

Toy Libraries



AUSTRALIA

2025 Federal Election

Toy library policy priorities

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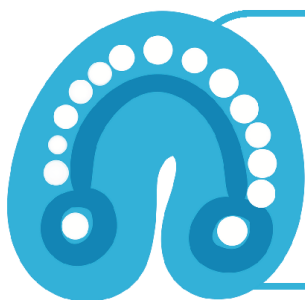
Toy Libraries Australia asks all parties to support toy libraries in their 2025 Federal election policies. This can be achieved by investing in the following initiatives:



1. Grow toy libraries to fight cost-of-living pressures - \$3.7m p.a.

For less than \$2 a week, families can borrow from hundreds of toys at their local toy library saving them a small fortune!

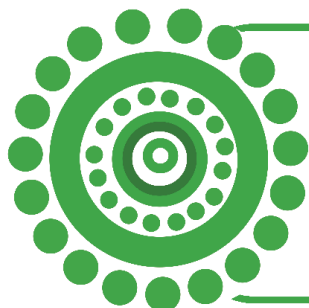
By growing the number of families borrowing from toy libraries, the government can provide substantial and meaningful cost-of-living relief to families with young children.



2. Make toy libraries a key disability Foundational Support - \$0.2m p.a.

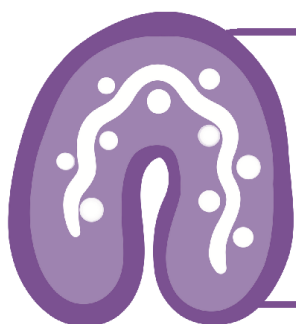
Toy libraries already exist as a mainstream service that is embedded in communities, cost effective, trusted, and seen as a place for support.

By training toy librarians in disability inclusion, they can efficiently support children with disabilities or developmental delay and their families.



3. Expand inclusive volunteering employment pathways at toy libraries - \$0.9m p.a.

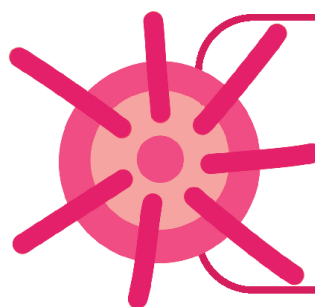
Toy libraries offer innovative models to support volunteering for people with disability and migrant women. By encouraging inclusive volunteering, toy libraries become more sustainable, and individuals have new pathways to work through volunteering.



4. Support the Toy Well program - \$0.2m p.a.

Toy Well establishes small free toy lending services in community hubs, with a particular focus on migrant and refugee women. The program is run by volunteers from the local community, and supported by a paid part-time Regional Coordinator also from the local migrant community.

Operational funding is required to support ongoing program growth.



5. Establish toy libraries in child and family hubs - \$0.4m

Collaborate with partners to develop strategies to integrate toy libraries as soft entry points in existing child and family hubs.

The strategies will focus on First Nations communities and regional communities in the most need.



Toy Libraries Australia (TLA) is the national representative body for not-for-profit toy libraries in Australia. Established in 1977, TLA has grown to represent 290 toy libraries across the country.

