



Draft Early Years Strategy

Consultation response

Toy Libraries
AUSTRALIA



Overview of toy libraries

Toy Libraries



AUSTRALIA



A toy library enables families to borrow a large variety of educational toys, games, and puzzles in a process similar to that of a book library. These toys suit children from birth to primary school and beyond.

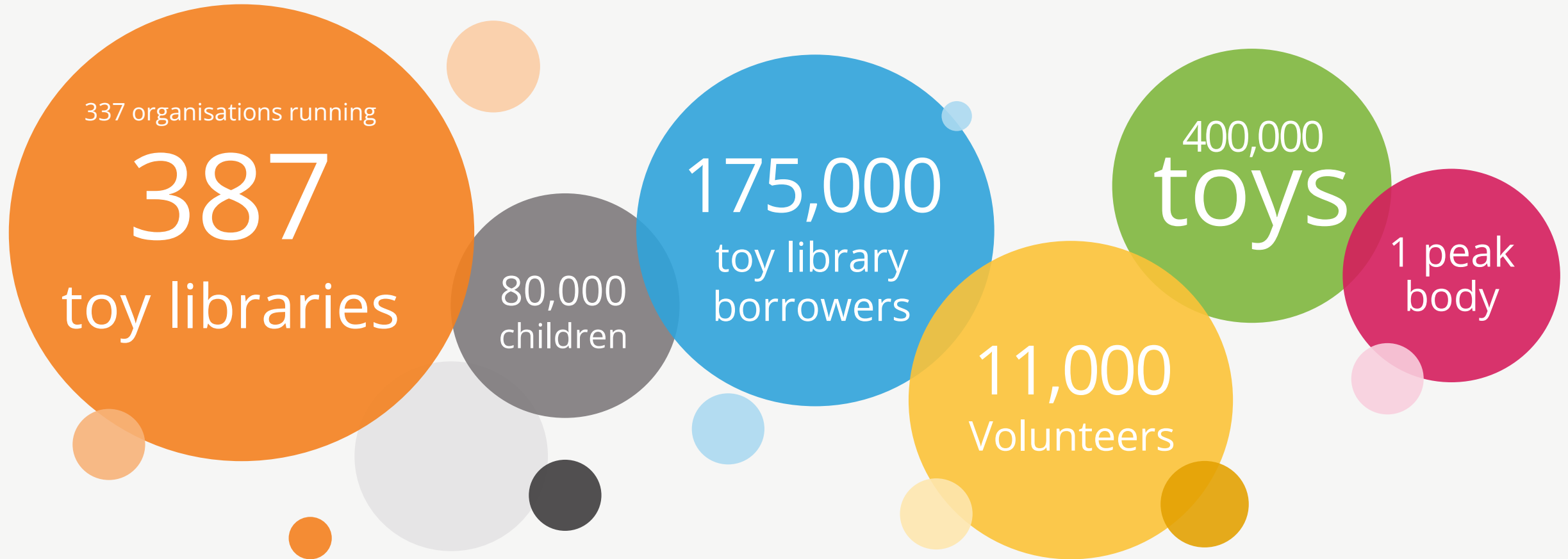
Toy Libraries Australia's members have a specific focus on promoting the educational value of play for younger children, encouraging positive adult/child interactions through play, and creating strong community connections in a setting that encourages the sustainable use of resources.

There are 380+ toy libraries across Australia, with over 175,000 people using a toy library each year. Our member toy libraries operate in a variety of formats and settings, but most are community organisations run primarily by volunteers.

Toy libraries' basic lending services are generally self-funding through membership fees, fundraising and corporate sponsorships; although limited grants from philanthropic sources and local government funding enable toy libraries to extend their toy collections. In the last year the Australian and Victorian governments have provided the first ever multi-year commitment to toy libraries.

