

# The Power of Innovation

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**NSW Health**  
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## Active Play at Playgroup: Addressing Child Obesity in 0-5 Year Olds Category 1: Keeping People Healthy to Avoid Unnecessary Hospitalisation

### Introduction

There is evidence of increasing levels of overweight and obesity in preschool-aged children, with higher rates reported in disadvantaged populations.

**Active Play at Playgroup** is an innovative health promotion project working in a new setting to promote physical activity to families from disadvantaged backgrounds with children 0-5 years.



### Aim

To reduce obesity risk factors in disadvantaged children (0-5 years) and their families by increasing the number of supported playgroups that promote active play over a 12-month period.

The project was implemented in the former South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service.



### Conclusion

Supported playgroups are an expedient setting for reaching families who may not otherwise receive Active Play messages.

Project implementation in three other Local Health Districts indicates **relevance and transferability**; results from this study will inform **state-wide implementation** of the intervention as part of the Healthy Children Initiative.

The project complements existing child obesity programs in the early years sector, adding to the portfolio of initiatives to increase protective factors for child obesity.



### Method

**Key stakeholders from government and community agencies** were engaged to ensure useful and relevant project strategies, and to strengthen the evidence base in this evolving area.

**Strategies were directed at playgroup service staff and through them parents/carers** attending playgroups. Strategies comprised:

- Resources for staff and parents/carers
- Staff training
- Equipment kit
- Support and regular contact with staff

A pre-post study collected data through interviews with playgroup staff and parents/carers.

### Results

The project reached **72 individual playgroups, servicing 850 families**. The project resulted in increases in the provision of structured active play, availability of active play equipment and dissemination of information to parents/carers.

**Statistically significant improvements included increased:**

- Provision of structured indoor games at playgroup
- Provision of structured outdoor games at playgroup
- Awareness of active play messages among all staff
- Provision of active play resources to parents/carers
- Number of parents/carers walking to and from the local park
- Frequency of parents placing babies <13 months on the floor 'every day' to play freely

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