

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups

Program guidelines 2008

**Office for Children and Early Childhood Development,
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development**

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Contents

Introduction	3
Background to the initiative	3
Setting the stage	4
The importance of the early years – the four key evidence themes	4
Policy context.....	5
Service Context.....	6
Useful concepts, terms and definitions	9
Playgroups.....	9
Parent groups	10
Supported playgroups (and/or parent groups) positions	11
Supported playgroups and parent groups initiatives	12
Objectives	12
Target groups	12
Service Model Requirements	12
Transition	13
Additional support	15
Playgroup Victoria	15
Post and Antenatal Depression Association (PANDA)	15
Performance Measures and Reporting Requirements	16
Activity plan	16
Reporting and accountability	17
Funding	17
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional offices	18
Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Activity Plan	19
Template	20

Introduction

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative (SPPI) aims to provide quality play opportunities for children at a critical time in a child's development. These opportunities foster children's language development, develop motor skills, expose children to sensory experiences and enhance social skills. The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative also provides families with opportunities to establish friendships and long-term social support networks and increase parenting capacity, confidence and enjoyment of family life.

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative targets vulnerable families from disadvantaged backgrounds. An important objective of the initiative is to increase families' participation in early years services and other supports. The initiative builds parents' capacity to support their child's health, development, learning and wellbeing.

These guidelines have been developed to provide assistance and direction to agencies and partnerships responsible for planning, developing, implementing and evaluating supported playgroups and parent groups in their local area, which are funded under this initiative.

Background to the initiative

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative was announced in the Victorian Government's social policy statement, *A Fairer Victoria*, in 2005-06 as part of a four-year, \$101.8 million package to give children the best start in life. The supported playgroups and parent groups initiative was initially rolled out to the municipalities where Best Start demonstration projects were established in order to consolidate the successful work of Best Start partnerships in building linkages for vulnerable families to the early years service system through playgroups. These municipalities include the Cities of Ballarat, Casey, Frankston, Greater Geelong, Hume, Maribyrnong, Greater Shepparton and Whittlesea, the Rural City of Swan Hill and the Shires of Wellington and Yarra Ranges (from 2005-06) and the Rural City of Horsham, Shire of Baw Baw and the City of Latrobe (from 2006-07).

The 2008/09 Victorian Government budget committed funding for the roll out of Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative to the remaining municipalities where Best Start sites are located, as part of a four-year \$20.3 million package to support disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their families. The municipalities to receive funding under the extension of this supported playgroups and parent groups initiative, as of January 2009, include the cities of Brimbank, Darebin, Greater Dandenong and Wyndham, the Rural City of Mildura and the Shires of Bass Coast, Campaspe, Cardinia, Central Goldfields, East Gippsland, Melton, Moorabool, Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik and South Gippsland.

Setting the stage

The importance of the early years – the four key evidence themes¹

Early childhood research and literature provides substantial evidence that:

- the early years are crucial in setting the stage for later life
- young children develop through their relationships with others
- children’s development is shaped by the balance between risk and protective factors
- supporting families effectively requires a comprehensive, coordinated family-centred service system.

Setting the stage for later life

Research shows that the early years of development from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, provide the building blocks for the cognitive, coping and emotional skills that affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life. There is growing evidence that good nutrition and a nurturing and responsive care-giving environment in the early years, combined with high quality early childhood development programs, can improve the long-term outcomes for all children’s health, development, learning and wellbeing.

Developing through relationships with others

All young children’s learning and development occurs in the context of their relationships with their caregivers. These early experiences form characteristic ways of relating to other people and of coping with the ebb and flow of emotions.

The balance between risk and protective factors

Early childhood development is shaped by the balance between factors known to place development at risk and those known to have protective properties. Children exposed to multiple risk factors become vulnerable to developmental problems that affect health, learning and wellbeing. Children exposed to protective factors are more likely to be resilient in the face of environmental challenges. To ensure that more children develop well, we need to reduce the factors that place them at risk and promote those that are protective. Among other things, this means building more child and family friendly communities.²

Providing a comprehensive, coordinated family-centred service system

To achieve better outcomes for children and families, we need an integrated system of services that can respond to the emerging needs of children and families in local community settings. To become more effective, service systems need to adopt a family-centred approach to working with families, a partnership approach to working with communities, and a strength-based approach to policy and service development. Better outcomes are also achieved when services are comprehensive and inclusive.

