



# PLAY FOR OUR FUTURE

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO THE  
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT 2026



# CEO MESSAGE

Playgroups are true community assets, playing a critical role in ensuring thriving children, families and communities.

Playgroups don't just happen - our advocacy plays a key role in ensuring a sustainable and vibrant playgroup sector where all children and families in all areas have access to universal and free playgroups. We still have a long way to go.

Our advocacy aims to support the federal and state governments to secure brighter futures for all children and families and in doing so, a brighter future for all Australians.



**EMILY CASKA**  
**CEO, PLAYGROUP NSW**

# PRE-BUDGET PRIORITY: INVESTING IN PLAYGROUPS AS FOUNDATIONAL EARLY YEARS INFRASTRUCTURE

Playgroup NSW is calling on the Australian Government to make **targeted, evidence-based investments that strengthen prevention, early intervention and family wellbeing across the first 2,000 days.**

Our pre-Budget priorities focus on embedding playgroups as core social infrastructure within the early childhood, health, disability and community systems.

## ISSUE

Families across NSW are facing increasing cost-of-living pressure, mental health challenges and fragmented access to early supports. **Evidence shows the first 2,000 days are critical to lifelong outcomes, yet prevention, early intervention and family capability-building remain under-invested relative to downstream crisis services.**

## OPPORTUNITY

Playgroup NSW provides a statewide, community-embedded platform that integrates playgroups, peer support, parent capacity building and peak body coordination to deliver scalable prevention and early intervention outcomes. **This integrated model enables government to reach families earlier, strengthen protective factors and improve system efficiency.**

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

### For Children and Families

- Improved early development, school readiness and lifelong learning outcomes
- Stronger parent–child attachment and caregiving capacity
- Reduced social isolation and improved parental mental health
- Earlier identification of developmental vulnerability and faster access to supports

### For Communities

- Stronger social cohesion, community connection and local resilience
- Increased participation of parents — particularly women — in volunteering, training and employment pathways
  - Improved access to services in regional and rural areas
  - Reduced intergenerational disadvantage through early intervention

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

### **For Government and Service Systems**

- Reduced downstream demand on health, child protection, disability and crisis services through upstream intentional prevention investment and impact
- Improved return on public investment by shifting expenditure from reactive to preventative service delivery
- Increased workforce participation and economic productivity from supported parents and carers
- Improved service integration and reduced duplication across portfolios, particularly health, disability, education
- Faster delivery of outcomes through scalable, community-based infrastructure
- Stronger accountability and data-informed decision-making through coordinated peak body oversight

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

### **For the Early Years System**

- More efficient delivery of early childhood outcomes without reliance on capital-intensive infrastructure
  - Strengthened cross-sector coordination across education, health, disability and community services
- Greater equity of access, reach and participation for vulnerable and underserved populations
- Improved transition pathways into ECEC and formal education settings, particularly for the most vulnerable children

## LOW INVESTMENT, HIGH IMPACT

Our pre-Budget agenda **positions playgroups and peer support as well as our parent capacity building as a high-impact, low-cost investment that delivers measurable returns across child development, family wellbeing, workforce participation and long-term service demand reduction.**

Cost effectiveness characteristics to leverage for return on investment in playgroup and peer support groups includes:

- Low infrastructure cost
- Volunteer-supported and workforce-leveraged
  - Highly scalable
  - Community-embedded and trusted
- Rapid to deploy compared to capital-intensive service models

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Our proposed investment aligns with:

- First 2,000 Days strategies
- Early childhood reform agendas
- Workforce participation objectives
- Place-based service delivery priorities
- Child safety and wellbeing frameworks

Playgroup NSW stands ready to partner with government to **deliver scalable, place-based solutions that create stronger families, safer communities and better outcomes for children.**

## INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

### 1. Universal Access to Playgroups

Ensure all children and families can access free, inclusive playgroups that support early learning, connection and developmental readiness. Increased investment into community and supported playgroups is critical to achieving this for every child, in every family, in every community as early as possible.

### 2. Integrated Place-Based Hubs, The Play Place Model

Expand community hubs that co-locate playgroups with early education, health, disability and family services to improve access and service integration.

### 3. Peer Support Expansion

Scale evidence-based peer support programs to reduce isolation, improve parental mental health and strengthen family wellbeing — particularly for parents of children with disability, new parents and vulnerable cohorts.

#### **4. Parent Capacity Building**

Invest in early home learning programs, digital platforms and education pathways that build parenting skills, confidence and capability during the early years.

