jurisdictional playgroup attendance by remoteness

Playgroup attendance in areas of high and low socio-economic disadvantage

Playgroups are one of the most affordable regular activities that parents can do with their children with annual memberships from \$30. However, families need to travel to the playgroup and this may present difficulties from a financial and logistic perspective for families with limited disposable income

and/or access to transportation. There are also a range of non-financial barriers that might prevent some families from attending playgroups. In the earlier qualitative work, parents reported feeling that playgroups weren't always easy to join once established because people had already formed friendship groups [6]. Other parents may feel that playgroups are inaccessible to them because they do not fit in (e.g., playgroup is for middle class families or stay at home mothers).



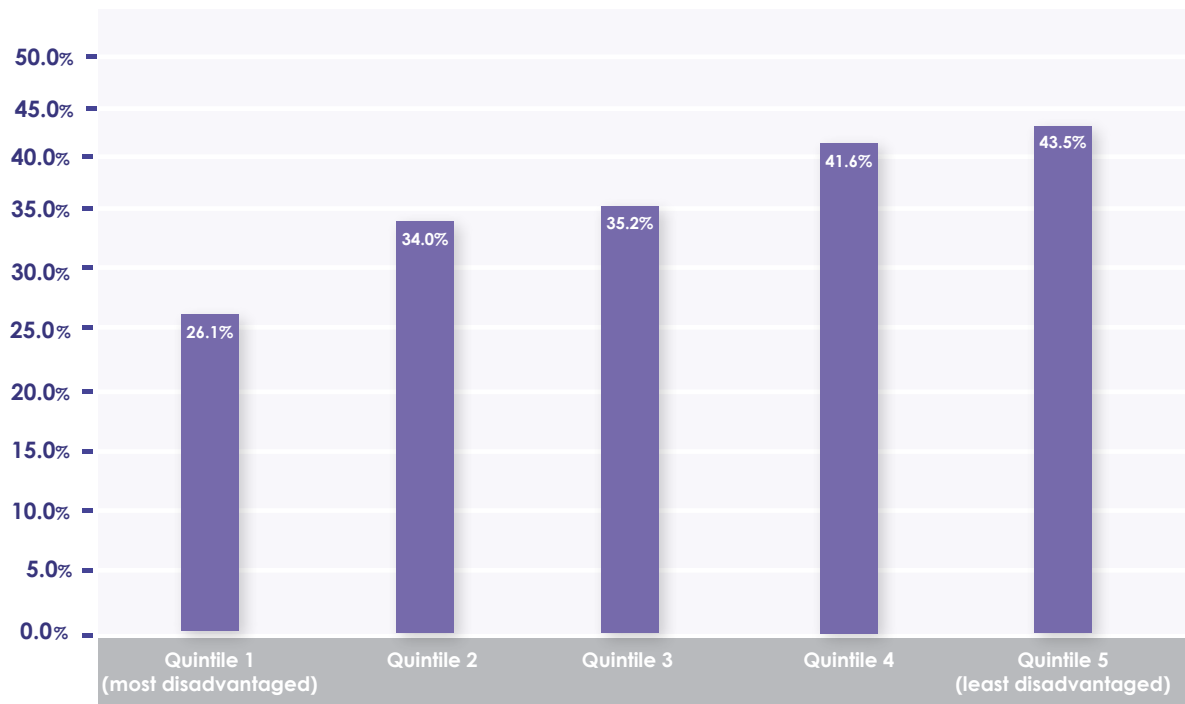


Figure 4. Playgroup attendance by socio-economic disadvantage



Figure 4 shows that there is a strong relationship between playgroup attendance and the socio-economic disadvantage of the area where the family lives. The likelihood of a child having attended a playgroup prior to school increases incrementally if they

live in less disadvantaged areas from 26% (most disadvantaged areas) to 44% (least disadvantaged areas). There was no evidence that playgroups attendance dropped off for families living in the most affluent areas.

Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance

The previous three sections have shown that there are clear patterns of playgroups attendance for children depending on where in Australia they live. Specifically, the likelihood that a child will have attended playgroups prior to starting school depends on the state/territory they live in, whether they live in a major city, regional town or remote area, and whether they live in a more or less socio-economically disadvantaged area of Australia.

