

Play Poverty in Australia

Impact Report November 2025



*Imagine the loneliness of
watching from the sidelines.*



What is play poverty?

Play poverty happens when individuals and families miss out on opportunities to play, move and connect because of financial hardship. This is more than missing a game of cricket, or skipping swimming lessons. The long term effects of missing out on play can mean the loss of experiences that build connection, confidence and wellbeing.

Outdoor play and sport have always been at the heart of the Australian lifestyle, from backyard cricket and beach footy to local netball matches and park picnics. These experiences create connection, build resilience, and strengthen community bonds.

Today, that tradition is under threat.

With everyday expenses rising, families are cutting back on sports fees, equipment, and outdoor gear. As a result, children are missing out on the benefits of being active and simply having fun outside.

Our research found over 1 in 3 Australians feel priced out of sport and play (34%), while many worry their children will spend summer indoors because they can't afford to take part. This trend points to a growing divide between households that can afford play and households that can't.



Overview



1 in 7 Australians (14% or 3.8 million) are currently experiencing play poverty, recently being unable to afford items for their family to participate in sport or play.¹



Almost 1 in 3 Australians (32%) believe the 'Aussie summer of sport' is under threat because too many families can't afford to take part.¹



More than 1 in 3 Australians (36%) are worried that cost pressures are forcing children and families to spend more time indoors instead of participating in organised or outdoor activities, with a staggering 7.6 million Aussies feeling that summer sport and play are now 'luxuries' only some can afford (28%).¹



Nearly 1 in 8 Australians (12%) say challenges affording play and recreational items/activities have impacted their family's emotional well-being. Meanwhile, 1 in 10 say these challenges have impacted their family's physical health.¹



Over 7 million Australians (27%) are worried about affording gifts for their families this Christmas.¹

Benefits of play

Play is a powerful driver of development and well-being. Under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), **every child has the right to rest, leisure, and play, and to participate freely in recreational and cultural life.** Play is essential to children's health, happiness, and development, and vital to ensuring that every child can thrive.

Research shows that **play helps develop pro-social brains**, improving children's ability to understand and interact with others and their environment.⁵ Active play, such as running, climbing and sports, supports brain growth, memory and energy regulation.

Play also builds critical life skills: social-emotional awareness, self-regulation, problem-solving, and executive function.⁷ These all support school readiness and lifelong learning. When children play, they're not just having fun; they're strengthening the brain's capacity to manage stress, build relationships, and adapt to challenges.

When play and nurturing relationships are missing, particularly in households facing adversity, children are more vulnerable to toxic stress, which can disrupt healthy brain development.⁷ In this context,

play becomes even more essential; it becomes a protective factor for emotional resilience and wellbeing.

Outdoor play also offers important physical health benefits: strengthening muscles, improving coordination, and reducing the risks of obesity and inactivity-related illness. Just as importantly, it also fosters creativity, curiosity, and a sense of belonging.⁷

When families are priced out of play, children lose much more than access to sport; they lose a key building block for healthy development.

"Not all play requires toys or equipment, but who has not experienced the joy of a new toy or piece of play equipment that you have shared in a game with friends and taken on play adventures? How wonderful that Good360 is ensuring no child misses out on that experience due to their family circumstances. Play is an essential developmental need of childhood and ensuring children can participate and engage in a range of play activities, both in the home and in the outdoors is of critical importance to health development and social inclusion."

Robyn Monro Miller, CEO Play Australia



"Given our regional location, there are very few opportunities for players without having to pay incredibly high fees, but we wanted to change that. Every child deserves a chance to be the very best version of themselves possible, but that requires access to appropriate facilities. These A-League balls are the very best that exist and are something that we would never have been able to afford as part of our community funding. But by giving the kids access to them, it not only shows the confidence we have in them, but gives them that extra sense of purpose and achievement, creating that determination to never give up!"

Rainbow Roos, Good360 Network Member

Who is going without?

Our 2025 research paints a clear picture: **1 in 7 Australians (14%) have recently been unable to afford the basics needed for sport and play, such as shoes, uniforms, or equipment.** For families already stretched thin, these costs are simply out of reach.

More than 1 in 7 worry their families will miss out on summer sports altogether (15%), while over 1 in 3 say cost pressures are forcing more children to spend time indoors instead of participating in outdoor activities (36%).

These findings reflect a broader trend: as costs rise, play and recreation are among the first things to go. Unfortunately, the effects ripple far beyond missing out on fun. Families report growing feelings of exclusion, stress, and guilt, while children lose vital opportunities for connection and growth.

This challenge isn't just isolated to play. More than 1 in 4 Australians are worried about affording gifts this Christmas (27%), and over 1 in 5 expect this to be their toughest festive season yet (21%). For many families, financial hardship now touches every aspect of life, including the moments meant to bring joy.



1 in 7 were recently unable to afford the basics needed for sport and play¹



1 in 4 Australians are worried about affording gifts this Christmas¹

For many families, Christmas isn't filled with excitement. With daily costs adding up, the season of joy is becoming a season of pressure and disappointment. New, donated goods ensures that families experiencing financial hardship can still create memories: a child unwrapping a new cricket set on Christmas morning, siblings playing in the backyard, parents feeling the relief of being able to give something special.