International research and experience indicate that some key activities are essential elements of a comprehensive, inclusive, accessible and effective early years service system. These include:

¹ Adapted from the *Municipal Early Years Framework 2005*

² A diagram of risk and protective factors with associated /protection of adverse outcomes can be found at the Centre for Community Child Health’s publication, *A review of the early childhood literature* (Feb 2000) at website:

www.rch.org.au/ccch

²

- improving support for parents to care for their children
- improving opportunities for good quality play, learning, child care, kindergarten and early education experiences for children, before school and during the first three years of school
- improving support for parents to strengthen their skills and capacity to promote the development and early learning of their children.

Policy context

In August 2007, the Premier announced the formation of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The department incorporates all early childhood services, Best Start and early intervention programs, as well as primary and secondary schools. The creation of DEECD signals a new opportunity to pursue an integrated approach to improving the learning, development, health and well being of all Victorian children from birth to adulthood.

Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development

In September 2008 the Premier launched the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (the Blueprint), which sets out the Government's agenda for ensuring a high-quality and coherent birth-to-adulthood learning and development system to build the capability of every young Victorian.

The Blueprint identifies four key priorities:

- Increasing access to high quality early childhood services
- Strengthening confidence in the school education system, with the government school sector at its core
- Integrating services for children and families
- Improving outcomes for disadvantaged young Victorians.

A series of actions have been designed to address these priorities grouped under three key strategies

- System improvement
- Partnerships with parents and communities
- Workforce reform

The Blueprint builds on the research of the importance of the early years by emphasising the need for an integrated system of high quality and accessible services and supports for children and families, the importance of a partnership approach to working with families and communities, a priority focus on disadvantaged children, families and localities and the need to provide supports to parents to build parental capacity and confidence. Further information about the Blueprint is available at www.education.vic.gov.au.

Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood

The *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* builds on recent policies and reforms. In the early childhood area, this includes, most notably, *Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood* (2007), one of Victoria's proposals to the Council of Australian Governments under the National Reform Agenda.

Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood draws on the research and evidence of the importance of early childhood and articulates a comprehensive framework for early childhood reform. The reform package is designed to develop an integrated, high quality and accessible early childhood service system to drive sustained improvements in early childhood outcomes.

Every child, every chance

Every Child Every Chance legislation is encompassed in two Acts the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* and the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 guides the operation of the Child Safety Commissioner, the Victorian Children's Council, and the Children's Service's Coordination Board. This Act also sets out the principles that should be used for guidance in the development and provision of Government, Government-funded and community services for children and their families.

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* places children's best interests at the heart of all decision-making and service delivery relating to vulnerable children, young people and their families. Whilst the Act is targeted at family support, Child Protection and out of home care services, these principles have resonance for the broader health and community services infrastructure including maternal and child health, early childhood services, schools and health services.

Service context

Role of local government

Local government is a primary investor in early years services and infrastructure. Many local governments already play a role in supporting local community playgroups in a variety of ways, including the provision of information, resources and access to facilities.

In *Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood*, the Victorian Government committed to work with local government to ensure that integrated children's services are in place in growing communities where and when families need them. The *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* reiterates support for the leadership role of local government in improving early childhood services.

A Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) is a local area plan designed to provide a strategic direction for the development and coordination of educational, care and health programs, activities and other local developments that impact on children and their families. These plans are the local mechanism for aligning and coordinating government policy and local priorities for children aged 0-8.

The Municipal Early Years Plan provides the local knowledge on which the Supported Playgroups and Parenting Groups initiative can be built.

Best Start partnerships

Best Start aims to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all Victorian children from pregnancy through transition to school (0-8 years). The aims are achieved by supporting service providers to improve universal early years services, making them more responsive to local needs. A strong emphasis of Best Start is on prevention and early intervention.