#### **5. Early Intervention and Protection Pathways**

Position playgroups as the earliest soft-entry platform for prevention, child safety, developmental screening and referral into targeted supports.

#### **6. Workforce and Volunteer Capability**

Strengthen volunteer-to-work pathways, facilitator training and leadership development to increase workforce participation and sustain sector growth.

#### **7. Research, Data and Evaluation**

Build statewide outcomes measurement capability to support evidence-based investment and continuous improvement.



## ABOUT PLAYGROUP NSW

Playgroup NSW is the state's peak body for playgroups and peer support, delivering prevention, early intervention and family wellbeing outcomes across NSW for over 50 years.

Each year, **we support over 76,000 families and deliver more than 120,000 hours of direct family support** across metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

We operate as a community-embedded, statewide delivery platform, uniquely positioned to reach families early, reduce access barriers and strengthen protective factors in the first 2,000 days of life.

**Powered by over 700 staff and volunteers**, Playgroup NSW delivers place-based, universal and trusted community platforms that provide scalable prevention and early intervention support across NSW.

## INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE FIRST 2000 DAYS

Our integrated delivery model is built on four core pillars:

### **Playgroups**

We support a statewide network of community, supported, targeted and culturally specific playgroups that provide safe, inclusive early learning environments and reach families in the earliest years.

### **Peer Support**

We deliver evidence-based peer support programs that reduce isolation, strengthen parental mental health and provide connection and guidance for families navigating parenting and developmental challenges.



# INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE FIRST 2000 DAYS

## **Parent Capacity Building**

Through early home learning initiatives, digital platforms, education programs and practical resources, we strengthen parent capability, confidence and engagement in children's development and learning.

## **Peak Body Leadership**

As the sector leader in NSW, Playgroup NSW provides strategic coordination, governance frameworks, workforce and volunteer development, data governance, evaluation, research partnerships and system-level advocacy. This ensures quality, consistency and scalability across the playgroup sector statewide.

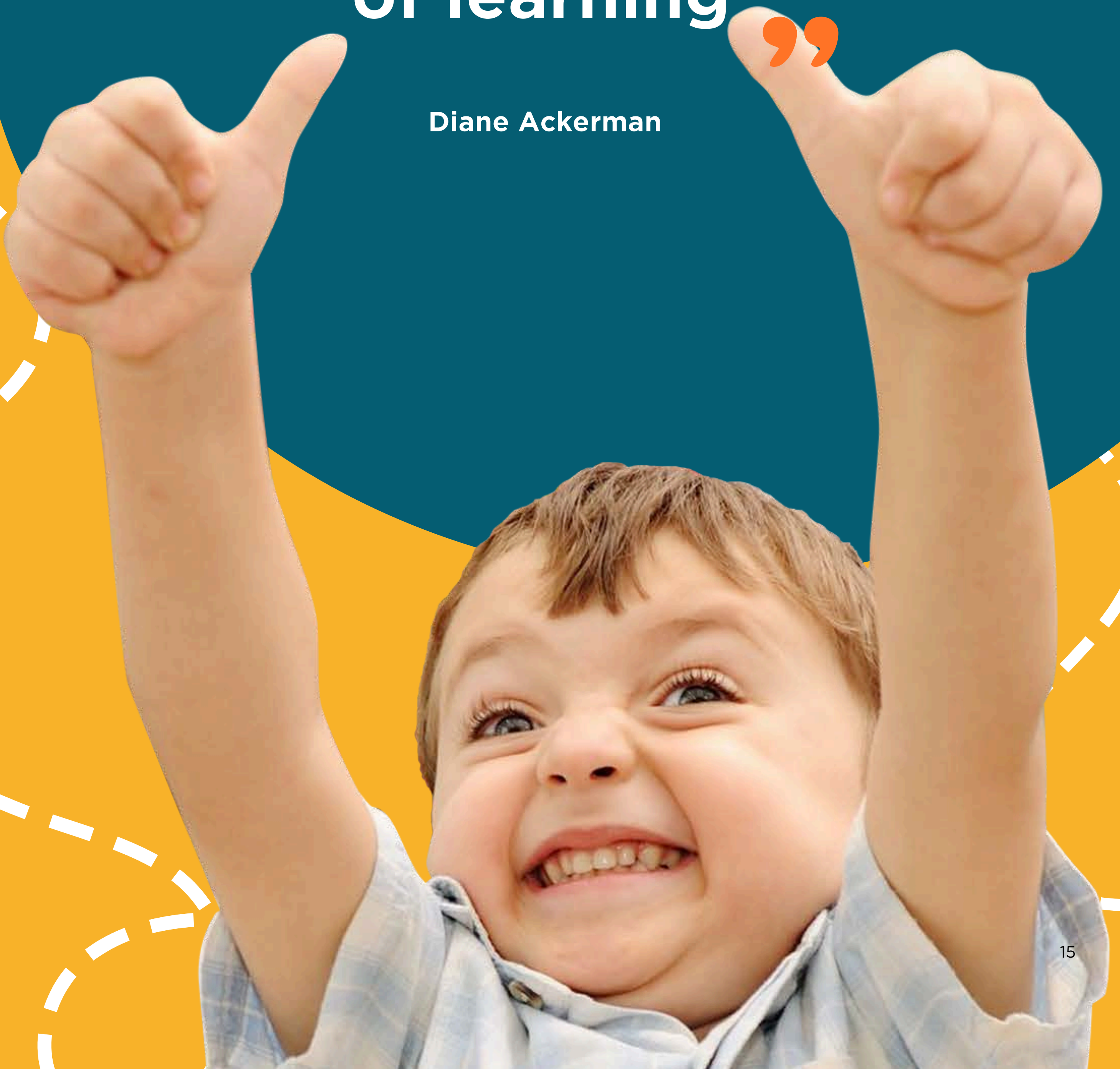
“

**PLAY**

**is your brain's  
favourite way  
of learning**

”

Diane Ackerman



## RIGHTS

**CHILD RIGHTS  
ARE UNDERSTOOD,  
EMBEDDED AND UPHELD**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Support for our  
Statement of Commitment  
to Child Rights and Safety,  
and implementation funding  
including campaign and  
capacity building for staff,  
volunteers, children, families,  
communities, the sector  
on child rights in line with  
the UN Convention**

## VOICE

**THE VOICES OF  
CHILDREN, PARENTS,  
CARERS AND FAMILIES  
ARE HEARD AND VALUED**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Commitment to  
and investment in the  
establishment of our NSW  
Committee for Children and  
Families and our NSW  
Committee for Parents and  
Carers of Children with  
Disability, to provide feedback  
to the NSW Government,  
alongside advocacy funding  
to Playgroup NSW**

## UNIVERSAL ACCESS

# UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PLAYGROUPS FOR THRIVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Increased investment  
to ensure that all  
children and all  
families in all areas  
have access to free,  
universal and  
inclusive playgroups**

## PLACE BASED HUBS

**BRINGING THE POWER OF  
PLAY TO PLACES  
THROUGH OUR  
INTEGRATED HUBS:  
THE PLAY PLACE**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Investment in our place based, inclusive and accessible community hubs, The Play Place Project.**

**Piloting in Western Sydney, Newcastle and Dubbo, integrated with early education, health, disability, family violence, community in partnership with the NSW Government and key research partners**

# PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

## ENGAGING OUR MOST VULNERABLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Investment to address the barriers to playgroup participation, drawing on our innovative pilots to engage key cohorts: dads, culturally and linguistically diverse families, children in out of home care settings, working families, grandparent carers, women experiencing family violence, parents with disability**

# INTERSECTIONALITY: ECEC

## PLAYGROUUPS AS A UNIVERAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE MODEL

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Playgroups to be included in and funded proportionate to the early childhood education and care sector, recognising playgroups as a pathway into, complementary model alongside, and alternative to formal early childhood education settings**

# INTERSECTIONALITY: HEALTH

## PLAYGROUPS AS EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Playgroups to be utilised as a formal partner for early childhood health and development checks in partnership with NSW Health as part of the Brighter Beginnings initiative as playgroups have earlier, broader and more accessible reach in the first 2,000 days**

# INTERSECTIONALITY: DISABILITY

# PLAYGROUPS AND PEER SUPPORT FOR THRIVING KIDS AND THRIVING FAMILIES

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Recognition of playgroups as place based, early soft entry point foundational supports, with investment to increase our navigation and linkage support services to families of children with developmental delay or disability across mainstream, general, targeted and NDIS**

## EARLY INTERVENTION

# PLAYGROUPS AS THE EARLIEST INTERVENTION, PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Expansion of playgroups as a targeted early intervention and prevention model, as well as a protective model for children and families with greater leadership from government to break down silos across the disability, health, child protection and family violence sectors**