A donation now helps children and families start the new year with dignity, joy and the opportunity to play.

You can make a difference by giving at <https://give.good360.org.au/holiday-toy-drive>



When asking Australians about the challenges of affording play and recreational items/activities, we found:



**Nearly 1 in 8 (12%)
say it's impacted their
family's emotional
wellbeing¹**



**1 in 10 say these
challenges have
impacted their family's
physical health¹**

The impact of play poverty

The loss of outdoor play opportunities has both immediate and lasting impacts. For children, missing out means fewer chances to develop teamwork, problem-solving, and confidence, all skills that support wellbeing and resilience throughout life. When children are deprived of play, it can negatively affect intellectual, physical, and emotional development.⁵ It can also increase long-term risks for mental health issues, as play deprivation is linked to higher stress and reduced cognitive flexibility.

For adults, play continues to have a vital role in coping, creativity, and emotional intelligence. Playfulness, defined as an intrinsically motivated, spontaneous, and joyful way of engaging with life,⁶ helps adults manage stress, build resilience, and maintain positive relationships. Research shows that playful adults experience more positive emotions, use healthier coping strategies, and demonstrate greater flexibility and emotional intelligence.²

Playfulness can also help adults reframe stress and remain resilient in the face of challenges, a valuable skill during times of financial and social strain.² In other words, play supports wellbeing across the lifespan, from the playground to adulthood.

The absence of play, however, deepens disadvantage. It limits opportunities for connection, mental health recovery, and stress relief, particularly for families already struggling.

At a community level, the decline in participation in outdoor play and sport risks eroding Australia's shared sense of community. The "Aussie summer of sport", once a unifying tradition, is now at risk of becoming a privilege for the few.

At Good360, we believe that everyone deserves the chance to play, to join in, to connect, and to thrive. Through our network of charities, schools, and corporate partners, we're connecting brand-new sports gear, outdoor equipment, and recreational items to communities across Australia.

By addressing play poverty, we're helping ensure that the great Aussie tradition of sport and outdoor fun remains open to everyone, not just the ones who can afford it.



"The additional costs for families who have a loved one with a disability are significant. Often parents are unable to work and the pressure on household budgets means they cannot afford to access community events or much-needed respite. Our Founder, Steve Dresler, has worked with countless families who are challenged to fund activities we ourselves enjoyed as kids. Something as small as a bowling ticket or the cost of overnight accommodation is out of reach for many. We are passionate about breaking down barriers and creating an inclusive community – to move, jump, play, swim and experience life to the full."

What Ability Foundation

"We've been able to give a family of disadvantaged kids some shoes where they were otherwise unable to afford shoes at all. They've been so overwhelmed by the gift of something that is so necessary for normal life but so unavailable to them on a day to day basis."

We've also been able to support indigenous soccer teams with some of the soccer boots that came in, that has helped families who have so little money to spare for specific sports shoes that they have been grateful for the help. The kids have been able to play as part of the team wearing the same kind of gear and it makes them feel so much more normal when some of the other areas of their lives feel so not normal."

Ipswich Assist, QLD

"Christmas 2025 is shaping up to be one of our biggest to date. The Santa Sacks for families and school gifts may be the only gift that the child or children receive due to various reasons – financial hardship, sickness, trauma or natural disasters. Our programs are working well, and through the nomination process, we are capturing many families who would never reach out for assistance. Thank you."

One recipient said, "People like you guys and the kindness shown make a difference to families like ours. In what has been a difficult year, support like this helps us all to smile and carry on."

Doin it for Rural Aussie Kids

Good360's member network

Good360's charity and disadvantaged school members play an important role in supporting people in play poverty. They provide shame-free access to products to help meet immediate needs and often act as a gateway to wider support.

So far in 2025 alone, over 829,675 play items have been connected to people in need, supporting over 170,000 individuals.

"A tenant came into our office with her young daughter to make a rental repayment plan. She shared that she was behind in most of her bills and was feeling overwhelmed. Her little girl mentioned it was her fifth birthday that day, and her mum looked heartbroken, saying she hadn't been able to get her a present. We gave the little girl one of the LEGO box sets donated by Good360, along with a few other small gifts we had on hand from community donations.

That single act of kindness completely changed the atmosphere of the day. What started as a difficult conversation about rent ended in smiles, tears of joy, and laughter. Thanks to Good360 and LEGO, we were able to show this mum that her community cares about her and her daughter. It reminded everyone present that even small gestures can make an enormous difference to someone doing it tough"

Link Wentworth, NSW

Our donors

Special thank you to our generous product donors, whose kindness has meant vulnerable communities can access much-needed play essentials, providing hope and joy.



What can be done?

Our network has already connected thousands of children to toys, games, and play essentials, but many more are missing out on the benefits of play; learning, creativity, and social connection. We're calling on businesses, charities, and public bodies to help make play accessible to every child.