Best Start partnerships make a difference to child health, development, learning and wellbeing through changes to the delivery of existing early years services, strengthening the links between those services and integrating services where possible. These changes are likely to lead to a sustainable coordination and provision of care and support for all children and parents, irrespective of income, ethnic background, ability or geographic location.

Many Best Start partnerships established or expanded the availability of playgroups and parent groups through their action plans. It is important that the planning for the local development, implementation and evaluation of supported playgroups and parent groups, under this initiative, is undertaken in consultation and with the support of the local Best Start partnership

and is consistent with the Best Start approach. For more information on Best Start go to the Best Start website at www.beststart.vic.gov.au.

Parenting services

Parenting services promote the independence and healthy development of families with children 0-18 years through the provision of parenting support, information, advice, referral and resources to parents and training and consultancy to professionals. There are a range of Victorian parenting services and resources available to assist the planning and delivery of local supported playgroups and parent groups. These include:

- the Parenting Research Centre, a statewide service that provides a leadership role in the parenting field through the provision of research, evaluation, training and parent information resources, The Parenting Research Centre also manages the Raising Children Network website accessible at www.raisingchildren.net.au/
- Parentline, a statewide telephone counselling service providing information, advice, referral and counselling for parents and carers of children from birth to eighteen years.
- Regional Parenting Services, which operate in all DEECD regions and offer consultation, linkages, resources and professional development to professionals who work with families, as well as information and education for parents and professionals.
- Early Parenting Centres, which provide services and support to assist parents experiencing acute early parenting difficulties to care for their children by increasing parents' knowledge, skills and confidence through the provision of consultation, counseling, skill development and education services.
- The Strengthening Parents Support Program, which assists parents and carers who have a child with a disability or developmental delay to connect with other families and the community.
- Family Intervention Services - preventative intervention services which aim to reduce parental depression, anxiety and stress and to reduce conflict in relationships between parents.

For more information about parenting services go to www.education.vic.gov.au/occcd/early-childhood-intervention/other/parenting_services.html

Early years services

Universal early years services incorporate programs supporting the health, development and learning of all young children and include kindergarten and childcare, maternal and child health and the primary school nursing services.

Playgroups and parent groups are already part of the mix of the early years programs available for families. The Maternal and Child Health Service is funded to provide parent groups inclusive of first-time parents as part of the flexible service capacity. Other universal early childhood services, including kindergarten and child care, may also run playgroups or parent groups.

There are a range of other services that support families with significant parenting problems and/or additional needs. This includes the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service, early parenting services, early childhood intervention services and kindergarten inclusion support services. The In Home Support initiative for Aboriginal Families, linked closely to the Koori Maternity Services, also operates in a number of locations across Victoria. Some of these services may already provide playgroups or parent groups. Strong linkages with both universal and more specialised early years services will need to be developed in order to establish and maintain successful supported playgroups and parent groups at a local level.

Integrated family services

Integrated family services (encompassing Family Services, Family Support Innovations Projects and Child and Family Information, Referral and Support teams,) play a critical role in supporting vulnerable children and families and provide a comprehensive range of service interventions with a whole-of-family focus which aim to

- Strengthen parent capability to provide basic care, ensure safety and promote children's development
- Improve the family's community connections and access to community resources.

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support teams) have been established in designated sub-regional catchments (24 sites in total by February 2009) across Victoria to provide a community-based referral point into Family Services.

Families requiring the support of Family Services generally have complex needs, which can adversely impact on child's development if appropriate supports and interventions are not provided in a timely manner. Some families may be assisted by the provision of information and advice only. However, for most families referred to Child First a cycle of assessment, planning and action will commence, often resulting in a referral to a Family Services agency for support.

Family Services often provide a range of parent support groups for their service users. Supported playgroups and parent groups can also play an important role in assisting these families. In addition the role of the Family Services agency is to facilitate connections with other appropriate services, such as universal early years services, drug and alcohol, mental health, housing or family violence services.

