



Safe Communities Start in the Early Years

**Submission to the Review of Criminal Law
Protections Against the Incitement of Hatred**

August 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. Each year, we support over 75,000 families through 600+ playgroups. Our work spans rural and remote areas, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, parents with disability, families living with disadvantage, and children in out-of-home care.

Playgroups are unique in that they engage both children and caregivers, providing connection, learning, peer support, and early intervention in a safe, inclusive environment. As a place-based and community-led model, playgroups play a quiet but powerful role in preventing social isolation and promoting belonging and wellbeing.

The Impact of Hatred on Vulnerable Families and Communities

Hate-based conduct and incitement have devastating consequences for the families we support. Many parents and caregivers at playgroups report experiencing discrimination based on race, religion, disability, language, or cultural background.

The impacts include:

- Withdrawal from public spaces, including early childhood settings
- Diminished mental health and wellbeing
- Reduced access to services and social participation for both parent and child

We note that marginalised families—especially those experiencing intersectional disadvantage—may be especially vulnerable to public acts of incitement and vilification. These harms are often silent, invisible, and cumulative.

The Need for Stronger and Broader Criminal Law Protections

We support the intent behind the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Act 2025. However, we encourage the expansion of protections beyond race to include:

- Religion
- Disability
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Parental status and carer responsibilities

The families we support do not experience discrimination in isolation. Many face multiple forms of hate or hostility. Criminal law should reflect this intersectionality and provide equitable protection.

We also recommend:

- Clearer definitions of "incitement" and "hatred" to guide enforcement
- Ongoing education and guidance for police and prosecutors
- Simplified reporting mechanisms and community education about protections

Balancing Free Speech and Protection

Playgroup NSW recognises the importance of free speech, political communication, and freedom of religion. However, these rights must be balanced against the right of children and families to live free from hate, violence, and fear.

We support the inclusion of safeguards (e.g., intention thresholds, public act requirements, and religious exemptions) that maintain this balance while ensuring that protections are not diluted.

Criminal Law and Social Cohesion

Playgroups are foundational to building social cohesion in communities. They demonstrate daily that respectful connection across difference is not only possible, but powerful. Criminal law alone is not enough to prevent hate—but it plays an important symbolic and deterrent role. Law reform should sit alongside investment in:

- Preventative education, especially in the early years
- Peer-led programs that build empathy and reduce prejudice
- Capacity-building in community organisations (e.g., playgroups) to promote inclusion

Playgroups as a Foundation for Anti-Hatred and Inclusion

Playgroups are one of the earliest environments where children and families encounter diversity in a structured yet informal setting. They offer a unique opportunity to model and reinforce inclusive behaviours from the start of life. Through shared play, respectful interactions, and parent-to-parent connection, playgroups lay the groundwork for empathy, respect, and belonging.

By bringing together families from all walks of life—across culture, language, ability, religion, and family structure—playgroups naturally counteract prejudice and isolation. They demonstrate, at the earliest stage, what inclusive community looks like in practice.

With the right support, playgroups can also actively showcase anti-hatred messaging, provide peer-led learning around discrimination, and build capacity among volunteers and facilitators to respond to and prevent bias. In this way, playgroups contribute not only to child development and family wellbeing, but also to a more cohesive and respectful society.

Recommendations

1. Expand the new incitement offence to protect vulnerable groups beyond race.
2. Ensure enforcement is culture and trauma-informed, especially for marginalised families.
3. Invest in playgroups and other soft-entry programs that promote connection and inclusion.
4. Include child rights and family wellbeing perspectives in any future consultations on reform.

Conclusion

Hate has no place in the lives of children, families, or communities. Playgroup NSW supports strong, inclusive laws that protect against incitement and discrimination—while also recognising the vital role of early prevention. By fostering connection, empathy and belonging from the earliest years, playgroups help build a safer, more cohesive New South Wales for all. We welcome this Review and urge continued investment in both legal protections and community-based solutions.

Our Impact: Playgroup NSW



ABOUT PLAYGROUP NSW

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- 550 playgroups a week
- 26,000 playgroups a year
- 63,868 members
- 546 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in culturally appropriate Playgroups
- 5235 parents attending peer to peer support sessions
- Members in 99% of NSW postcodes, reflecting the incredible reach and diversity of our community
- \$7.2 million annual funding, 30% growth in income over the past year, enhancing our impact
- 50+ years proudly in operation as the peak body with state and national footprint in services and advocacy



Our Vision
The national standard for play in early childhood learning for children, their families and carers

Our Purpose
Playgroup NSW leads and enables playgroups and parents, carers and community to support children, their families and carers

Our Values
Act with integrity, honesty and transparency at all times
Respect and play in a safe and inclusive environment
Lead change that improves the lives of children, their families and carers
Share knowledge, experience and resources

Our Programs
The various programs through our Playgroup program areas:

- Parental Capacity Building
- Playgroup (Pre-School)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Universal & Community Led
- Playgroup (Pre-School) - 0-5 years and mental health
- Disability & Inclusion
- Torres Strait Islander
- Culture & Linguistic Diversity
- Rural & Remote

Our Priorities

For our children, families & community, we will:

- Strengthen capacity and support capacity and support through resources, targeted and coordinated services
- Facilitate parent-child development, learning, social interaction, the playgroup, health and wellbeing, and pathways to early learning
- Create equal opportunities for all children and families to access, including indigenous, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, disability, and Torres Strait Islander, children and families who receive, healthy and developmentally appropriate services
- Create environments and resources that support children, their families and carers

With our partners, we will:

- Be a leading voice and contributor in the development of the early years sector
- Represent the voice of playgroups and our community to government and other key stakeholders
- Provide targeted and inclusive services that drive cultural change for the benefit of all children
- Deliver culturally appropriate services and programs and Torres Strait Islander services and programs
- Support of Australia-wide network to increase reach and impact