In this section, we explore whether a child is more or less likely to attend playgroups


depending on their individual characteristics including whether they:

- are a boy or girl,
- are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent or not;
- were born in Australia, an English speaking country, or a non-English speaking country, and;
- have a language background other than English

If specific children or groups of children are “missing out” on attending playgroups, then this may present an opportunity for Playgroups Australia to target these families in future marketing campaigns.

TABLE 4. Demographic characteristics of children who did/did not attend playgroups prior to school

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
National results		42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
SEX	Male	21,590	35.0%	40,125	65.0%
	Female	21,362	37.1%	36,168	62.9%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	41,285	37.0%	70,273	63.0%
	Indigenous	1,667	21.7%	6,020	78.3%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	40,744	36.8%	70,094	63.2%
	Other Country	903	19.0%	3,838	81.0%
	Other English Speaking Country	1,305	35.6%	2,361	64.4%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	38,244	39.5%	58,597	60.5%
	Yes	4,708	21.0%	17,696	79.0%



Facilitated playgroups are often targeted towards particular vulnerable groups, such as Indigenous children, children with English as a second language, children living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, whereas community playgroups are not. Nonetheless, children who do and do not attend playgroups in the AEDC cohort differ substantially in their demographic characteristics (see Table 4). The key findings are described below.

➤ **Gender**

Parents of girls were more likely to take them to a playgroup than parents of boys. While this difference looks small (35% vs. 37%) it represents a lot of children at the population level, and given the much poorer results on the AEDC of boys across all developmental domains, boys are likely to benefit from playgroup just as much as girls.

➤ **Indigenous status**

Indigenous children were less likely to attend playgroups than non-Indigenous children (22% vs. 37%). While the percentage is lower, this still suggests that a sizable number of Indigenous children (one in five) attended a playgroups prior to school.

➤ **Country of birth**

Interestingly, children who were born overseas in an English speaking country were just as likely as Australian born children to attend playgroups. However, the children who were born in a non-English speaking country were much less likely to have attended playgroups at some time prior to school. This likely reflects both the prevalence of similar playgroup programs in other English speaking countries, and also the challenges facing parents with limited English skills when they arrive in Australia to attend community playgroups.

➤ **Language Background other than English**

Consistent with the findings on country of birth, children who spoke English only were about two times more likely to attend playgroups than children who had a language background other than English.

One of the key findings from this data is that even in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia, more than a quarter of children are attending playgroups prior to school. Amongst other disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous children and children born in non-English speaking countries, close to 20% of children have attended playgroups prior to starting school. In the most remote areas of the country, almost a third of children have some exposure to playgroups prior to school. While there are opportunities to increase the reach of playgroups in Australia, they are by no means a small targeted program that reaches a small fraction of the population. Rather playgroups have a wide reach impacting about 20% of disadvantaged children and close to 40% of less disadvantaged Australian children.

In Appendix B, we replicate Table 4 for each of the jurisdictions to provide a description of the demographic characteristics of children who do and do not attend playgroups.



Playgroups have a wide reach impacting about 20% of disadvantaged children and close to 40% of less disadvantaged Australian children.



Summary

This section of the report set out to understand patterns of playgroup attendance across Australia based on a teacher completed item ("Did this child attend playgroup before entering full time school?") collected within the 2012 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). 2012 AEDC data were available for close to 300,000 children in their first year of full time school, and data on playgroup attendance was available for about 120,000 of these children.

Key findings include:

- Nationally, 36% of children attend playgroups prior to starting school
- Between 30% and 66% of children attend playgroups across the different states and territories of Australia
- Playgroup attendance is higher for children living in more regional and remote areas of Australia than for children living in the major cities
- Playgroup attendance increases incrementally for children living in less socio-economically disadvantaged communities from 26% in the most disadvantaged communities to 44% in the least disadvantaged communities
- Boys, Indigenous children and children with a language background other than English are less likely to attend playgroups
- Playgroups have a wide reach impacting about 20% of disadvantaged children and close to 40% of less disadvantaged Australian children.

5

IMPACT OF PLAYGROUP ATTENDANCE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

“Children who attend playgroups prior to school are half as likely to have developmental vulnerabilities when they start primary school”

IMPACT OF PLAYGROUP ATTENDANCE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The importance of play for children's development is irrefutable. Playgroups provides an opportunity for children to regularly engage in unstructured play with other children of a similar age and developmental stage, offering opportunities to develop their physical, emotional, social and language skills. Playgroups also provide opportunities for parents and carers to socialise, learn parenting skills, and seek emotional support from one another, which should improve their wellbeing and parenting abilities leading to a secondary benefit for their children. In this section, we explore whether children who attended playgroups prior to commencing school had better child development outcomes on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) at school entry.

