

Federal Election

September 2021



Play Matters

Toy libraries helping all Australian families play together and recover from COVID-19.

Every child deserves the chance to play. For many children the last 18 months has seen significant restrictions on their ability to play through closures of kindergartens, schools, and playgrounds, and restrictions on leaving the home.

Throughout the pandemic toy libraries have stepped up. Volunteers have quickly redesigned their toy library's processes to offer click and collect services, making sure children stuck at home had toys to play with.

As we (hopefully) emerge from the pandemic, play will have an important role in helping children adapt and return to a sense of normality. However, many families are doing it tough. This makes simple things like buying age-appropriate quality toys for their children difficult.

This initiative will make toys available to all children through toy libraries, reducing pressures on parents, and setting children up to succeed. Specifically, **funding of \$2.9 million per annum** will:

1. **Help 20,000 families and over 40,000 children borrow toys from toy libraries in over 280 locations across Australia** by introducing play coaches and mentors.
2. Provide **peak body funding** of \$150K p.a. to Toy Libraries Australia to support the volunteers who run toy libraries, including by providing more professional development opportunities and a structured national training program.
3. Launch a **community toy library grant program** to establish or expand existing toy libraries, undertake minor capital works, or purchase new toys.
4. **Open five new toy libraries each year** to fill gaps in toy library services. 30 federal electorates do not have a toy library – of those communities missing out 15 are in New South Wales and 11 in Queensland. Priority locations will include South East Queensland (e.g. Petrie, Griffith, Longman) and Western Sydney (e.g. Robertson, Reid).
5. Provide a subsidy so that 10,000 families who lost work during COVID, or in receipt of a concession card, can **access toy libraries free of charge** and help their children enjoy their childhood and thrive.

The benefits

This initiative will increase the number of children in Australia 'playing'. Play is necessary for children to develop and increase their language and early literacy skills, as well as their social and emotional wellbeing (self-regulation and resilience). Play is recognised as a fundamental human right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Play is the lens through which children experience their world, and the world of others. It is through play that children organise and make meaning of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representation. Play is fun for children, and fun for parents!

Parental involvement in their young children's play and education is widely evidenced to be associated with better outcomes for children, yet we are seeing fewer children engaging in symbolic play, which is fundamental for language development. In Australia, according to the Australian Early Developmental Census in 2018, 21.7% of all Australian children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain when they arrived at school.

As they recover from lost hours worked during COVID, many parents are having to choose between putting food on the table, paying the mortgage, or paying their bills and utilities. This means quality and age appropriate toys become 'nice to haves' for some families and are out of reach. For other families, buying toys and keeping up with age and peer influenced requirements is putting a real strain on families. This initiative will generate a community approach to all children being able to borrow the toys that are right for them, reducing stigma and setting all children up to succeed.

Finally, toy libraries offer massive relief for our environment. Even for families who can afford to buy toys, using toys from a library is increasingly seen as beneficial in terms of generating 'community' and reducing waste. For example, the Collingwood Toy Library is accessed by a large proportion of socio-economically advantaged parents who value community and the environment.

Costings

\$	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total	Ongoing
<i>Component 1: Expand the number of children and families 'playing' and using toy libraries</i>	499,320	509,306	519,493	1,528,119	519,493
<i>Component 2: Peak body funding</i>	150,000	153,000	156,060	459,060	156,060
<i>Component 3: Community toy library grant program</i>	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	3,000,000	1,000,000
<i>Component 4: Provide equal access to toy libraries, by filling gaps in coverage</i>	350,000	357,000	364,140	1,071,140	364,140
<i>Component 5: Helping families who lost work during COVID</i>	843,536	860,407	877,615	2,581,557	877,615
TOTAL	\$2,842,856	\$2,879,713	\$2,917,307	\$8,639,876	\$2,917,307

Component 1: Expand the number of children and families 'playing' and using toy libraries

Funding supports five full time play coaches and mentors, who will be employed by Toy Libraries Australia and deployed across the country to support families access toy libraries and help them play.

Play coaches will run 'stay and play' coaching sessions for parents using toy libraries as an appropriate setting, skill up and train staff in toy libraries on how to encourage families to play together, and work with Maternal, Child and Family health services to help connect new parents to local toy libraries, giving them access to ongoing social support and building links within their communities.

Component 2: Peak body funding

Funding supports the peak body activities of Toy Libraries Australia. This will include providing more professional development opportunities for toy librarians and volunteers, implementing a structured national training program to supplement existing state conferences, and connecting rural and remote toy libraries.

Component 3: Community toy library grant program

Funding supports toy libraries with one off grants of between \$5,000 and \$15,000 to establish or expand existing toy libraries, undertake minor capital works, or purchase new toys. 100 grants would be provided each year with an average value of \$10,000.

Component 4: Provide equal access to toy libraries, by filling gaps in coverage

Funding supports the establishment costs of five new toy libraries (TL) a year, including purchase of 1000 toys (\$50,000/TL); shelving, equipment, and systems (\$20,000/TL); and a half time project officer (\$43,500 p.a.) to engage local stakeholders and support volunteers in establishing the new toy library.

Component 5: Helping families who lost work during COVID

Funding supports a membership subsidy for 10,000 concession card holder families to join and access toys from over 280 toy libraries (average membership cost \$80 per family) and one half time project manager role (\$43,500 p.a.).

ABOUT TOY LIBRARIES

A toy library enables parents and caregivers to borrow a large variety of educational toys, games, puzzles and equipment in a process similar to that of a public book library. These toys suit children aged from birth to primary school and beyond. Toy Libraries Australia's 280 toy library members have a specific focus on promoting the educational value of play for younger children and encouraging positive adult/child interactions through affordable access to toys on short-term loan.

Our members operate in a variety of formats and in settings that reflect the needs and capacities of their local communities. Toy libraries are generally situated within premises shared with other community services, i.e. early years centres, halls, neighbourhood houses, public libraries, or community centres – with some operating full time and others a few hours a week.

Toy libraries range from small (catering to as few as 20 families in rural towns) - to large (supporting over 500 families in metro Melbourne or Adelaide). Some toy libraries are employers (nationally they employ 120 toy librarians to manage their operations), but all rely on the assistance of a team of volunteers to operate – over 14,000 volunteers support toy libraries each year in Australia.

Toy libraries are generally operationally self-funding through membership fees, fundraising and corporate sponsorships; although limited grants from philanthropic sources and local government funding enable toy libraries to extend their toy collections and service offerings. Toy libraries do not currently receive any ongoing funding from either state or federal governments.

Toy Libraries Australia

Our vision: all communities can access a quality toy library

Toy Libraries Australia is the national representative body for not-for-profit toy libraries in Australia, representing 280 toy libraries nationally. Australian toy libraries have more than 40,000 children and 20,000 families as members.

Operating as a not-for-profit Australian incorporated association, Toy Libraries Australia supports a growing community of not-for-profit toy libraries, encouraging families to play and learn together in a sustainable way.

We advocate for play that is unstructured, voluntary, child-initiated, inclusive and minimises impact on the environment. Toy Libraries Australia also provides ongoing information, support and leadership to its members and prospective toy libraries.

For more information contact:

Debbie Williams

CEO, Toy Libraries Australia

debbie@toylibraries.org.au

0411 037 941