Useful concepts, terms and definitions

The following section clarifies some concepts and provides working definitions and explanatory notes about a number of commonly employed terms. They provide a helpful summary for understanding and interpreting the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative guidelines

The definitions of playgroup terms are informed by the definitions outlined in Playgroup Victoria's *Supported Playgroup Manual*³

Playgroups

Playgroups provide developmentally appropriate quality play opportunities at a critical time in a child's development. Playgroups foster children's language development, develop motor skills, expose children to sensory experiences and enhance social skills.⁴ Playgroups also

- enhance parenting skills, capacity, confidence and enjoyment
- promote social networks and community connectedness
- create pathways to other services.

The main feature that distinguishes playgroups from other children's services is that the parent or caregiver attends and participates in playgroup activities and is responsible for their child's safety and care when they are at playgroup

There are three major types of playgroups.

- Community playgroups
- Supported playgroups
- Intensive support playgroups

Community Playgroups

Community playgroups are self-managed by the parents and/or caregivers who attend the playgroup. Currently close to 40,000 families with over 50,000 children attend playgroups in Victoria each week.

Supported playgroups

Supported playgroups are facilitated or led by, a paid worker⁵ and are targeted at disadvantaged families who might not normally attend playgroup. The term facilitated playgroup is sometimes used and is synonymous with the term supported playgroup.

Intensive support playgroups

Intensive support playgroups are targeted at children with multiple risk factors and their families. They are designed to enhance child safety and wellbeing and developmental outcomes.

Families attending intensive support playgroups are often harder to reach and require support for a longer time. A facilitator, social worker or other support worker, provides extensive support to these playgroups and families, while providing information about a wide range of services

The term therapeutic or intensive playgroup is sometimes used and is synonymous with the

³ Supported Playgroups Manual, Playgroups Victoria 2006

⁴ Early Intervention Parenting Project: Improving Access to Playgroups for all Families, Centre for Community Health 2003

⁵ Occasionally supported playgroups are facilitated by a volunteer. In these instances volunteers should receive supervision and support

term intensive support playgroups.

Parent groups

Parent groups create an opportunity for parents to meet in a non-judgmental, safe and supportive environment to share their experiences, develop friendships and establish supportive networks that increase their ability to function to their full potential.

Many parent groups of this nature already exist. For example, maternal and child health services run parent groups, including first time parent groups, dads groups and groups for women with postnatal depression. Many of these parent groups evolve, over time, into community playgroups. Family services, early parenting centres and other secondary services, including mental health, also run broad and targeted parent support groups as part of regular education calendars.

A supported parent group may meet the aims of both a parent group and playgroup as parents may attend the group with their children, (as in the case of maternal and child health run parent groups). Alternatively parents may meet for, at least part of the session, separately from their children, as in the case of some postnatal depression groups.

Parenting activities

Playgroups and parent groups provide participants with many informal opportunities to further develop parenting skills, capacity and confidence. In the case of supported playgroups and parent groups, these opportunities are enhanced by the presence of an appropriately qualified facilitator who can act as a resource; encourage informal discussion and role model appropriate parenting strategies and interventions with young children.

In addition more structured parenting activities may be incorporated into supported playgroups and parent groups.

Such activities can include one off sessions, or a series of sessions, which provide information on topics such as child development or guiding children's behaviour. These sessions may be led by the supported playgroup or parent group facilitator or by a maternal and child health nurse, family services' worker or other appropriately trained professional attending as a 'guest' speaker or in a fee for service capacity.

In some instances structured activities to enhance parenting skills and confidence may be an integral part of the supported playgroup or parent group. These include activities that have a particular focus on interpreting infant or children's cues and behaviour or on improving parent child interaction and attachment through structured play activities. Examples of such programs include 'Mother Goose' and 'Sing and Grow'. Such structured programs always include and benefit both children and their parents or guardians and are often time limited.

Child minding and child care

There are some situations where parents may meet separately from their children for part or all of the supported playgroup or parent group, either to provide space for facilitated or informal discussion and group activities (such as with some young parents groups or postnatal depression groups) or in order to provide uninterrupted time to participate in structured parenting activities.

In such situations agencies need to consider whether any child care/ child minding provided during the session needs to be licensed under the requirements of the *Children's Services Act 1996*.

All children's services operating in Victoria need a licence. Section 3 of the *Children's Services Act 1996* defines a children's service as:

a service providing care or education for five or more children under the age of six years in the absence of their parents or guardians

- for fee or reward, or

- while the parents or guardians of the children use services or facilities provided by the proprietor of the service.