We identify whether children did or did not attend playgroups based on a teachers responses to this item in the AEDC ("Did this child attend playgroup before entering full time school?"), and explore the percentage of children who were developmentally vulnerable on each of the five developmental domains, and for two overall summary measures amongst those who did and did not attend a playgroup.

AEDC results for children who did and did not attend playgroups

Table 5 presents the number and percentage of children who were developmentally vulnerable on each of the five AEDC domains (see above), and the two summary indicators for those children who attended playgroups prior to school and those who did not.

There were marked differences between the two groups on all five of the developmental domains. Given that playgroups involve "play based" activities, the biggest impacts on children's development might be expected in their social skills. There were substantive differences in the Social Competence of children who did and did not attend playgroups (6% vs. 12% developmentally vulnerable) and in their Emotional Maturity (6% vs. 10%). However, the biggest differences between children who did and did not attend playgroups were in their Language and Cognitive Skills, and Communication Skills and General Knowledge, where children who did not attend playgroups were more than two times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than children who did not.

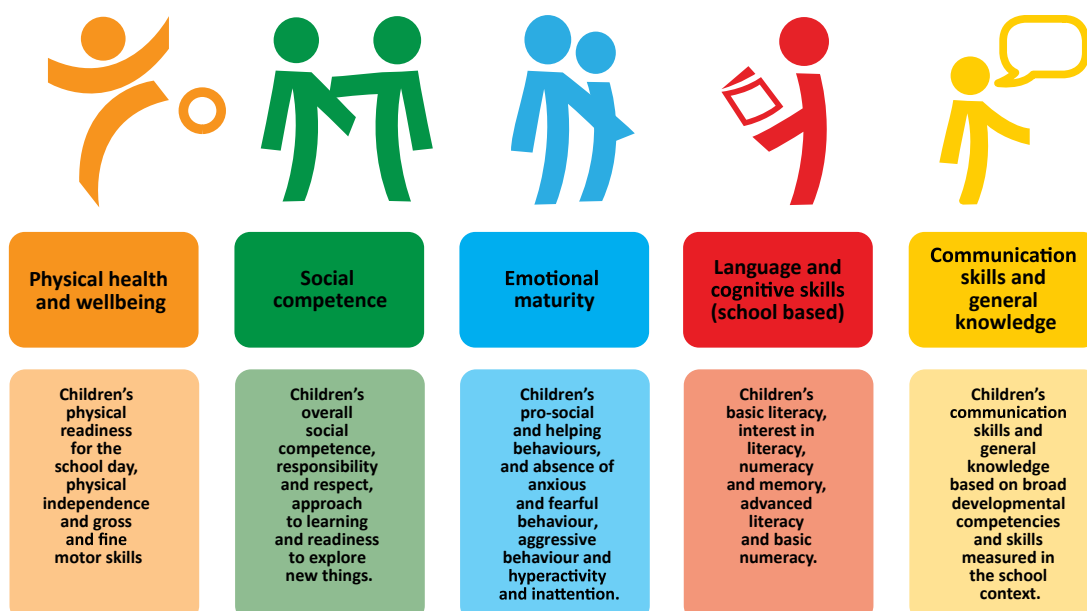


TABLE 5. AEDC results (% vulnerable) for children who did and did not attend playgroup prior to school

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES (n = 42,952 ^a)		NO (n = 76,293)	
		n	%	n	%
Developmental domains	Physical Health and Wellbeing	2,772	6.8%	8,849	12.3%
	Social Competence	2,625	6.4%	8,538	11.9%
	Emotional Maturity	2,309	5.7%	6,897	9.6%
	Language and Cognitive Skills	1,507	3.7%	7,284	10.1%
	Communication and General Knowledge	2,075	5.1%	8,885	12.3%
Summary indicators	Vulnerable on 1 or more domains	6,402	15.8%	19,761	27.5%
	Vulnerable on 2 or more domains	2,823	6.9%	10,589	14.7%

^aThe number of children with valid cases for each indicator will be slightly lower than this number and varies for each of the different indicators

Children who attend playgroup are half as likely to have developmental vulnerabilities when they start primary school

Adjusted effects of playgroups on child development

It is important to note that children who do and do not attend playgroups vary on a whole range of socio-economic and demographic factors that are related to their child development outcomes. As shown in Table 4, children who did not attend playgroups were more likely boys, Indigenous,

living in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and to speak English as a second language, all factors that are associated with poorer child development outcomes. As such, the next analysis explores the difference in AEDC results for children who did and did not attend playgroups after adjusting for the difference in these background characteristics of the two groups.