Clear national guidelines and incentives for product donation would make a huge difference. Food has well-established redistribution frameworks; we need the same for non-food goods including toys and play items. Reducing barriers around logistics

costs, tax treatment, and liability would help more businesses make the switch confidently. Above all, it's about normalising giving as the first option, not the last resort, when businesses have surplus or unsold goods.

"These resources have made a significant impact, ensuring all students, regardless of background, have access to quality sporting equipment."

Gilgai Plains Primary School, VIC

We all can play a role in tackling play poverty in Australia:



Donate play products

Retailers, manufacturers and brands with new play products to donate can [visit our website](#) or contact Good360 Australia:

corporatepartnerships@good360.org.au

If your business has excess stock, don't let it go unused. Donate it to Good360 and help provide dignity and happiness to people doing it tough.



Join our network to access play products

Charities and disadvantaged schools can join our network for free to access toys, outdoor adventure items, books and puzzles to support local communities. Register at:

<https://good360.org.au/get-the-goods>



Donate money

to help alleviate play poverty, because everyone deserves access to life's essentials.

<https://give.good360.org.au/holiday-toy-drive>



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Help us address play poverty, what items are needed?

In 2024, approximately \$31 million worth of brand-new toys went unused, an 11% increase since 2021.

While surplus stock remains an important resource, businesses also have the unique opportunity to use their buying power to purposefully support Australians experiencing hardship. These are some of the most requested items from our members, along with other essentials that can make a difference in communities.

Toys and Games

- Board games and puzzles
- Building blocks
- Card games
- Construction toys
- Dolls, action figures, animals, dinosaurs
- Dress-up items
- Educational toys
- Toy cars, trucks and trains
- Play sets
- Plush toys
- Pretend play (kitchen, doctor, tool kits etc)
- Sensory toys
- Wooden toys

Sports and Outdoor

- Bikes, scooters and skateboards
- Exercise gear
- Helmets and protective gear
- Outdoor games and play sets
- Outdoor play equipment
- Sports balls (soccer, basketball, football, netball etc)
- Sporting equipment (bats, racquets, hoops etc)
- Sportswear, sport bags and sneakers
- Swimwear, rash vests and goggles
- Sunscreen
- Water bottles

Outdoor and Adventure

- Camping gear
- Bushwalking packs and backpacks
- Outdoor clothing and footwear (all sizes)
- Picnic sets and portable chairs
- Shade tents and beach umbrellas
- Wet weather gear

Creative and Educational

- Art and craft supplies
- Craft kits
- Books (all ages)
- Learning games
- Musical instruments
- Stationery packs
- STEM kits

Infant and Toddler

- 0-3 toys and games
- Play mats and activity gyms
- Play tents
- Ride-on toys
- Soft toys and rattles
- Teething toys
- Soft play

A note from our Founder and Managing Director



"Australia prides itself on a strong culture of sport and play, yet too many families are being priced out. Play shouldn't be a luxury. No one should have to choose between letting their child join in or paying for essentials like rent or food. The emotional toll is even greater at Christmas, when parents simply want to give their children joy and connection. At Good360, we're working to ensure every family can access the items that make play possible, and we call on businesses to donate excess stock so no child is left watching from the sidelines."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Alison Covington AM'.

Alison Covington AM,
Good360 Australia Founder & MD

Sources:

1. Nationally representative online survey of 1,000 Australians conducted by PureProfile in October 2025 on behalf of Good360 Australia and data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
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3. Holmes, R. & Hart, T., (2022) "Exploring the Connection between Adult Playfulness and Emotional Intelligence", *The Journal of Play in Adulthood* 4(1), 28–51. <https://doi.org/10.5920/jpa.973>
4. Lubbers, Kathy & Cadwallader, Jeanne & Lin, Qiyang & Clifford, Christopher & Frazier, Leslie. (2023). Adult Play and Playfulness: A Qualitative Exploration of its Meanings and Importance. *The Journal of Play in Adulthood*. 5. 10.5920/jpa.1258.
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6. Sluss, D. (2015). *Supporting play in early childhood* (2nd ed.). Cengage Learning.
7. Yogman M, Garner A, Hutchinson J, et al; AAP COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, AAP COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA. The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children. *Pediatrics*. 2018;142(3):e20182058



**Donate to Good360
to help alleviate the
impact of play poverty**

**Every \$1 donated = \$20 worth of toys
and goods to a person in need**



\$25

\$25 can deliver \$500 RRP
worth of toys, sportsgear
and essential goods to
people in need.



\$50

\$50 can deliver \$1,000 RRP
of toys and essentials
to multiple families in need.



\$100

\$100 can provide \$2,000 RRP
of a trolley load of toys, gifts
and festive surprises to
people in need.

About Good360 Australia

Good360 Australia is a not-for-profit online marketplace for charities and disadvantaged schools. We redirect donated new products to the people who need them most, working with over 600 partners and a network of over 4,800 charities and schools. Our purpose is to ensure no one in Australia goes without life's everyday essentials, including for hygiene, play, home and education. The result is a Circle of Good that reduces both need and waste in our communities.



Be part of the Circle of Good

For more information visit good360.org.au
or follow us @good360au