



**ACT**  
Playgroups

## **SUBMISSION ON INQUIRY INTO**

### **SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES**

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# ACT PLAYGROUPS INC.

ACT Playgroups Inc. is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1973, as the peak body for Playgroups in Australian Capital Territory, promoting play, learning, and support for families with young children. ACT Playgroups also advocates for the benefits for all through playgroup participation.

**ACT Playgroups supports over 200 affiliated playgroups and 3000 members.**

ACT Playgroups is governed by a Board of Volunteers, comprised of Playgroup Members, and interested members of the public in line with a skills matrix. ACT Playgroups is funded by both the State and Federal Governments. The ACT Playgroup staff team is dynamic, diverse and multidisciplinary. The team is managed by an Acting Executive Officer, with a Program Manager for Playgroup Support and Development.

## WE VALUE

**At ACT Playgroups, we value the following.**

- The importance of play in a child's development
- Parents as primary educators
- The interests and welfare of young children and families
- Diversity, inclusion and a sense of community
- Quality, best practice and affordable services
- Members, staff, volunteers and stakeholders

## SUBMISSION

ACT Playgroups applauds the ACT Government for recognising the need to support the expansive Community Sector. However, the **recent budget announcements fell short of providing meaningful change and continues to hinder the support Community Organisations provide.**

## WAGES

Wages for highly dedicated, empathetic and passionate staff have continued to increase and rightly so. From the **1<sup>st</sup> of July 2024**, wages will increase by **3.75%** percent. However, the ACT Government has only applied CPI of **3.6%** to eligible funding. This leaves a substantial gap which Community Sector Organisations must cover.

Community Organisations must also continue to self-fund the increases in Superannuation. The superannuation rate increased on the **1<sup>st</sup> of July 2024 to 11.5%**. The increase to wages and superannuation means Community Organisations must cover a **0.74%** increase with no further funding. **Wages continue to be the biggest cost for Organisations and places budget pressure on already stretched service delivery budgets.**

## POPULATION GROWTH

Whilst it is encouraging to see population growth factored into the ACT Government's budget, it is disappointing to not see this factored into or across all Community Organisations. ACT Playgroups faces continued growth across all Playgroup programs.

**Canberra's population grew by 1.27% from 2023 to 2024 alone. It is predicted that the population will continue to grow. How do Organisations continue to provide services with a growing population but no funding to account for this?**

## INCREASING VULNERABILITY

ACT Playgroups faces higher operational costs due to the increasing complexities that families are presenting with across the ACT. Staff now must undertake specialised training such as domestic violence support and response to support families attending playgroups for example. Staff are now faced with growing demand for support, requests for further information and warm referrals across a multitude of needs for both adults and children alike.

The ACT Government is aware of the increasing developmental vulnerability that children in Canberra are presenting with via the results of the **AEDC** (Australian Early Development Census) and the cost-of-living crisis which is hurting families. These factors are having an impact on universal services. The scale of need is ever increasing across the population.

**ACT Playgroups believes the ACT Government should be taking these factors into consideration for all relevant Community Sector Organisations and provide funding which will enable us to be responsive and proactive, rather than expect Organisations to continue to provide extended services to those in the community who are vulnerable and/or facing increasing vulnerability.**

**In closing, ACT Playgroups is encouraged to see measures such as population growth factored into funding, however, it needs to be a universal measure for all Community Sector funding. ACT Playgroups also believes baseline funding needs to match the growth of wages to ensure services can continue to be delivered to high standards and achieve outcomes for the ACT Government's Wellbeing Framework.**