TABLE 6. Logistic regression analyses of playgroups on % of children developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains

		Unadjusted			Adjusted		
		n	OR (95% CI)	p	n	OR (95% CI)	p
Playgroup attendance prior to school	Yes	40,514	ref	-	40,514	ref	-
	No	71,739	2.03 (1.96-2.09)	<.001	71,739	1.75 (1.69-1.80)	<.001
Indigenous status	Non-Indigenous				104,912	ref	-
	Indigenous				7,086	2.47 (2.35-2.60)	<.001
Language background other than English (LBOTE)	English only				90,829	ref	-
	LBOTE				21,169	1.49 (1.44-1.55)	<.001
Gender	Male				56,829	ref	-
	Female				55,169	0.46 (0.45-0.48)	<.001
Socio-economic status (SES)	Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)				23,166	ref	-
	Quintile 2				21,955	0.80 (0.76-0.83)	<.001
	Quintile 3				21,896	0.71 (0.68-0.74)	<.001
	Quintile 4				21,467	0.59 (0.56-0.61)	<.001
	Quintile 5 (least disadvantaged)				23,514	0.47 (0.45-0.50)	<.001

Table 6 presents the results of logistic regression analyses that estimate the impact of attending playgroup prior to school on the chances of being developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains of the AEDC before and after adjusting for key demographic and socio-economic factors. There are several key findings from these analyses. The odds of being developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains of the AEDC were:

- **2.03 times higher** for children who did not attend playgroups prior to school compared with children who did attend playgroups
- **2.47 times higher** for Indigenous children than non-Indigenous children
- **1.49 times higher** for children who spoke English as a second language than those who spoke English only

- **0.46 times lower** for girls than boys
- **Between 0.80 and 0.47 times lower** for children growing up in less socio-economically disadvantaged areas than children in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia

After adjusting for the fact that children who do and do not attend playgroups have different socio-demographic characteristics, the odds of being developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domain domains of the AEDC were still:

- **1.75 times higher** for children who did not attend playgroups prior to school compared with children who did attend playgroups

Adjusted effects of playgroups on child development for different population groups

From the previous analysis, we know that children not attending playgroups had 1.75 times higher odds of being developmentally vulnerable than children attending playgroups. In this section, we explore whether we see the same beneficial impacts for boys and girls, children with a language background other than English, Aboriginal children and children living in more and less socially disadvantaged areas of Australia. For each of the analyses, the adjusted model accounted for all of the demographic factors shown in Table 6.

TABLE 7. Adjusted odds ratios for impact of playgroup on AEDC results for different population sub-groups

	Adjusted* OR (95% CI)
Full population*	1.75 (1.69-1.80)
Males	1.68 (1.61,1.75)
Females	1.86 (1.76,1.96)
Indigenous	1.76 (1.59-1.98)
Non-Indigenous	1.76 (1.70-1.82)
LBOTE	1.59 (1.47,1.72)
English only	1.79 (1.73-1.86)
SEIFA Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)	1.82 (1.69-1.95)
Quintile 2	1.88 (1.75-2.02)
Quintile 3	1.73 (1.60-1.86)
Quintile 4	1.83 (1.70-1.98)
Quintile 5 (least disadvantaged)	1.48 (1.38-1.60)

Note: * Adjusted for gender, Indigenous status, language background other than English and socio-economic status of the area where the child lives (SEIFA).

Table 7 shows the increased odds of being developmentally vulnerable for children who did not attend playgroups in the full population (adjusted OR = 1.75) and for specific sub-groups. For instance, boys who did not attend playgroup prior to school had 1.68 times higher odds of being developmentally vulnerable than boys who

attended playgroups prior to school, whereas the odds ratio for girls was a little higher 1.86 suggesting girls benefit more from attending playgroups than do boys. Odds ratios were significantly different from 1 and ranged from 1.48 and 1.86 for all sub-groups, suggesting that playgroups are universally beneficial from children from a range of different backgrounds.