A service that meets all parts of this definition is required to be licensed.

The service does not require a licence if:

- there are less than five children under the age of six years being cared for, in the absence of their parents or guardians.
- there is no fee or reward **and** the parents or guardians of the children are not using the services or facilities provided by the proprietor of the service
- playgroups are registered with Playgroup Victoria and are operating within the guidelines of roster playgroups
- children are being minded in the same room where their parents are meeting and the parents attend to any care needs of their child.

Where agencies are uncertain if the child care/child minding arrangements they plan to put in place needs to be registered they should contact their regional Children's Services Adviser. For contact details of your region see page 18.

Information and copies of roster playgroup guidelines, as well as information about Playgroup Victoria membership is available by contacting Playgroup Victoria on 1800 171 882 (toll free within Victoria).

Supported playgroups (and/or parent groups) positions

Supported playgroups (and/or parent groups) coordinator

A supported playgroup(s) coordinator takes a key role in coordinating the planning and implementation of supported playgroups across a local government area. Their responsibilities may include

- the development of strategic partnerships to support the establishment and implementation of supported playgroups and parent groups
- providing supervision, training and/or support and mentoring to supported playgroup leaders
- developing linkages with services in order to build referral pathways into and out of supported playgroups and parent groups
- linking supported playgroups to relevant early years services, community playgroups and other generic services such as libraries and neighbourhood houses
- accessing venues for supported playgroups and parent groups
- developing promotional and other relevant resources

The role of the Coordinator should only include general resourcing and support of community playgroups if the position is also partially funded through additional funding sources, outside of the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative.

Supported playgroup (or parent group) facilitator

A supported playgroup, in contrast to a community playgroup, is facilitated or led by a qualified worker. Sometimes a supported playgroup coordinator may also lead one or more supported playgroups or parent groups. In other municipalities they may be two distinct positions. A supported playgroup facilitator may facilitate a number of playgroups or parent groups or just one playgroup. In some situations there may be two people who co-facilitate a playgroup or parent group.

The term supported playgroup or parent group leader is sometimes used and is synonymous with the term facilitator.

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative

Objectives

The objectives of the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative are to:

- promote improved health, development and wellbeing outcomes for children,
- build parents' confidence and capacity and support the establishment of social networks
- model and support developmentally appropriate play experiences and parenting practices
- promote and support participation in the maternal and child health service and kindergarten programs and link families to other relevant services and supports

Target groups

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative is a targeted program for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families, who may, for a range of reasons, under utilise or have difficulties accessing universal early childhood services and supports, including playgroups and parent groups.

There are four population groups that are specifically targeted under this initiative. They are

1. Indigenous children and their families or carers
2. Culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, with a particular focus on recently arrived families
3. Disadvantaged families with complex needs⁶
4. Children and families affected by disability⁷

Who is not included in these target groups?

Fathers, grandparents, multiple birth playgroups/parent groups and isolated families UNLESS they also fall in one of the target groups described above

Service Model Requirements

The service model must:

- provide supported playgroups and/or parent groups that include the specified target group(s)
- build on existing plans and initiatives in the area, in particular the Municipal Early Years Plan and the local Best Start Action Plan

⁶ The term disadvantaged families with complex needs includes, but is not limited to,

- young isolated parents
- families affected by family violence,
- families impacted by mental health issues, including postnatal depression,
- families where there are substance abuse issues
- families who are homeless and
- families where there are significant socio-economic problems such as long term employment

⁷ The term children and families affected by a disability includes

- children with a disability or developmental delay
- children where there is a risk of a diagnosis of disability or developmental delay
- children with challenging behaviours symptomatic of developmental delay
- children with complex health care needs
- families where the parent has a physical or intellectual disability or significant learning difficulties

- be developed in collaboration with the local Best Start partnership group and other relevant family and early years services operating in the geographical area
- take into account existing playgroups and parent groups and ensure new groups complement, rather than replicate existing initiatives, particularly any facilitated playgroups or parent groups funded through other sources
- promote ongoing collaboration with existing services and participation in other universal early childhood services
- develop assertive strategies to engage with the target group and maintain regular attendance
- take into consideration how individual families and, where relevant, playgroups and/or parent groups will be assisted to transition into community playgroups
- ensure all personnel involved in supported playgroups and parent groups in the area (including Coordinators, supported playgroup facilitators and volunteers) hold a current Working with Children Check.