Toy Libraries support parents to be children’s first educators

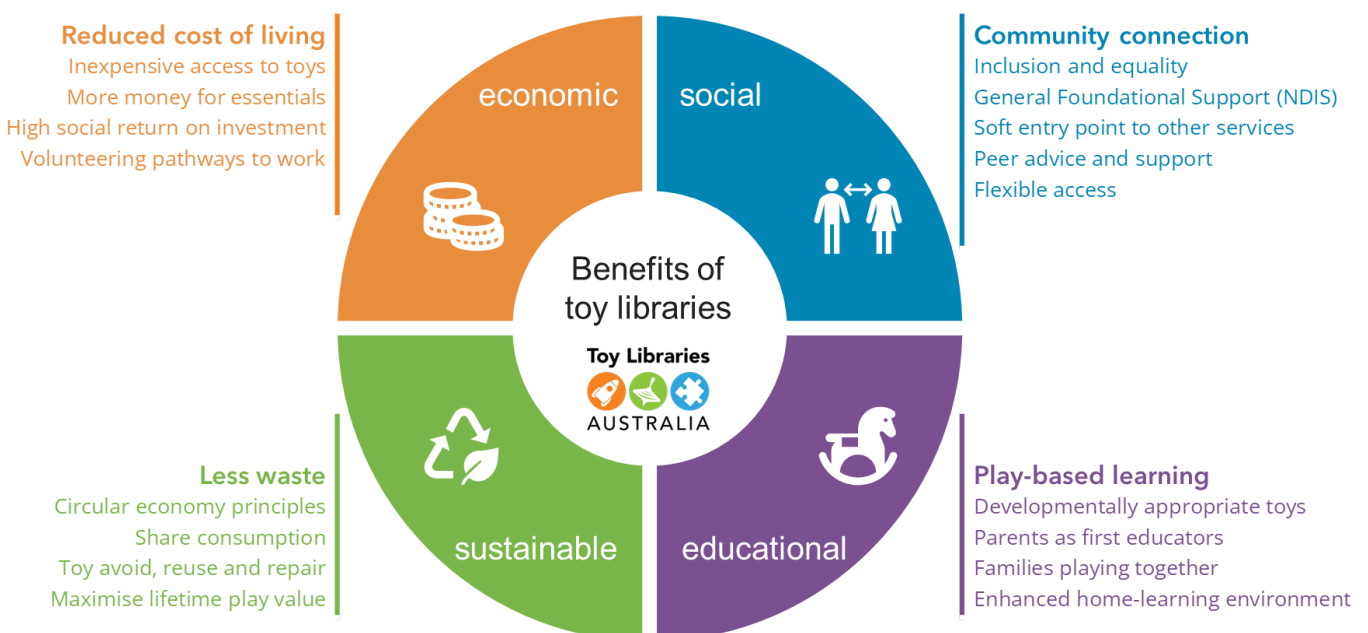
A toy library enables parents, caregivers and professionals to borrow a large variety of educational toys, games, puzzles, and equipment in a process like that of a book library. These toys suit children aged from birth to primary school and beyond. Toy Libraries Australia’s members have a specific focus on promoting the educational value of play for younger children and encouraging positive family-child interactions through affordable access to toys on short-term loan. In these earliest years, children develop best by forming secure attachments in nurturing and stimulating environments that enable them to explore and make sense of their world. All this and more happens at a toy library.

“ Children thrive when...
 • they can play, imagine and grow
 • connected to culture and community
 • parents, caregivers and kin feel confident, supported and included ”

Early years strategy

Other benefits of toy libraries

But toy libraries do so much more than just support parents as a child’s first educator. They **reduce cost-of-living pressures**, create **community connection** and support networks for parents with young children, provide **volunteering pathways to employment**, support **inclusion of children with disability**, and **reduce waste** by following circular economy principles.



Families

1. Grow toy libraries to fight the cost-of-living pressures

Cost-of-living pressures are having a significant impact on families, with the real cost of living growing at almost double the rate of inflation for millions of families¹. Researchers and educators agree that the home learning environment makes an independent and substantial impact on children's development² but in this tough environment, parents are buying less toys³, leaving children missing out on important play and development opportunities.

Toy libraries reduce the cost-of-living pressure for families. For less than \$2 a week, families can borrow from thousands of toys at their local toy library saving them a small fortune!

By growing existing toy libraries, establishing new toy libraries in areas where there currently isn't a service and building the capacity of the toy library community, there will be a meaningful impact on families' cost of living.