## PEER TO PEER SUPPORT

**INCREASED PEER TO  
PEER SUPPORT  
FOR CONNECTION,  
WELLBEING AND  
BELONGING**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Increased investment into our peer to peer support groups for parents of children with disability or developmental delay to meet demand, as well as extension of our expertise and evidence based models for parents experiencing other vulnerabilities**

## PARENT CAPACITY

# BUILDING THE CAPACITY AND CONFIDENCE OF PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Increased investment  
in our early home learning  
and resource hub for parents  
and carers, as well as our early  
childhood webinar series and  
podcast series to build the  
knowledge, skills, confidence  
and capacity of busy  
modern parents**

## SECTOR CAPACITY

# ENHANCING SECTOR CAPABILITY, COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Support the  
establishment of our  
Playgroup NSW Communities  
of Practice and the Playgroup  
Innovation Fund to drive  
collaboration, continuous  
improvement and innovation**

## RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

# BOOSTING EVIDENCE BASED BEST PRACTICES FOR OPTIMAL OUTCOMES

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Investment in  
Playgroup NSW to deliver  
PEEP Training to staff in all  
playgroups across NSW, as well as  
commissioning key research to  
drive evidence based best  
practices, tools, practice guides  
and impact evaluation**

**SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY**

**REINVIGORATING  
PLAYGROUP  
VOLUNTEERING,  
ESTABLISHMENT AND  
INCUBATION**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Investment in our Spark Hub, designed to support the establishment and incubation of new playgroups through proactive service mapping, volunteer attraction and capacity building, establishment and incubation support and succession for sustainability**

## REDUCING BARRIERS

# NURTURING PLAYGROUP SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUITY THROUGH VENUE ACCESS

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Intentional  
community development  
and social infrastructure  
planning that includes  
playgroups in every community  
across NSW, in formal partnership  
between Playgroup NSW and  
local government to ensure  
free, accessible venues  
for playgroups**

## PLAY IN COMMUNITIES

# TRANSFORMATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AS ACTIVE PLAYFUL LANDSCAPES

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Activation of  
community spaces as  
active playful landscapes  
with innovative, evidence based  
play installations, in partnership  
with Playgroup NSW to  
transform communities and  
harness the power of  
place based play  
everyday**

# CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY

## EMBEDDING ARTICLE 31 OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities - be recognised and embedded in all early childhood education, health and disability settings**

# GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

## PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT FOR PLAYGROUPS IN PERPETUITY

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**The establishment of Parliamentary Friends of Playgroups at NSW Parliament, underpinned by bipartisan support recognising play as critical to the first 2,000 days, bringing together education, disability, health and communities portfolios**



# ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

# SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR OUR INTEGRATED ABORIGINAL CHILD AND FAMILY COMMUNITY HUB

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Sustainable, long term investment in our innovative Ngurra Hub in Wiradjuri Country Wagga Wagga, delivering intergated services and supports by community, for community, ensuring that every Aboriginal child and family has the very best start in life**



**CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY  
DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

**EMBRACING  
MULTICULTURALISM  
THROUGH PLAY**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Investment to translate resources, increase in language playgroups, embed diverse cultural practices and awareness across all playgroups. Proactive recruitment and support of diverse playgroup facilitators and volunteers to match community need**

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

# PLAYGROUPS AS A KEY WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION MODEL

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Investment in our  
Volunteer To Work  
Program, designed to  
support return to work parents  
in the early years through our  
structured learning and  
development, mentoring,  
credentialling support  
and career progression  
hub**

# CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

**PLAY AND EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
ENGAGEMENT IS  
VALUED BY EMPLOYERS**

**WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR**

**Reforms to continue to increase paid parental leave and family friendly work practices, as well as utilisation of leave or other entitlements to enable parents and carers to engage in play and early childhood, and incentives for workplaces to host playgroups for staff and their children**



# Playgroup

nsw

CONNECT WITH US

CEO EMILY CASKA: [ecaska@playgroupnsw.org.au](mailto:ecaska@playgroupnsw.org.au)

PHONE: 1800 171 882

WEB: [www.playgroupnsw.org.au](http://www.playgroupnsw.org.au)

FACEBOOK: [/PlaygroupNSW](https://www.facebook.com/PlaygroupNSW)

INSTAGRAM: [@PlaygroupNSW](https://www.instagram.com/PlaygroupNSW)

LINKEDIN: [Playgroup NSW](https://www.linkedin.com/company/playgroup-nsw)