Playgroups are universally beneficial for children from a range of different backgrounds

Adjusted effects of playgroups on child development for different jurisdictions

Finally, we explored the impact of playgroups on child development separately for each of the states and territories (see Table 8). Across all jurisdictions, children who attended playgroups prior to school had lower levels of vulnerability than children who did not. These effects remained significant after adjusting for socio-demographic differences between the two groups with adjusted odds ratios ranging from 1.28 to 2.71 in the different jurisdictions. There were big differences between states and territories in the size of the impact of playgroups on the AEDC results. In Tasmania, children who did not attend playgroups were almost three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable at school entry, whereas the odds ratio was just 1.28 in the ACT. These results should be interpreted with some caution given the number of children in each group. For example, in the ACT, 475 children attended playgroups and 92 of these were developmentally vulnerable (19.4%). Nonetheless, the results indicate that the impact of playgroups on child development are largest within Tasmania, followed by SA and WA, Victoria, Queensland, Northern Territory, New South Wales and finally the ACT.

TABLE 8. AEDC results x playgroups attendance in each jurisdiction

	Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?		Adjusted OR (95% CI)
	YES	NO	
New South Wales	14.7% (n=1,448)	23.7% (n=6,126)	1.52 (1.42-1.62)
Victoria	13.7% (n=1,351)	26.0% (n=3,277)	1.84 (1.71-1.98)
Queensland	18.8% (n= 1,762)	30.6% (n=6,163)	1.74 (1.64-1.85)
Western Australia	15.1% (n=840)	30.3% (n=2,498)	1.99 (1.82-2.18)
South Australia	16.1% (n=469)	31.8% (n=646)	2.04 (1.77-2.36)
Tasmania	14.1% (n=293)	33.0% (n=333)	2.71 (0.97-1.70)
Australian Capital Territory	19.4% (n=92)	25.2% (n=235)	1.28 (0.97-1.70)
Northern Territory	35.7% (n=147)	49.0% (n=483)	1.68 (1.27-2.21)

Summary

This section of the report set out to understand the impact of playgroup attendance on child development outcomes.

Key findings include:

- The benefits of playgroup are seen across all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development, and communication.
- Children who do not attend playgroups are 1.78 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains of the AEDC at school entry, after adjusting for socio-economic and demographic differences between the two groups.
- Playgroups are universally beneficial for children from a range of different backgrounds, with adjusted odds ratios ranging from 1.48 to 1.86 for different population groups.
- There are big differences between jurisdictions in the beneficial impacts of playgroups, with adjusted odds ratios ranging from 1.28 in the Australian Capital Territory to 2.71 in Tasmania.

Previous research has shown that children who are developmentally vulnerable when they start primary school are much more likely to have problems with literacy and numeracy skills throughout primary school [27]. Specifically, the research showed that children who were developmentally vulnerable on 1 domain when they started school were 2.3 times more likely to receive a low score in NAPLAN Reading in Grade 7, than children who were not developmentally vulnerable on any domains of the AEDC. The current research suggests an *association* between playgroups and child development, not a causal effect. However, if the effect of playgroups on child development was *causal* then the positive effects of playgroups would be expected to have flow on effects onto children's NAPLAN results later in primary school.

6

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7

APPENDIX A





Appendix A

Technical Information on AEDC Data

The child development outcome measure used throughout this report were collected during the 2012 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The AEDC is a nation census of early childhood development conducted once every three years in Australia on all children in their first year of full time schooling. In 2012, AEDC data were collected on 289,973 children across Australia providing a rich population data source. The AEDC data provides a snapshot of child development at the national level, for each of the states and territories, and AEDC data is publically available (www.aedc.gov.au) for about than 600 communities and 4,700 local communities across Australia


The child development instrument used within the AEDC programme is an Australian adaptation of the Early Development Instrument [28, 29]. The EDI is a 96-item teacher completed instrument measuring development across five developmental domains covering physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive development.

For each of the five domains, children receive a score between 0 and 10 with higher scores representing better development. In addition, children are classified into one of three categories based on national benchmarks set in 2009 during the first national census. In 2009, national benchmarks were set so that children receiving scores below the 10th percentile were classified as “developmentally vulnerable”, children scoring between the 10th and 25th percentile were classified as “developmentally at risk” and children scoring above the 25th percentile were classified as “on track”. In 2012, the same

benchmarks were used to allow monitoring of whether developmental vulnerability for the population of children entering their first year of full time school is improving over time or not [30].