Our strategic priorities, aligned with the NSW Government's Strategic Plan, are:

- Ensure children safely, securely and inclusively participate
- Create healthy, equitable, sustainable communities
- Provide opportunities for development, independence and education
- Be a leading voice and contributor in the early years sector
- Deliver on our commitment to development, disability and inclusion programs
- Encourage a culture of innovation across the network

Our strategy is underpinned by a continued focus on our foundational capabilities:

1. Building community capacity and trust
2. Building evidence & research excellence
3. Growth & financial sustainability
4. Digital engagement and delivery

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN



OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



Kellie Murray, Chief First Nations Officer
Steve Moore, Chief Operating Officer
Emily Caska, Chief Executive Officer
Jennifer Kemp, Chief Social Impact Officer



OUR GROWING IMPACT



"My Playgroup experience has been overwhelmingly positive. The environment is nurturing and inclusive, fostering a sense of community among the children and parents. The activities are well-organised and engaging, promoting both fun and learning. Overall, it's been a wonderful opportunity for my child to socialise and develop new skills in a safe and friendly setting."

"Playgroup has made me a better parent."

"I experienced the Playgroup to be very healthy for me in my early single moment of playing with my daughter that's taken me out of my depression. Also it's very healthy for her to discover new places new friends and new things."

"I am honestly so grateful for Playgroup as it has supported my daughter's holistic development, encouraged her to build and nurture new friendships, given me so many new ideas for playtime as well as new friendships for me personally with other parents, and it is an experience my daughter absolutely loves. I genuinely love watching her happy little face as she checks out all the new activities and interacts with her new friends. It's the highlight of my day."



"Playgroup has only just started back up locally after 2 years, and it's been a great experience. My daughter really enjoys going, and hoping to be able to take both my girls regularly."

"Getting a reason to leave the house rather than being stuck indoors with no social interaction has helped my mental health and my children love somewhere new to play and socialise."



"Playgroup is a great place for adults and children to come together socially to learn and have fun. I have made friends with other parents and my son has friends he will have for school and beyond."

"Playgroup has been an excellent experience for myself and my child. Interacting with other local families is a fantastic part of our week."

"Playgroups have helped me to not feel isolated, it has allowed me to celebrate my daughter with her development and made me feel supported by the community when sharing the difficulties of parenting. It has stimulated my daughter with activities I would not have thought of. It also gives her the opportunity to socialise, share and see how others (adults) treat each other."

"Without the interactions of the local (family of friends) and parents themselves already connected new parents and local services from the area (Nurse, Aged Care and Playgroup) visiting the Playgroup, the entire life and parenting experience would be immensely different as I was in a very lonely relationship and with the knowledge and support gained through Playgroup I was able to keep the household going again."

550+

Playgroups a week

26,000

Playgroup a year

642

Volunteers

711

Communities, Supported and Organisational Playgroups

38

Pop-Up Playgroups

49

Innovative In-Centre Playgroups in Partnership with Westfield

48

New Community Playgroups Started

542

Play Van Services

7

New International Playgroups

1446

MyTime Parent Peer Support Sessions

TOTAL INCOME
\$7,209,391

UP 30%
Year on Year

1

First International Playgroup in Wagga

24

Community Events connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families in Wagga

11

Corporate Partners

63,868

Members

Playgroups across of NSW Postcodes

44%



1163

LinkedIn Followers

546

Total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Culturally appropriate Programs

5235

Parents Attending MyTime Peer Support Sessions

52,000

Newsletter Subscribers

67,288

Unique Website Visitors

15

Capacity Building Workshops Held

31,000

Facebook Followers

71

Team Members

11,300

Instagram Followers

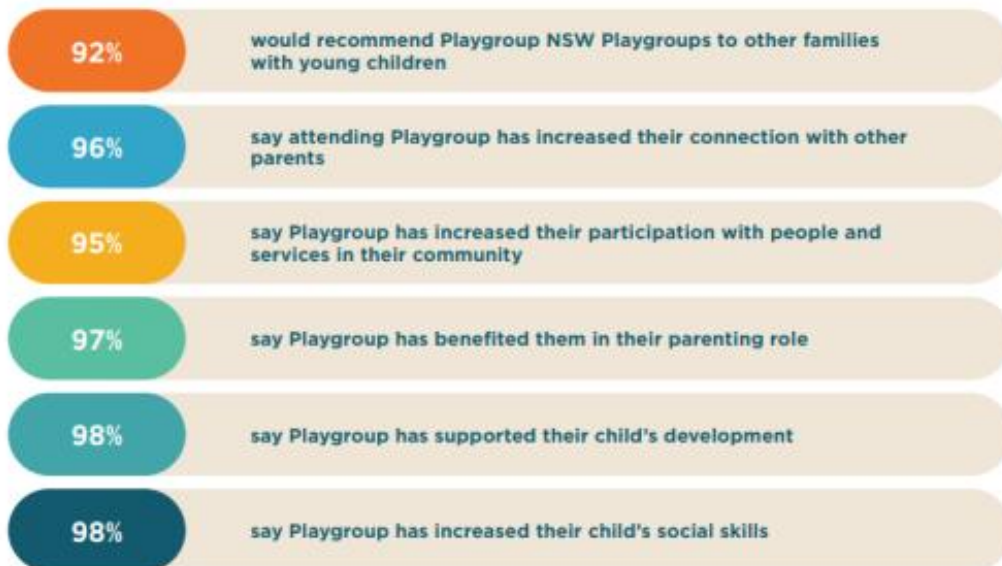
40

Resources, Publications or Activity Sheets Shared





OUR EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMS



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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