



SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT



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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS PROVIDE VITAL SUPPORT FOR PLAYGROUPS

For more than 50 years, local governments in Western Australia have fostered volunteer-led playgroups through access to quality venues, as well as offering community grants, forming partnerships, and providing resources to support families with young children.

Councils continue to play a vital role in sustaining playgroups, facilitating venue access, and promoting inclusivity through strategic community development.

This support strengthens local communities, helping families thrive. Playgroups provide essential social networks and child development opportunities. When children and families receive early support, they build lasting connections and are more likely to flourish throughout their lives.

WHAT IS A PLAYGROUP?

A playgroup is a place to meet each week in your local community for parents or caregivers and their young children aged 0-5 years. Families meet in a safe and supportive environment to play and interact socially, which supports early childhood development. Babies and children develop social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills through play, while caregivers connect, share experiences and build supportive networks in their local community.

There are different types of playgroups, including community playgroups and supported playgroups. The latter are funded, facilitated playgroups to meet specific needs.

Community playgroups are organised and led by volunteers - the parents or caregivers who attend the playgroup.

HOW PLAYGROUPS ARE DIFFERENT TO OTHER EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTIVITIES

Playgroups are parent-led which benefits both the children and the parents. Unlike early years care and education, parents stay and continue to supervise their child. This parental involvement creates a shared experience where adults and children learn and socialise together. This can build confidence for first-time parents and provide them with a vital support network.

Importantly, playgroups are flexible, low-cost, and shaped by the needs and interests of local families.

Being part of a playgroup fosters a sense of belonging and helps families connect with local services, schools, and community resources.

PLAYGROUP VENUES

Having a place to meet and play in their local community is an essential need for families with young children. Quality playgroup venues include a few key criteria.

INDOOR SPACE

- Space for 10-20 families
- Adequate lighting and ventilation
- Space for prams and bags
- Kitchen, safely sectioned off from children's play areas
- Storage for toys and equipment

OUTDOOR SPACE

- Safe, enclosed (fenced) outdoor area with play equipment suitable for 0-5 year old children
- Undercover or shaded area
- Outdoor storage area for equipment

ACCESSIBILITY

- Easy parking and building access for prams.
- Accessible and child-friendly toilet/changeroom facilities.

AFFORDABILITY

- Clear and affordable hiring and lease agreements to ensure playgroups understand their rights and obligations, for example management of maintenance needs; cleaning responsibilities; and rules on subletting.
- Playgroups are run by volunteer parents with young children. Having access to a low-cost venue is vital for the long-term sustainability of the playgroup, which in turn has many flow-on benefits for the local community.



ABOUT PLAYGROUP WA

Playgroup WA is the peak body for playgroups in Western Australia and has been supporting and establishing playgroups throughout the state since 1972.

It is a not-for-profit community organisation with an annual membership of several thousand families, attending several hundred playgroups, led by volunteer parents in local communities.

Playgroup WA receives funding at the federal and state level to support community and facilitated playgroups. This includes funding to establish community playgroups in schools and intergenerational playgroups in aged care centres, as well as funding to run facilitated playgroups for specific needs.

Playgroup WA has a strong following on social media as well as more than 30,000 subscribers.

Staff travel across the state, including metropolitan, regional and remote areas to support playgroups, with Development Officers assigned to local government areas. Playgroup WA advocates for playgroups, with the aim to see families with young children thrive in their local community.

The support provided is wide-ranging and includes advice and resources on how to run a playgroup, useful evidence-based information, monthly newsletters, and the Playgroup WA website includes a state-wide search by suburb to find nearest playgroup.





BENEFITS OF PLAYGROUP FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

PLAYGROUPS:

- Provide safe and nurturing environments where children can play and learn.
- Enhance healthy early brain development through play, thus improving AEDC scores and educational outcomes for children.
- Provide opportunities for children to create, invent, reason and problem solve
- Provide opportunities to build attachment between adults and children as they play together
- Help children learn social skills as they negotiate with peers, resolve conflict, take turns, share and make friends
- Help children to build resilience to enable them to cope with new situations, manage stress and adapt to change.
- Create a welcoming space to build local friendships and social networks.
- Strengthen family capacity and connection during the early years and as their children transition to school.
- Offer affordable, regular opportunities for families to enjoy time together.
- Act as a cost-effective link between families and other community services.

HOW DO PARENT-LED PLAYGROUPS SUPPORT COMMUNITIES?

Community playgroups are a vital part of connected, thriving communities. Run predominantly by parents and caregivers, they foster local friendships, peer support, and active citizenship through volunteering.

Community playgroups are especially valuable in growing communities, offering a simple, affordable and sustainable way to build social connection and engagement. They also play a key role in early childhood development. Research shows that children who attend playgroup are half as likely to face developmental vulnerabilities when starting school (Telethon Kids Institute, 2016).

COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS:

- Strengthen social connections and inclusion
- Support children's development before school
- Foster community resilience and identity
- Encourage volunteering and shared purpose
- Develop skilled volunteers building community capacity
- Provide a welcoming entry point to services
- Help create child-friendly, supportive neighbourhoods

For more on the benefits of playgroup participation, visit the Australian Early Development Census at www.aedc.gov.au.



LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' ROLE IN SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

Community playgroups are a sustainable community resource being self-funded and self-managed. With just a little support they can provide even greater benefits to local families and children.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- What are your council and community aspirations for young children and their families?
- How do playgroups fit into your Integrated Planning and Strategic Community Plan?
- How does your community recognise the support role community playgroups play in developing positive school readiness outcomes?
- How are you nurturing active citizenship within your community?
- Does your community have the physical and social capital to support children's development?
- Are positive connections being maintained between local agencies and services working with families and young children?
- Is there an Early Years Network in your region and does it have local government representation?
- Do you have a designated contact person for community playgroups?

STEP 1:

Get to know your community playgroup sector

- How many 0–4-Year-olds exist in your community?
- How many community playgroups are operating in your Local Government Area?
- What venues and facilities are they using?

STEP 2:

Consult with community playgroups

- What support would assist them?
- Do they have room for growth or are they struggling to maintain numbers?
- What challenges have they experienced in establishing and maintaining the playgroup?

STEP 3:

Review planning processes, policies and procedures

- How do your policies encourage playgroups to establish and flourish?
- Is the need for community playgroup venues considered in the planning of new residential developments?
- Do venue hiring systems, leasing arrangements and fee schedules adequately recognise the benefits playgroups bring to the community, especially in relation to encouraging new groups to form?
- Are community playgroup committees invited to annual volunteer celebrations?
- Are community playgroup committees included in capacity building workshops and activities for local clubs and community groups?
- Do your community playgroups know they may be eligible for community funding and the types of funding available?

HOW PLAYGROUP WA CAN SUPPORT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Provide up to date information on playgroup availability and playgroup participation for member playgroups in your area
- Advise on the development of facilities
- Mediate issues between playgroups and local government
- Provide information to support funding applications regarding playgroups
- Auspice local government grants to unincorporated member playgroups
- Provide advice on the development of playgroup programs that best fit community needs
- Provide cross referenced data on AEDC results
- Assist new playgroups to establish by assisting them to source a venue if needed and advising on playgroup session planning



COMMON BARRIERS FOR COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

VENUE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY FOR COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

1. Availability of Venues



Access to suitable, affordable venues is a major barrier to starting and sustaining community playgroups. Research shows that participation is highly price sensitive. While local governments aim to support community engagement, misalignment between community development goals and facility management policies can unintentionally undermine volunteer-led playgroups.

2. Price of Venues

High venue costs, large key bonds, and rigid policies often prevent new groups from forming. This can lead councils to implement more expensive alternatives, like professionally facilitated playgroups, which can cost upwards of \$25,000 annually. A shift toward commercialised facility management may reduce venue efficiency but raise costs in other parts of the council budget.



3. Suitability of Venues

Venue availability and affordability vary greatly. Regional areas often lack options, while urban growth areas may have long waitlists. Hire fees range from free to over \$15 per hour, depending on local government priorities and resources. Affordability also depends on group size—what's viable for 30 families may not work for a group of five. Sudden rent increases or declining attendance can quickly lead to closures, reducing access to early childhood and social supports.



4. LGA Venue Policies

Shared or multi-use venues offer potential for collaboration but can present challenges if user needs are incompatible. Common issues include limited storage—restricting activities—and unclear responsibilities for maintenance of shaded areas, fencing, and outdoor equipment, often leading to confusion or disputes.



5. New vs Established Playgroups



New playgroups face further hurdles. These small, emerging groups often lack the financial systems and capacity to meet upfront costs. Expensive bonds and immediate hire fees discourage formation, and while grants may be available, the application process can be overwhelming for first-time organisers without support.

PLAYGROUP WA INSURANCE

Playgroup WA Member Playgroups have comprehensive insurance (through Finsura Insurance Broking) provided by Playgroup WA, as part of their membership fee. This insurance covers liabilities on playgroup related assets, public liability and accident cover for participants. Policy details are available on request. Non- Playgroup WA Member Playgroups need to source their own insurance.

Community playgroups should be required to demonstrate they have insurance in place to cover liability on all playgroup related assets and participants. A copy of the Certificate of Currency should be requested annually and is provided at the end of March and October each year.

In general, the Local Government Authority will be liable for council owned assets. However, in some instances community playgroups also enter into lease agreements whereby the playgroup has responsibility for maintenance and insurance of the building and outdoor areas.

Some community playgroups take out additional insurance to increase coverage for assets or to support casual hire capacity that some have through their lease arrangements.





(08) 9228 8088



hotline@playgroupwa.com.au



1-3 Woodville Lane, North Perth



PO Box 61, North Perth WA 6906



playgroupwa.com.au

Playgroup  **WA**