The service model should where possible:

- in the case of supported playgroup facilitators, employ a qualified worker as defined in Regulation 25 of the Children’s Services Regulations 1998 (a list of approved qualifications is provided at www.education.vic.gov.au/ocecd/earlychildhood/library/publications/licensing/schedule.html)
- in the case where parents meet separately from their children for all or part of the supported playgroup or parent group, incorporate the participation of children in developmentally appropriate activities while the group is operating
- include partnership approaches and arrangements in the delivery of supported playgroups and/or parent groups
- provide supported playgroups and parent groups in facilities that promote linkages with other early childhood education, care and health services, notably integrated children’s centres and community hubs

Agencies may use funds to incorporate one or more of these features into their service model:

- employ a municipal supported playgroup coordinator⁸
- provide brokerage funds to other relevant services in the municipality to facilitate a supported playgroup or parent group
- contract another relevant service in the municipality to provide supported playgroup(s) and/or parent group(s)
- target resources to a geographic area within the identified municipality
- provide activities that build connections between supported playgroups, community playgroups and other relevant universal services
- use funds for professional training and/or development of supported playgroup facilitators. This may include targeted training for potential playgroup leaders from existing supported playgroups
- incorporate strategies, including integrated playgroups and/or one on one support where appropriate, to facilitate the inclusion of parents from the target groups in mainstream playgroups and/or parent groups⁹
- utilise funding to support existing playgroups to promote the inclusion of the target group

Transition

Agencies can use funds to provide ongoing or time limited support for playgroups and parent groups. The decision about whether to provide support for a particular group on an ongoing basis, or whether to assist the group to transition to a more independent option, will need to

⁸ Where funds are used to employ a playgroup coordinator their responsibilities need to focus on activities that align with the Supported Playgroup and Parent Groups initiative guidelines. Position responsibilities that fall outside of the SPPI guidelines, such as support of community playgroups, need to be funded through alternative funding sources.

⁹ Where inclusive/integrated playgroup models are utilised at least 50% of the group participants must come from one or more of the SPPI target groups to be included in the SPPI data report

consider both the needs of the group participants and an assessment as to how many groups the agency or partnership can provide support to at any one time, given the available funds.

Even where there is no requirement for a group to transition to more independent options the group facilitator should still keep in mind the needs of individual families within the group and whether those needs would be better met through transitioning into a community playgroup or other early childhood service, such as kindergarten or childcare. Families, on a case by case basis, can be assisted and encouraged in the process of transition by 'leaving the door open' for a short period of time during the process of transition but care needs to be taken to ensure that dependence is not inadvertently created or that places in playgroups are not reserved 'just in case'.

If the service model in operation includes integrated playgroup(s) or parent group(s) it is an expectation that the participation of non target group families in the playgroup/parent group will be time limited.

Additional support

Playgroup Victoria

Playgroup Victoria has been funded to support the establishment and implementation of the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative in the identified municipalities. This support includes:

- compiling the biannual state-wide report on the implementation of the supported playgroups and parent groups initiative
- inviting new staff to participate in relevant existing playgroup networks
- providing resources and induction for new playgroup facilitators on request
- developing resource material for supported playgroups and parent groups as appropriate
- providing other relevant training and development opportunities

Playgroup Victoria also offers a range of membership options for professionals, playgroups and families which are a valuable additional resource. For more information about the range of supports that Playgroup Victoria offer go to their website www.playgroup.org.au

Post and Antenatal Depression Association (PANDA)

PANDA provides confidential information, support and referral to anyone affected by post and antenatal mood disorders, including partners and extended family members. PANDA also produces and distributes accurate information about post and antenatal mood disorders to health professionals and the wider community.

Over a number of years, PANDA has supported Maternal and Child Health and other services to establish support groups for families affected by postnatal depression. As part of this initiative, PANDA is able to offer additional support to some targeted sites where postnatal depression is identified as an issue.

