Play poverty in Australia 2026



Sport and outdoor play are central to Australian life, but rising living costs are pricing families out of basic recreation. New national research from Good360 reveals that 13 million Australians have experienced play poverty, forced to go without sports gear, uniforms, and outdoor equipment. This snapshot highlights how cost barriers are impacting physical health, driving screen time, and why urgent action is needed.

The big picture

47%

have experienced play poverty

Nearly 1 in 2 Australians have been unable to afford essential items or costs to play, move, learn and connect.

Emerging need

13%, 3.6 million Australians experienced play poverty for the first time in last 12 months.

Hidden crisis

18% considered seeking help from a charity for play items but didn't ask.

Rising concern

48% believe cost pressures are forcing families indoors.

Priced out

43% say Australians are being priced out of sport and outdoor play.

Sacrifices & physical impacts

51%

Less physically active

Among Australians who say they have experienced play poverty before, 31% lost confidence, and 28% suffered a decline in mental health.

19%

Cut back elsewhere to afford play

Households cut back on essentials like food and fuel to afford play, while 20% stopped or reduced activity participation entirely.

Top play items households went without due to cost

- 19% Sports shoes/boots
- 16% Sports uniforms
- 13% Outdoor gear
- 13% Bikes & Scooters
- 11% Swimwear

Who is most affected?

Play poverty is not limited to low-income households

82%

First Nations people

Have experienced play poverty, and 86% went without a play item in the last 12 months

>70%

Families and young people

72% of couples with children and 79% of 18-24 year olds report negative impacts from play costs

52%

Women

More than half have gone without a play, sport or recreation item because of cost in the last year, compared to 43% of men

For more information visit good360.org.au

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The knock-on effects

83%

Replace play with screens

Parents say high play costs force their kids onto screens for at least an extra hour a day and 50% say 2 or more extra hours.

45%

Fear isolation of seniors

Australians fear older generations are becoming isolated, with 24% of 65-74 year olds becoming less physically active due to costs.

1 in 4

Worried they can't afford Christmas gifts

25% of Australians are already worried about affording family gifts this holiday season.

Recipient stories, shared by our charity members

When we left, the kids had to leave their favourite things behind. A LEGO set of their own made them feel special again.
Cassie*, woman rebuilding after family violence

I've always wanted shoes like these but could never afford them. Now I can join in with everyone else.
Locky*, teenager at school

New toys aren't always guaranteed at Christmas. We have to survive and raise the kids on just our pension, getting gifts for the grandkids took a real weight off us.
Pat*, grandcarer

Thank you for the sports clothing. I really love the jacket, it's perfect for when I play soccer and I've made new friends in the team.
Amir*, student from a refugee background

Playing team sport with others who've been through the same thing has built my confidence. Having the right gear took the pressure off the cost of training and travel when so much of my finances goes towards managing my condition.
Jess*, living with a chronic health condition

**These stories are based on real submissions by our members but names and some details have been changed to protect privacy.*

Australians want government and businesses to act to reduce play poverty

59% believe no one should miss out on play due to cost. 51% want governments to act, while 38% say businesses should donate goods rather than let them go to waste.



How you can help:

1. Read and share these findings.

The more people know, the more that can be done.

2. Donate goods and services

Get goods and experiences into the hands of people in need.

3. Donate $50 to provide $1,000 of goods

Your donation can provide toys and sporting goods to people in need, giving more Australians a fair go at play.

Learn more at good360.org.au

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Research Methodology Nationally representative online survey of 1,055 Australians aged 18+, conducted by PureProfile on behalf of Good360 Australia in September 2026.