This can be achieved by investing **\$3.6 million p.a.** (\$11.2m over the next three years) to:

1.1	Provide national Children and Parenting Support (CaPS) peak body funding to Toy Libraries Australia (TLA) to build the capacity of existing toy libraries, support the establishment of new toy libraries, and increase community awareness– \$2.1m p.a.
1.2	Fund a voucher program to provide 10,000 toy library memberships each year for targeted families with children under 5 years, administered by Toy Libraries Australia – \$1.2m p.a.
1.3	Fund a new toy library grants program to establish 5 new toy libraries each year in areas of need, including areas of socio-economic disadvantage (where children are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable) ⁴ , growth corridors and rural Australia– \$0.2m p.a.
1.4	Fund an existing toy library grants program to support targeted projects/areas of interest in existing toy libraries (e.g. developmental delay, toy library growth, inclusion) – \$0.2m p.a.



¹ The Sydney Morning Herald. (August 7, 2024). When it comes to cost-of-living pressures, there is one group being hit hardest

² Rodriguez, E., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2011). Trajectories of the home learning environment across the first five years: Associations with children's language and literacy skills at Pre Kindergarten. *Child Development*, 82(4), 1058-1075.

³ Circana. (June, 2024) Toy Market Presentation FY 2023 & YTD Apr 2024.

⁴ Graham, C. (2024).SVA Quarterly. *Mapping child and family hardship across Australia*

Disability

2. Make toy libraries a key disability Foundational Support

Toy libraries can play a key role in a new Foundational Support system for children, being developed as part of NDIS reforms. Toy libraries already exist as a mainstream service that is embedded within communities, cost effective, trusted and seen as a place for peer support, fun and learning. In particular, toy libraries are an effective soft entry point for families who don't engage with formal early years services and supports, or are unable to access services during business hours.

Some toy libraries are already offering Foundational Support-like services and Toy Libraries Australia has recently received ILC funding⁵ to develop pilot initiatives that build toy libraries' capacity to support children with disability and their families.

We believe an integrated toy library model provides the greatest benefits for all children and their families. The specialist toy library model run by NDIS providers has failed children with disability, while at the same time mainstream toy libraries are thriving and have the capacity to support all families.

To make toy libraries an effective General Foundational Support, Toy Libraries Australia needs ongoing funding to employ qualified staff to provide training and support for toy libraries on disability inclusion.

Individual toy libraries would also need funding to:

- Establish low sensory borrowing sessions and individual orientation sessions for families with additional needs
- Employ staff so they can provide a consistent and knowledgeable service
- Participate in training on disability inclusion
- Roll-out disability inclusion initiatives developed through the ILC program
- Become better integrated into the existing disability and early years networks.



This would not only enhance toy libraries' ability to support children and their families with emerging needs, development delay and disability, but would improve the service for all children.

As Foundational Supports are a joint responsibility with states, we have not costed funding to individual toy libraries. The funding requested is for TLA to support and enable toy libraries across Australia to rollout services to support children with disability and their families.

This can be achieved by investing **\$0.2 million p.a.** (\$0.6m over the next three years) to:

2.1	Support Toy Libraries Australia to hire a qualified disability inclusion professional to train and support toy libraries to become disability inclusive services – \$0.2m p.a.
2.2	Support the inclusion and funding of toy libraries as a foundational support

⁵ Australian Government Department of Social Services, Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program

Volunteering

3. Expand inclusive volunteering employment pathways at toy libraries

Toy libraries provide meaningful volunteering opportunities for people looking to enter or return to the workforce, new migrants, and people with disability. Building toy libraries’ volunteering capacity builds members’ citizenship, improves social connectedness and has a positive impact on mental health.

With more support, toy library volunteering programs could be expanded to support more people and improve the sustainability of the toy library. A TLA Volunteering Officer would support our members in identifying and addressing barriers to volunteering, developing resources to support the training of volunteers, streamlining volunteering processes, promoting toy library volunteering, and integrating the National Volunteering Standards into a toy library context.

Two programs established by TLA with one-year DSS Strong and Resilient Communities funding could be embedded and expanded:

Young people with disability partnership

Northam Toy Library (WA) developed a community volunteering partnership with St Joseph’s School’s special needs program to provide volunteering opportunities for high school students. After training, students Cooper and Santi run the toy library for one session a week. This gives them an opportunity to attain important customer service and management experience to build on their in-school learning, and a means to meaningfully connect and contribute to their local community. This model is currently being piloted at 13 toy libraries nationwide and we hope can be integrated with the new specialist disability employment program from July 2025.



Photo: Cooper and Santi at Northam

Migrant women partnerships

7 toy libraries are trialling partnerships with multicultural organisations to provide pathways to work for migrant women. These women do not have work experience in Australia, may not be confident speaking English, and may have other barriers (including childcare) that make it difficult to enter the workforce. Through work experience both in community and Toy Well toy libraries, we can create supportive employment pathways that overcome these barriers. We are already seeing the benefits of volunteering for migrant women at our Toy Well sites:

‘I have had at least 4 volunteers go on to secure employment in various industries. I was able to provide them with a written or verbal reference based on their work as a toy library volunteer. I have had 3 others start their studies after engaging in the Hub and toy library. It enabled them to look at options based on conversations with myself or other members in similar situations.’
~School Hub Leader

This can be achieved by investing **\$1.0 million p.a.** (\$2.9m over the next three years) to:

3.1	Establish a Toy Libraries Volunteering Officer role to train all toy libraries on inclusive volunteering at toy libraries – \$0.2m p.a.
3.2	Fund expansion and embedding of the disability volunteering program at 20 toy libraries – \$0.5m p.a.
3.3	Fund expansion and embedding of the migrant women volunteering program at 10 toy libraries – \$0.3m p.a.

Multicultural affairs

4. Support the Toy Well program

Toy Well establishes a small free toy lending service in community hubs, with a particular focus on migrant and refugee women. The program is run by volunteers from the local community (mostly migrant mothers) and supported by a Regional Coordinator employed by TLA, also from the local migrant community. There are currently 23 Toy Well toy libraries across 3 states, mostly based at Community Hubs Australia (CHA sites).

Our philanthropic partners provide the backbone funding for the program, including funding our Toy Well National Manager. We have also been successful securing grants for new Toy Wells from the Victorian State government, local government and from DSS. However, there is no committed ongoing operational funding for the program. We are now at the stage where we are limiting the opening of new sites until we can secure long-term operational funding.

It costs less than \$5K p.a. to run each Toy Well site because of our volunteer led model, so the ongoing costs of supporting the program are low.

If operational funding is secured, we would also be able to continue expanding the program. This would include looking to expand the program beyond CHA sites to other early years hubs, including Child and Parent Centres in WA (where CHA does not operate).

This can be achieved by investing **\$0.2 million p.a.** (\$0.6m over the next three years) to:

4.1	Provide ongoing operational funding for Toy Well toy libraries– \$0.2m p.a.
4.2	(Dependent on funding for 4.1) Fund the establishment costs of 5 new Toy Well toy libraries to each year – \$0.04m p.a.



Photo: Truganina South Toy Well opening

First Nations and regional Australia

5. Establish toy libraries in child and family hubs

Child and family hubs, bring together supports and services in places where they are easily accessible by families. Hubs often include health, early education, and social services, and address the challenges families face navigating complex systems.

Toy libraries can play a unique role in a child and family hub. As a welcoming mainstream service, toy libraries act as a soft entry point for parents who may not access other services. If you have postnatal depression, anxiety or are unsure in engaging with others, you can visit a toy library at a time that suits you, borrow toys, and play with your children. As you become more confident, you may engage with the volunteers, talk to other mothers, get peer support, volunteer yourself, and make friends. You may join a playgroup or talk with a staff member and get a referral to a service at the hub. The toy library opens doors to opportunity and support.

Work is needed to develop strategies to integrate toy libraries in hubs in communities of most need⁶. This can be achieved by investing **\$0.4 million** to:

4.1	Provide funding to undertake a feasibility study on including toy libraries in Connected Beginnings sites in conjunction with First Nations partners – \$0.2m.
4.2	Collaborate with PLACE (National Centre for Place-Base Change) to develop a strategy for establishing and integrating toy libraries in child and family hubs in regional Australia – \$0.2m.



⁶ Graham, C. (2024). SVA Quarterly. *Mapping child and family hardship across Australia*

Australian Toy Library Profile

2024



Our record working with governments

Toy Libraries Australia and our members genuinely appreciate the commitments made to the sector over the last three years, including:

Federal

- \$670,000 to TLA from the Australian Government for the 2022 federal election commitment *Helping Families Learn and Grow*
- \$110,000 to 14 toy libraries in 2022 election commitments from federal MPs
- \$150,000 variation to *Helping Families Learn and Grow* funding (June 2024)
- \$360,000 *Strong and Resilient Communities* funding for an inclusive volunteering project (June 2024)
- \$1.5m *Information Linkages and Capacity Building* funding for a toy library disability inclusion program (June 2024)

Victorian

- \$1.9m to Victorian toy libraries and TLA as part of *Best Start, Best Life* reform

We pride ourselves on our collaborative relationships with ministers, departments and MPs and their offices. We can respond quickly to requests for information or visits and are keen to facilitate toy library visits for all MPs and candidates.

For more information contact:

Debbie Williams
Chief Executive Officer, Toy Libraries Australia
e: debbie@toylibraries.org.au
m: 0411 037 941

TLA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, and to the children who are the leaders of tomorrow. Original illustrations were created by Leah Cummins @bunyadesigns, a proud Mayi woman from North-Western Queensland.

Appendix: Toy library priority policy costings

1. Grow toy libraries to fight the cost-of-living pressures

Priority	Details	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
TLA peak body funding	Provide TLA national CaPS funding	\$2.04	\$2.12	\$2.21	\$6.37
Toy library vouchers	10,000 x \$100 membership vouchers+ administration costs	\$1.15	\$1.20	\$1.24	\$3.59
New toy library grants	5 x \$40,000 for significant new toy libraries p.a.	\$0.20	\$0.21	\$0.22	\$0.62
Existing toy library grants	Grants under \$5,000 for target projects/areas of interest	\$0.20	\$0.21	\$0.22	\$0.62
TOTAL \$ million		\$3.60	\$3.73	\$3.88	\$11.20

2. Make toy libraries a key disability Foundational Support

Priority	Details	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
TLA funding for disability inclusion training	1 full-time Allied Health professional to train toy libraries on disability inclusion	\$0.19	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$0.59

3. Expand inclusive volunteering employment pathways at toy libraries

Priority	Details	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
TLA volunteer officer	1 full time volunteering officer to train toy libraries on inclusive volunteering practices, with a focus on multicultural inclusion	\$0.16	\$0.17	\$0.18	\$0.51
Disability volunteering	Expand and embed disability volunteering program at 20 toy libraries	\$0.52	\$0.53	\$0.54	\$1.59
Multicultural volunteering	Expand and embed migrant women volunteering program at 10 toy libraries	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.26	\$0.76
TOTAL \$ million		\$0.94	\$0.95	\$0.97	\$2.86

4. Multicultural affairs -Support the Toy Well program

Priority	Details	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
Toy Well funding	Operational funding for 24-34 Toy Well toy libraries	\$0.12	\$0.15	\$0.18	\$0.44
New Toy Wells	5 new toy libraries x \$8,000 each	\$0.04	\$0.04	\$0.04	\$0.12
TOTAL \$ million		\$0.16	\$0.19	\$0.22	\$0.56

5. First Nations and regional Australia - Establish toy libraries in child and family hubs

Priority	Details	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
First Nations hubs	Connected Beginnings toy library feasibility study	\$0.18	-	-	\$0.18
Regional hubs	Strategy for toy libraries in child and family regional hubs	\$0.17	-	-	\$0.17
TOTAL \$ million		\$0.35	-	-	\$0.35