For more information about PANDA visit their website at www.panda.org.au.

Performance Measures and Reporting Requirements

The following table outlines the outcomes, measures and outputs that will be monitored as part of this Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative.

Outcome	Measures (proxy)	Outputs
Parent promotion of child health and development Communities that enable parents and children to build connections and draw on informal assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group attendance rates • Rate of eligible children participating in a playgroup who are enrolled in four year old kindergarten • Rate of eligible three or four year old children participating in a playgroup who are attending a state funded kindergarten program • Completion of the relevant Key Age and Stage maternal and child health visit(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of groups receiving funds through this initiative • The number of children and parents participating in these groups

Table 1

Activity Plan

All Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups sites that receive funding through this initiative are required to submit an activity plan. This applies to both existing and new sites.

Lead agencies

The activity plan needs to identify the lead agency for the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative in the local area. This agency has responsibility for driving the strategic planning and implementation of the initiative. They are also responsible for financial management of the initiative and for reporting accountability.

The lead agency in new sites will generally be local government. If a council or shire identifies another agency in the local government area that is more strategically placed to be the lead agency, this will need to be approved by the relevant regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Similarly in existing sites, if a new lead agency is identified for the initiative, this should be approved by the regional office.

Activity plan requirements

The activity plan clearly identifies how the funded agency will meet the objectives and outcomes of the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative and provides a context for accountability.

The activity plan should incorporate the proposed service model, the priority groups that will be targeted at a local level, and outline how the plan aligns with the requirements of this initiative, as specified in these guidelines.

The activity plan should identify the partners to this initiative and how it links to local existing relevant early years plans and programs.

A template for the activity plan can be found on page 20.

Timelines

Agencies are required to submit their activity plans to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in the relevant region by **Friday 28 March 2009**.

For contact details of your local region see page 18.

Reporting and accountability

Activity plans need to be reviewed annually. This review provides an opportunity to assess whether targets, approaches and strategies are effective or whether they require modification. All partners to the initiative should have an opportunity to provide input into the review. Modifications to strategies in response to information emerging from the monitoring process are an important part of the quality feedback loop. Any revisions to the activity plan should be documented and a revised plan should be returned to the regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development each year by 15 December.

Data Reports

The data relating to measures and outputs (as outlined in Table 1) need to be collected from all supported playgroups and parent groups that receive any amount of funding through this initiative. A template for data collection is provided for this purpose and is available from the website www.beststart.vic.gov.au. A hard copy of the template will be sent to all sites in early 2009.

In collecting this information, sites may also wish to measure other outputs or outcomes, including participant satisfaction or feedback (from agencies) regarding the accessibility of the supported playgroups and parent groups, as part of their own quality improvement process.

Sites need to provide data reports to the regional office twice a year (15 July and 15 January). In order to ensure that reports are provided on a timely basis to the regional office the lead agency, who is responsible for submitting the reports, may want to ensure that reports are returned from each playgroup and parent group at an earlier date (for example end of Term 2 and Term 4).

The data reports will be collated by Playgroup Victoria to develop a statewide profile of the initiative. A summary of the data will be made available to all sites.

Funding

The funding for the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative is based on a minimum allocation to all municipalities of \$40,000 and a proportional allocation based on the number of children aged 0–4 years living in the municipality.

Financial reports

Lead agencies are required to submit a financial report at the end of each financial year. This report should be forwarded to the regional office by 15 July each year.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Regional Offices

The Department of Education and Early Childhood has a central office in Melbourne and nine regions throughout the state. There are four metropolitan regions and five rural regions.

Each region has a section responsible for early years services with a team of program and service advisers who are appointed to monitor, advise and support services funded through the department to provide services to children and their families. Agencies are encouraged to maintain regular contact with their regional program and service adviser.