In addition to looking at each of the five domains individually, there are two key summary indicators used within the AEDC programme, which indicate whether children are vulnerable on 1 or more domains (or not), and whether children are vulnerable on 2 or more domains (or not). In this report, we focus primarily on whether children are vulnerable on 1 or more domains as our main outcome measure. In some cases, we report on whether children are developmentally vulnerable on each of the five developmental domains separately.

During the AEDC data collection, demographic information on the child such as gender, Indigenous status, language background and country of birth are obtained from school administrative records and added into the AEDC dataset. In addition, the child’s residential address was linked to information held by the Australia Bureau of Statistics to identify the level of socio-economic disadvantage in the community where the child lived. Specifically, the 2011 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage was linked at the lowest level of geography possible [31] providing a measure of socio-economic disadvantage for each child in the dataset. The child’s residential address was also used to classify the level of geographical remoteness of the community in which they lived based on the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas [32].



In addition to completing the Early Development Instrument, teachers are asked to provide some contextual information about the children in their class. For instance, teachers are asked about the child's education and care experiences prior to school, their transition to school, whether they are read to at home, etc. In 2012, an item was added to ascertain whether children had attended playgroups prior to school ("Did this child attend playgroup before entering full time school?"). This item was used as the measure of playgroup attendance throughout this report. It is important to note that teachers were not asked specifically about whether the child attended a community playgroup or a Playgroup Association run playgroup so they will answer 'Yes' if they are aware of the child attending any type of playgroup run by any organisation prior to starting school.





APPENDIX B



Appendix B

Demographic characteristics of children attending playgroup by jurisdiction

TABLE 9. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (New South Wales)

		Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?			
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	New South Wales	10,483	27.7%	27,429	72.3%
SEX	Male	5,278	27.0%	14,257	73.0%
	Female	5,205	28.3%	13,172	71.7%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	10,029	28.2%	25,543	71.8%
	Indigenous	454	19.4%	1,886	80.6%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	10,021	28.1%	25,651	71.9%
	Other Country	236	16.1%	1,228	83.9%
	Other English Speaking Country	226	29.1%	550	70.9%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	9,376	31.1%	20,753	68.9%
	Yes	1,107	14.2%	6,676	85.8%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)	2,077	19.9%	8,382	80.1%
	Quintile 2	2,107	25.4%	6,200	74.6%
	Quintile 3	1,530	26.5%	4,248	73.5%
	Quintile 4	1,749	32.1%	3,700	67.9%
	Quintile 5 (least disadvantaged)	2,970	38.1%	4,824	61.9%

TABLE 10. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (Victoria)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	Victoria	10,530	43.7%	13,560	56.3%
SEX	Male	5,282	42.5%	7,158	57.5%
	Female	5,248	45.0%	6,402	55.0%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	10,422	44.0%	13,282	56.0%
	Indigenous	108	28.0%	278	72.0%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	10,083	45.0%	12,339	55.0%
	Other Country	231	21.0%	869	79.0%
	Other English Speaking Country	216	38.0%	352	62.0%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	9,898	47.4%	10,993	52.6%
	Yes	632	19.8%	2,567	80.2%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	1,075	28.0%	2,762	72.0%
	Quintile 2	1,880	40.7%	2,737	59.3%
	Quintile 3	2,232	42.5%	3,019	57.5%
	Quintile 4	2,857	51.4%	2,703	48.6%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	2,486	51.5%	2,339	48.5%

TABLE 11. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (Queensland)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	Queensland	9,957	31.9%	21,300	68.1%
SEX	Male	5,052	30.9%	11,290	69.1%
	Female	4,905	32.9%	10,010	67.1%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	9,465	32.8%	19,373	67.2%
	Indigenous	492	20.3%	1,927	79.7%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	9,264	32.0%	19,662	68.0%
	Other Country	209	21.7%	754	78.3%
	Other English Speaking Country	484	35.4%	884	64.6%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	9,448	33.1%	19,137	66.9%
	Yes	509	19.0%	2,163	81.0%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	1,369	23.6%	4,432	76.4%
	Quintile 2	1,679	29.4%	4,036	70.6%
	Quintile 3	2,488	32.0%	5,288	68.0%
	Quintile 4	2,234	35.3%	4,090	64.7%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	2,146	38.7%	3,394	61.3%

TABLE 12. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (Western Australia)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	Western Australia	5,772	40.0%	8,647	60.0%
SEX	Male	2,893	38.9%	4,545	61.1%
	Female	2,879	41.2%	4,102	58.8%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	5,609	42.4%	7,629	57.6%
	Indigenous	163	13.8%	1,018	86.2%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	5,380	41.4%	7,622	58.6%
	Other Country	132	19.2%	555	80.8%
	Other English Speaking Country	260	35.6%	470	64.6%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	5,497	43.0%	7,277	57.0%
	Yes	275	16.7%	1,370	83.3%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	358	24.7%	1,093	75.3%
	Quintile 2	911	35.9%	1,624	64.1%
	Quintile 3	966	34.5%	1,838	65.5%
	Quintile 4	1,285	42.6%	1,734	57.4%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	2,239	48.9%	2,340	51.1%

TABLE 13. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (South Australia)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	South Australia	3,114	58.4%	2,214	41.6%
SEX	Male	1,534	56.9%	1,160	43.1%
	Female	1,580	60.0%	1,054	40.0%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	3,016	59.6%	2,045	40.4%
	Indigenous	98	36.7%	169	63.3%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	2,998	60.8%	1,933	39.2%
	Other Country	51	17.8%	236	82.2%
	Other English Speaking Country	65	59.1%	45	40.9%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	2,916	63.3%	1,689	36.7%
	Yes	198	27.4%	525	72.6%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	599	45.4%	719	54.6%
	Quintile 2	817	61.1%	520	38.9%
	Quintile 3	559	60.2%	370	39.8%
	Quintile 4	660	66.3%	336	33.7%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	478	64.0%	269	36.0%

TABLE 14. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (Tasmania)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	Tasmania	2,113	66.2%	1,087	33.8%
SEX	Male	1,077	64.1%	602	35.9%
	Female	1,056	68.5%	485	31.5%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	2,006	67.3%	975	32.7%
	Indigenous	127	53.1%	112	46.9%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	2,085	66.8%	1,035	33.2%
	Other Country	23	34.8%	43	65.2%
	Other English Speaking Country	25	73.5%	9	26.5%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	2,112	67.0%	1,042	33.0%
	Yes	21	31.8%	45	68.2%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	793	60.9%	510	39.1%
	Quintile 2	519	71.7%	205	28.3%
	Quintile 3	343	74.2%	119	25.8%
	Quintile 4	413	64.9%	223	35.1%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	63	69.2%	28	30.8%

TABLE 15. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (Australian Capital Territory)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	Australian Capital Territory	516	34.3%	987	65.7%
SEX	Male	268	34.1%	517	65.9%
	Female	248	34.5%	470	65.5%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	506	34.5%	959	65.5%
	Indigenous	10	26.3%	28	73.7%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	482	35.8%	863	64.2%
	Other Country	12	12.0%	88	88.0%
	Other English Speaking Country	22	37.9%	36	62.1%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	473	37.8%	777	62.2%
	Yes	43	17.0%	210	83.0%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	< 5	-	< 5	-
	Quintile 2	< 5	-	< 5	-
	Quintile 3	< 5	-	< 5	-
	Quintile 4	210	38.7%	333	61.3%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	301	32.1%	638	67.9%

TABLE 16. Demographic characteristics of children by playgroup attendance (Northern Territory)

Did the child attend playgroup before entering full time school?					
		YES		NO	
		n	%	n	%
	Australia	42,952	36.0%	76,293	64.0%
	Northern Territory	447	29.5%	1,069	70.5%
SEX	Male	206	25.7%	596	74.3%
	Female	241	33.8%	473	66.2%
INDIGENOUS	Non-Indigenous	232	33.2%	467	66.8%
	Indigenous	215	26.3%	602	73.7%
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Australia	431	30.4%	989	69.6%
	Other Country	9	12.2%	65	87.8%
	Other English Speaking Country	7	31.8%	15	68.2%
LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OTHER THAN ENGLISH	No	256	34.0%	497	66.0%
	Yes	191	25.0%	572	75.0%
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITIES WHERE CHILDREN LIVING (SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage)	Quintile 1 (<i>most disadvantaged</i>)	203	29.6%	494	70.4%
	Quintile 2	32	24.4%	99	75.6%
	Quintile 3	78	28.0%	201	72.0%
	Quintile 4	74	29.6%	176	70.4%
	Quintile 5 (<i>least disadvantaged</i>)	55	35.7%	99	64.3%



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