

# Fair for Children and Families

**Submission to the Australian Government  
Department of Social Services NDIS Supports  
Rules Consultation**

July 2025



Playgroup NSW is a not-for-profit organisation that connects children and families to people and services in the community that positively impact their quality of life.

Our impact at a glance:

- 550 playgroups a week
- 26,000 playgroups a year
- 65,000 members across 99% of postcodes
- 650 volunteers, 75 staff

For over 50 years, Playgroup NSW has delivered and linked families to vital services such as parent support groups and playgroups for those experiencing vulnerability and diversity, and those who value community connections. We also support families to navigate the broader community and tertiary support systems, with playgroups an effective, local, place-based soft entry point underpinned by an early intervention and prevention approach.

We are proud to offer valuable volunteer opportunities and experiences through our community-led programs, and we support our volunteers to create connections through play within their communities.

All Playgroup NSW programs delivered across NSW and ACT are designed to help families navigate the joys and challenges of parenting and build strong, resilient communities.

Thousands of families connect via Playgroup sessions affiliated with or delivered by Playgroup NSW every week, building their parental capacity, building their village, and helping their children learn.

Playgroup NSW is the leading peak body for playgroups in NSW, committed to inclusivity and community, and at the heart of our playgroups lies the essence of connection. Since 1972, we focus on giving children an equal opportunity in education, health, and wellbeing.

We play a key role in ensuring that the voices of children and families are heard on matters that affect them at both the state and federal level, as well as lead a range of national consortia research projects, including building evidence based best practices, inclusive enablers and impact measurement frameworks.

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## About Playgroup NSW

Playgroup NSW is the peak body for supported and community playgroups across New South Wales. We reach over 75,000 children, parents, and carers, including many families of children with disability.

While we are not an NDIS provider, we play a vital role in the lives of families who are NDIS participants—often as one of the first, and most consistent, community supports in the early years. We seek to play an active role with the National Disability Insurance Agency as part of the broader early years ecosystem.

## Key Issues and Recommendations

### 1. Support Must Reflect the Whole Family Experience

NDIS changes can cause anxiety, confusion, and disengagement—especially for families of young children. For many of these families, understanding what is or isn't funded under the NDIS is difficult and inconsistent. This uncertainty disproportionately impacts those with low health literacy, those from culturally diverse backgrounds, and those navigating multiple systems of care.

We recommend ensuring all rule changes are accompanied by plain-language, family-friendly materials that clearly explain impacts for children and families—including examples and case studies.

### 2. Listen to the Child and Family Voice

Children can self-advocate, though many also need support. Their experiences of support—or the lack of it—must also be captured through trusted voices, such as parents, carers, peer groups and organisations like ours. The current system overly medicalises disability and ignores the social, developmental, and community contexts in which children grow.

In all future consultations, we recommend targeted engagement with early childhood and family-focused services and ensure play-based and peer-led models are considered as valid forms of developmental support.

### 3. Equity and Early Years Matter

Young children with disability need timely, holistic support. Exclusion from supports due to confusing or restrictive rules can delay intervention, increase stress, and exacerbate long-term inequities. Many of our families report confusion around what constitutes an NDIS support—for example, whether social groups, peer support, or informal play-based development programs are eligible.

We recommend including low-cost, high impact supports such as peer groups, supported playgroups, and community programs in NDIS support lists where they clearly deliver developmental and psychosocial benefit. These may not be “clinical” but are evidence-informed and deeply valuable.

#### **4. Don't Let the Rules Undermine Trust**

The consultation paper and summary clearly show that people want clarity—but not at the expense of flexibility or fairness. A rigid, prescriptive approach risks eroding confidence in the scheme. For children in particular, flexibility must be preserved to accommodate diverse developmental pathways and family contexts.

We recommend applying a developmental lens in rules and include principles that enable flexibility and responsiveness in the early years.

#### **5. Avoid Downstream Pressure on Foundational Supports**

When NDIS rules restrict or exclude low-cost, community-based supports, the impact is felt beyond individual plans. It places greater strain on universal and foundational systems—such as child and family health services, early childhood education, and playgroups—which are already under pressure. This shift increases long-term service demand, delays early intervention, and risks poorer outcomes for children and families.

We recommend recognising the interdependence of the NDIS and the foundational ecosystem of early support. Invest in coordination and clarity between systems to avoid fragmentation and ensure children receive the right support at the right time, regardless of funding source.

## **Conclusion**

As an organisation working at the intersection of early childhood, disability, mental health, and community wellbeing, we urge that these rules consider the lived realities of families with young children. Change—even positive change—can bring anxiety. It is critical that families are supported to navigate the NDIS with confidence, clarity, and care.

We would welcome further opportunities to contribute the voice of families and frontline experience to ongoing NDIS reforms.







## OUR EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMS

### Playgroup NSW Supported Programs & Playgroups

Playgroup NSW has been supporting and connecting families for over five decades through a range of Playgroups and Parent and Career Outcomes Groups facilitated by either volunteers or trained employees.

#### COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

Volunteers run Community Playgroups and connect those Playgroups affiliated with Playgroup NSW. These groups cater to various children and families, from babies to school age and are run by local volunteers who best understand what their community requires from a Playgroup. There are also Community Playgroups that cater to a range of services, looking for something specific, such as Baby Outlets or language-specific groups.

#### BABY AND FIRST-TIME PARENT'S GROUPS

Baby Playgroups cater to families with a child up to 12 months of age, offering babies a wide variety of early learning experiences and giving parents and carers a safe space to discuss ideas, challenges, and the joys and frustrations of parenting.

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#### START STRONG

Start Strong Pathways program helps provide educational support for young children prior to preschool enrolment, strengthens the engagement of children within these services and helps promote the importance of early childhood education to parents.

#### TIMELESS PLAY INTERGENERATIONAL PLAYGROUPS

Timeless Play Intergenerational Playgroups bring together three generations – seniors, children and their parents. Interacting with seniors adds a new dimension to the Playgroup experience for children and can be incredibly enriching for those who don't have access to spending time with their own grandparents.

#### MYTIME

MyTime engages our support groups for parents and carers of children with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition. It provides face-to-face and online peer support for parents and carers, with a facilitator for parents and a play leader for preschool-aged children. The group caters to parents or carers with a child up to age 10 who require a higher level of care than other children.

#### PLAYCONNECT +

PlayConnect+ Playgroups are for families of children with disability and/or developmental concerns from birth through to eight years of age. Children do not require a formal diagnosis or referral to attend. PlayConnect+ is a Playgroup for the whole family, and siblings and carers are also welcome and included at PlayConnect+.

#### PALS

Play and Learn Supported (PALS) Playgroups provide developmentally appropriate play and learning opportunities for 0-6 years of age of all abilities. Activities are co-designed for families where children with a disability get exposure to mainstream cultural, arts, sporting or recreational activities. It's a great place to connect with others to increase diversity skills and enhance families' understanding of disability and inclusion within the community.

#### SUTHERLAND SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS (SSPG)

SSPG offers indoor and outdoor play activities and experiences that embrace the strengths, interests and emerging skills of children aged 0-6 years. Our qualified early childhood educators provide a nurturing and stimulating environment that supports children's growth and learning during their early years through intentional teaching and role modelling. Activities also include education to build confidence in parenting by connecting them with services and resources that support their children's development and overall well-being.

#### ABORIGINAL SUPPORTED

Aboriginal Supported Playgroups play an important role in connecting Aboriginal families to their culture while offering family and parental support. These Playgroups are an opportunity to connect with others in their community and offer families linkages to other services and resources, while acting as a stepping stone to early learning and preschool. The program is delivered by dedicated Aboriginal educators who strive to bridge the gap and increase equality in education, wellbeing and health outcomes for young Aboriginal children and their families.

#### LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE GROUPS

Language-specific and Culturally Diverse Groups Playgroup NSW has a strong tradition of supporting culturally and linguistically diverse families and, at present, supports local communities by offering Playgroups, which cater to over 20 different languages and cultures in Playgroups across NSW.

#### PLAYTOGETHER

Play Together offers access to programs within Playgroup NSW to support children and families with a disability and/or developmental delay to participate in community Playgroup settings. This is achieved through training, workshops and webinars to build the capacity of educators, service providers and industry experts, as well as the provision of a range of resources to support this learning. One-on-one family support is also provided to families to overcome barriers to participation and inclusion.

92%

would recommend Playgroup NSW Playgroups to other families with young children

96%

say attending Playgroup has increased their connection with other parents

95%

say Playgroup has increased their participation with people and services in their community

97%

say Playgroup has benefited them in their parenting role

98%

say Playgroup has supported their child's development

98%

say Playgroup has increased their child's social skills





## OUR KEY MESSAGES



Play is critical to the first 2000 days of a child's life

Playgroups are a unique soft entry point that are local, place based, early intervention and prevention model

Playgroups are unique - both children and parents benefit

Playgroup NSW is leading the future of playgroups, innovative in our approaches across community and supported groups to reach dads, multicultural families, vulnerable cohorts, remote communities, Aboriginal families and children in non-traditional settings such as out of home care and adoptive families

Playgroups are a key foundational support, navigation, connector and referral point in the critical early years

Peer to peer support is a key component of playgroups in building capacity, nurturing connection and resilience



SEE WHAT ALL THE FUN IS ABOUT



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We work with passion and pride to ensure that every child and family has the very best start in life.

Working together across government, philanthropy, early childhood, health, community, research and corporate sectors enables us to grow our reach and impact to those who need it most across our community, disability, First Nations, multicultural and intergenerational offerings.

We are so much more than just playgroups - from play to peer to peer support to community development, health, early intervention, prevention, evidence based research and evaluation, we are proud to firmly place children and families at the centre of all we do

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