Regional office staff work directly with funded agencies. All agency enquiries should be directed to the regional office applicable to the location from which the program is provided.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Services regional offices contact details are listed below:

Barwon-South Western Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
State Government Offices
2nd Floor, Cnr Little Malop & Fenwick Streets
Geelong 3220
Phone: (03) 5226 4540

Loddon Mallee Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
74-78 Queen St
Bendigo 3550
Phone: (03) 5434 5555

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
Level 3, 295 Springvale Road
Glen Waverley 2150
Phone: (03) 9265 2400

Northern Metropolitan Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
145 Smith Street
Fitzroy 3065
Phone: (03) 9412 5333

Gippsland Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
64 Church Street
Traralgon 3844
Phone: (03) 5177 2500

Southern Metropolitan Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
122 Thomas Street
Dandenong 3175
Phone: (03) 9213 2111

Grampians Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
109 Armstrong Street
Northern Ballarat
Phone: (03) 5337 8444

Western Metropolitan Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
71 Moreland Street
(Cnr Napier Street)
Footscray 3011
Phone: (03) 9275 7000

Hume Region

Early Years Partnerships/Services
163 Welsford Street
Shepparton 3632
Phone: (03) 5832 1500

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Activity Plan

Activity plan

The activity plan clearly identifies how the funded agency will meet the objectives and outcomes of the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative and provides a context for accountability.

The activity plan should incorporate the proposed service model, the priority groups that will be targeted at a local level, and outline how the plan aligns with the requirements of this initiative, as specified in these guidelines.

The activity plan should identify the partners to this initiative and how it links to local existing relevant early years plans and programs.

Activity plans need to be reviewed annually. This review provides an opportunity to review whether approaches and strategies are operationally effective or whether they require modification. All partners to the initiative should have an opportunity to provide input into the review. Modifications to strategies in response to information emerging from the monitoring process are an important part of the quality feedback loop. Any revisions to the activity plan should be documented and a revised plan should be returned to the regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development each year by 15 December.

Performance measures

The following table outlines the outcomes, measures and outputs that will be monitored as part of this initiative. Additional outcome measures determined by the agency or partnership can be included.

Outcomes	Measures (proxy)	Outputs
Parent promotion of child health and development Communities that enable parents and children to build connections and draw on informal assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group attendance rates • Rate of eligible children participating in a playgroup who are enrolled in four year old kindergarten • Rate of eligible three or four year old children participating in a playgroup who are attending a state funded kindergarten program • Completion of the relevant Key Age and Stage maternal and child health visit(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of groups receiving funds through this initiative • The number of children and parents participating in these groups

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Activity Plan Template

1. Name of local government area

2. Lead Agency Details:

- a. Agency name
- b. Name of contact person for the project
- c. Agency address and other contact details

3. List the names of organisations that have provided input into the development of the activity plan:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

4. List the ongoing partnerships to the initiative in your Municipality/Shire and briefly outline their role in the initiative

Name of agency/partnership	Description of role

5. List any other supported playgroups or parent groups currently operating in the municipality/shire (if relevant)

Name of playgroup	Auspice agency	Primary target group	Funding source

6. Provide a brief description of the service model.

This should include information about how it links to your Municipal Early Years Plan and/or your Best Start Action Plan. You can also include any other evidence to support your service model and any other outcomes and measures identified by the agency or partnership.

7. Outline the number of groups and sessions per group and the families and children that will be targeted for support in a full year:

Access to supported playgroups and parent groups should engage disadvantaged families who may otherwise not access these services. Four population groups known to require particular attention are:

- *Indigenous children and their families or carers*
- *Culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, with a particular focus on recently arrived families*
- *Disadvantaged families with complex needs*
- *Children and families affected by disability*

Primary target group	Number of groups provided annually	Number of sessions per group (If ongoing the number of sessions over 12 months)	Estimated number of families supported per target group	Estimated number of children supported per target group

8. Briefly describe (three) strategies to:

- a. Engage disadvantaged families and in particular the four population groups requiring particular attention
- b. Maintain the attendance of participants in the groups

The objectives of the initiative include: building parents' confidence and capacity, supporting the establishment of social networks and modelling and supporting developmentally appropriate play experiences and parenting practices.

9. Briefly describe (three) strategies to:

- a. Provide developmental play experiences for children
- b. Increase parent confidence, capacity and connectedness to the community

10. Budget

Include a proposed annual budget for the initiative

Lead Agency Endorsement

Name:

Signature:

Date: