POSITION STATEMENT
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Playgroup Australia™

CHILD SAFETY

Child safety requires a connected early-years system

Playgroup Australia's response to ABC Four Corners' *Monstrous* report and the continuing task of strengthening child safety in Australia



Every child has the right to be safe, heard and supported.

Strong regulation of formal services is essential. It must sit within a wider early-years system that strengthens families, connects services and acts early when concerns arise.

A concerning report and a shared responsibility

The matters reported by ABC Four Corners are deeply concerning. They show the consequences when safeguards fail and reinforce the responsibility of governments, regulators, providers and the wider early-years sector to ensure that children's safety, rights and best interests are central to every decision.

Playgroup Australia empathises with and acknowledges the children and families affected, and those whose reporting enabled authorities to act. Families should be able to trust that concerns will be recognised, reported, and acted upon consistently.

The report should not be read as an indictment of the early childhood workforce as a whole. The overwhelming majority of teachers, educators, and volunteers are committed to children's wellbeing. To be effective in their roles, they need clear expectations, effective training, safe staffing arrangements, capable leadership and organisational cultures in which concerns can be raised and acted upon.

Important reforms are under way

Playgroup Australia welcomes the significant child-safety reforms being implemented by Australian, state and territory governments. These include stronger legislation and regulatory powers, mandatory national child-safety training, the National Early Childhood Worker Register, improved information sharing and greater transparency and accountability.

These reforms are necessary and should be fully implemented, adequately resourced and evaluated for their impact. The immediate priority is to ensure that nationally agreed safeguards operate effectively in every service covered by the National Quality Framework, and that children in services outside that framework are protected by clear, rigorous and culturally appropriate arrangements.

National consistency should not mean uniformity. For example, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, safety includes cultural safety, connection to family, community and Country, and the leadership of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Sustainable funding, workforce continuity and trusted relationships are also part of a safe service system.

The next opportunity: connect ECEC reform to the wider early-years ecosystem

Governments are exploring a potential national early education and care commission to strengthen stewardship of the ECEC system. Playgroup Australia supports this work and encourages governments to consider how any commission will connect with the wider early-years ecosystem, including health, family support, disability, child protection, community-controlled and community-based services such as playgroups.

Families do not experience these systems as separate portfolios. A parent may attend playgroup, see a child and family health nurse, use childcare, seek disability support and prepare for preschool within the same period. Yet services often operate with different responsibilities, information pathways and institutional settings.

Stronger ECEC regulation should therefore be complemented by a nationally coordinated approach that clarifies child-safety responsibilities, proportionate safeguards, escalation pathways and connections across the broader early-years ecosystem. This should strengthen, not diffuse, accountability for safety within regulated services.

Our responsibility to act

Child safety is a responsibility for every organisation and setting involving children. Playgroup Australia and its State and Territory delivery partners are implementing a national Child Safety Governance and Reporting Framework aligned with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Shared expectations

A common foundation for child-safe practice across a diverse national network.

Annual assurance

Organisational assessment, improvement planning and declarations by the CEO and Board Chair.

Oversight and support

Closer national oversight and practical support where risks, gaps or improvement needs are identified.

Proportionate implementation

Requirements suited to the different roles and risk profiles of community, facilitated, supported and specialist playgroups.

The framework recognises that community-led does not mean unsupported or unaccountable. Safe, welcoming and sustainable playgroups depend on capable volunteers and staff, clear governance, quality improvement, risk support and effective referral connections. Implementation will continue to be strengthened as expectations and evidence develop.

How playgroups can contribute to improved safety outcomes

Playgroups are not ECEC services, regulators, child-protection agencies or substitutes for professional assessment. Their distinctive contribution is preventive and connective: they strengthen the everyday relationships and community connections around children and help families reach appropriate services earlier.

2,943	16,241	18,482	800+
playgroups	families	children	partner organisations

The national playgroup network in 2026.

Children and carers participate together

Parents, carers and kin remain with children during playgroup. Learning about child development, responsive relationships and child safety can therefore be carried into everyday family life.

Trusted, low-stigma relationships

Regular, informal participation can make it easier for families to ask questions, share concerns and seek guidance before needs escalate.

Earlier recognition and help-seeking

Playgroups can strengthen parents' confidence to notice changes, understand developmental concerns and know where to seek help. This is family capability building, not surveillance or diagnosis.

Warm pathways to support

Trained facilitators, family linkers and specialist connectors can help families navigate health, early learning, disability and family-support services. Community volunteers should not be expected to undertake specialist or statutory functions.

National reach with local responsiveness

In 2026, the national network comprised 2,943 playgroups reaching 16,241 families and 18,482 children, supported by partnerships with more than 800 organisations. This provides an existing platform for prevention, connection and locally adapted pathways.

Cultural and community connection

Playgroups can be shaped with local communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support culturally safe, community-led approaches.

What Playgroup Australia is asking governments to do

1 Fully implement, resource and independently evaluate current ECEC child-safety reforms

- Ensure nationally agreed reforms translate into safer everyday practice through effective supervision, safe staffing arrangements, capable and adequately resourced regulators, transparent accountability, workforce support and culturally safe practice.
- Establish clear protections for children in services both within and outside the National Quality Framework, provide implementation support for small, rural, remote and community-controlled services, and publicly report on whether reforms are improving safety and strengthening family confidence.

2 Give the proposed national commission a clear connection to the wider early-years ecosystem

- Establish formal interfaces between ECEC and health, family support, disability, child protection, community-controlled and community-based services.
- The commission should support cross-portfolio stewardship, nationally coherent referral and escalation pathways, appropriate information sharing and accountability for gaps between systems, while preserving clear regulatory responsibility within ECEC.
- Families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and community-based organisations should have a meaningful role in its design and continuing governance.

3 Establish a shared and proportionate child-safety foundation across early-years settings

- Use the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations as the common foundation for settings involving young children.
- Translate these principles into role-appropriate expectations for governance, screening, training, codes of conduct, complaints and reporting, risk management, cultural safety and continuous improvement.
- Assurance and implementation requirements should be proportionate to each setting's role, operating model and risk, and supported by practical guidance, capability building and appropriate oversight.

4 Invest in the preventive and connective contribution of playgroups

- Recognise playgroups as part of Australia's wider early-years system and invest in their capacity to strengthen the protective environment around children.
- This should include child-safety capability building for parents, carers, facilitators and volunteers; trained family linkers and warm navigation to appropriate services; culturally safe and community-led models; stronger local partnerships and referral pathways; and the national and jurisdictional infrastructure required for governance, quality assurance, workforce development, data and evaluation.
- Investment should build on the reach and trusted relationships of the existing playgroup network, particularly for families who are isolated, underserved or not well connected to formal services.

A connected protective environment around every child

No single service, regulator or sector can create safety on its own. Children are safer when formal safeguards are strong, organisational leadership is accountable, adults around them have the confidence to act, and services are connected enough to respond early and well.

Playgroup Australia will continue strengthening child-safety governance across our own network and working with governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, ECEC organisations, child-safety experts and family and community services. Our contribution is clear: to help build capable families, trusted relationships and connected pathways around children, supported by proportionate standards and strong national and jurisdictional infrastructure.

Sources and supporting material

- ABC Four Corners, *Monstrous*, 26 October 2026.
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- Playgroup Australia, *A National Conceptual Model for Playgroups*, Version 1.0, 2026.
- Playgroup Australia, *Child Safety Governance and Reporting Framework*, under national implementation.

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