




Playgroup
nsw

PLAYSTRONG IMPACT REPORT

Funded by the NSW Department of Education through Start Strong Pathways



About the NSW Start Strong Pathways Program

The Start Strong Pathways program is a NSW Government initiative designed to support the early learning needs of children aged 0–3 years, particularly those not yet eligible for preschool. Launched in 2018 and continuing through 2025, the program provides funding to not-for-profit services to deliver place-based, culturally appropriate early learning activities to children and families. Its core objectives are to engage very young children in early education, support their transition into preschool settings, and promote the value of early childhood education to families and communities.

The program is especially focused on reaching children from priority groups, including Aboriginal families, children with disability or developmental concerns, those from low-income or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and families experiencing social isolation. Services funded under the program offer tailored support such as play-based learning, parent education, and transition planning.

Evidence supporting the program highlights the long-term benefits of early engagement in education. Research shows that children who participate in early learning before preschool are more likely to develop strong social, emotional, and cognitive skills, which are critical for school readiness. The program also helps families navigate the early childhood education system, improving access and inclusion for those who may face barriers.





Our Playgroup NSW PlayStrong Program

Playgroup NSW delivers the Start Strong Pathways initiative through its PlayStrong supported playgroup model. We know that these playgroups are a powerful way to deliver quality outcomes for children and families because:

- Children who attend playgroups are 47% more likely to be developmentally on track across all five AEDC domains and these outcomes hold true across diverse population groups
- Playgroups are particularly effective in addressing vulnerabilities in social competence, emotional regulation, and language exposure - domains that saw the largest increases in vulnerability based on AEDC data between 2021 and 2024.
- The model is informed by the Early years Learning Framework
- The playgroups reduce attendance barriers for families with no cost to attend and locations that are readily accessible.
- Families are empowered through access to information, resources and community connection for support and services
- The Peep Learning Together program is embedded in the playgroups
- They are uniquely connected to, and embedded within, local communities and collaborate with local services including libraries, community services, health and allied health, early childhood partners.

Our Reach

50 playgroup sessions
per week

16,000

total child attendances

45%

of families speak a
language other than
English at home

7%

of children
have a
diagnosed
disability at
service

7% of
Aboriginal
families

40%

of sessions delivered in
regional and rural New
South Wales

19 service
delivery
partners

60%

of sessions delivered in
metropolitan areas,
predominantly Western
Sydney, South-West
Sydney and Central Coast

2136

unique registrations recorded
across all Playgroup NSW
PlayStrong groups in the
period from 1 July 2024 to 30
June 2025, engaging a diverse
range of communities,
including First Nations families,
culturally and linguistically
diverse (CALD) communities,
fathers' groups, and families in
regional and rural areas.



Outcomes

87%

of parents reported an improved relationship with their child

83%

of parents saw improvement in their child's early literacy development

80%

of parents saw improvement in their child's early numeracy development

88%

of parents saw improvement in their child's social skills

88%

of parents reported a greater understanding of the importance of Early Childhood Education

90%

of parents reported feeling more confident in engaging in and creating learning opportunities for their child in the home learning environment

90%

of parents reported feeling more connected with their community

50%

of families reported their child had been enrolled, or increased their hours at an ECEC, with a further 25% still exploring options

Testimonials



"Play group is the one place where both my children are able to come and be included just as they are. As a family where one child is autistic and the other is neurotypical, there are very few spaces where both our children are welcome and included to fully participate and where there is no expectation that they be anything other than their true selves."

"My child has definitely improved her social, physical and listening skills while we have attended playgroup. I love that they do a lot of indigenous activities and education."

"It's been crucial to my mental health and general well-being as a first-time mum as well as so beneficial for my little one- who is given opportunities to interact alongside other children and foster their development and learning as they continue to grow. The opportunity to build friendships with other parents and receive support from the facilitators as well as the various community support organisations that often come and share their specific insights- it's been a positive part of my motherhood journey."

About Playgroup NSW

Playgroup NSW is the peak body for playgroups in New South Wales, with over 50 years of experience supporting families with children from birth to school age. We deliver supported, community-led, and targeted playgroups that foster child development, parenting confidence, and community connection. Each week, thousands of families engage in our programs across metro, regional, and remote NSW, including culturally safe playgroups for First Nations families, disability-inclusive groups, and specialist initiatives that serve as soft entry points to health, family support, and early education services.

Playgroup NSW in Numbers

- 550+ Playgroups each week
- 5,000+ families supported
- 70,000+ members
- 99% of NSW postcodes with Members
- 400+ First Nations Families
- 800+ CALD Families
- 1,400+ Families with Children with Disability

More than *just* Playgroups

Playgroup NSW is a leader in:

- place based, peer-led peer to peer support groups for parents
- parental capacity building through resources and workshops
- focus on engaging dads, siblings, grandparents in the early childhood space navigation support to parents and families – both within PGNSW and connecting them to services and supports in their communities
- out of home care in reach and partnerships
- sector development and community building
- employment and volunteering opportunities – particularly for women re-entering the workforce
- early childhood development research projects we lead nationally, through funding from Ian Potter Foundation and Department of Social Services
- corporate partnerships and investment into the sector
- policy and advocacy at state and federal government levels
- participation in submissions and parliamentary hearings



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