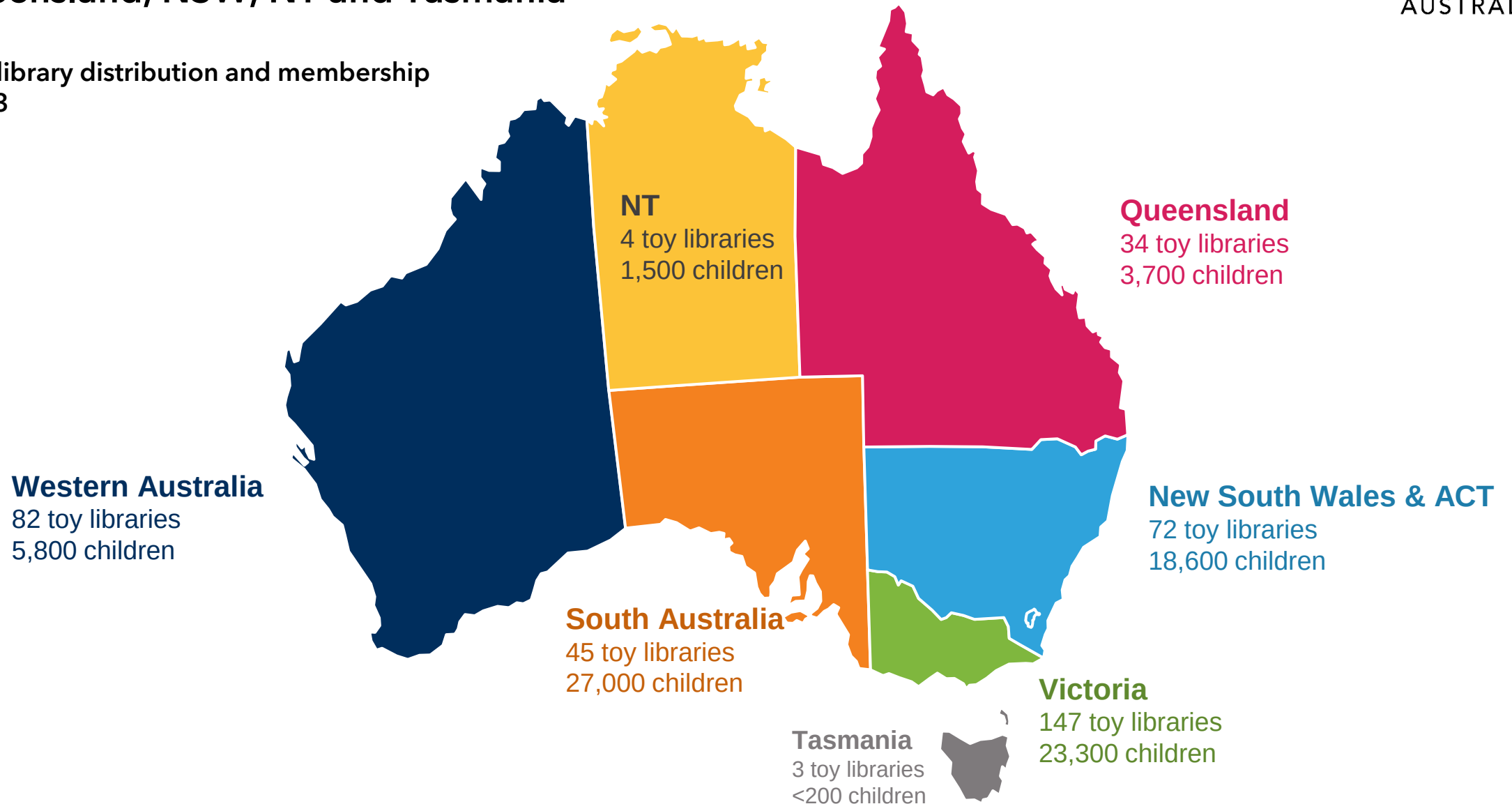


Snapshot of Toy Libraries in Australia

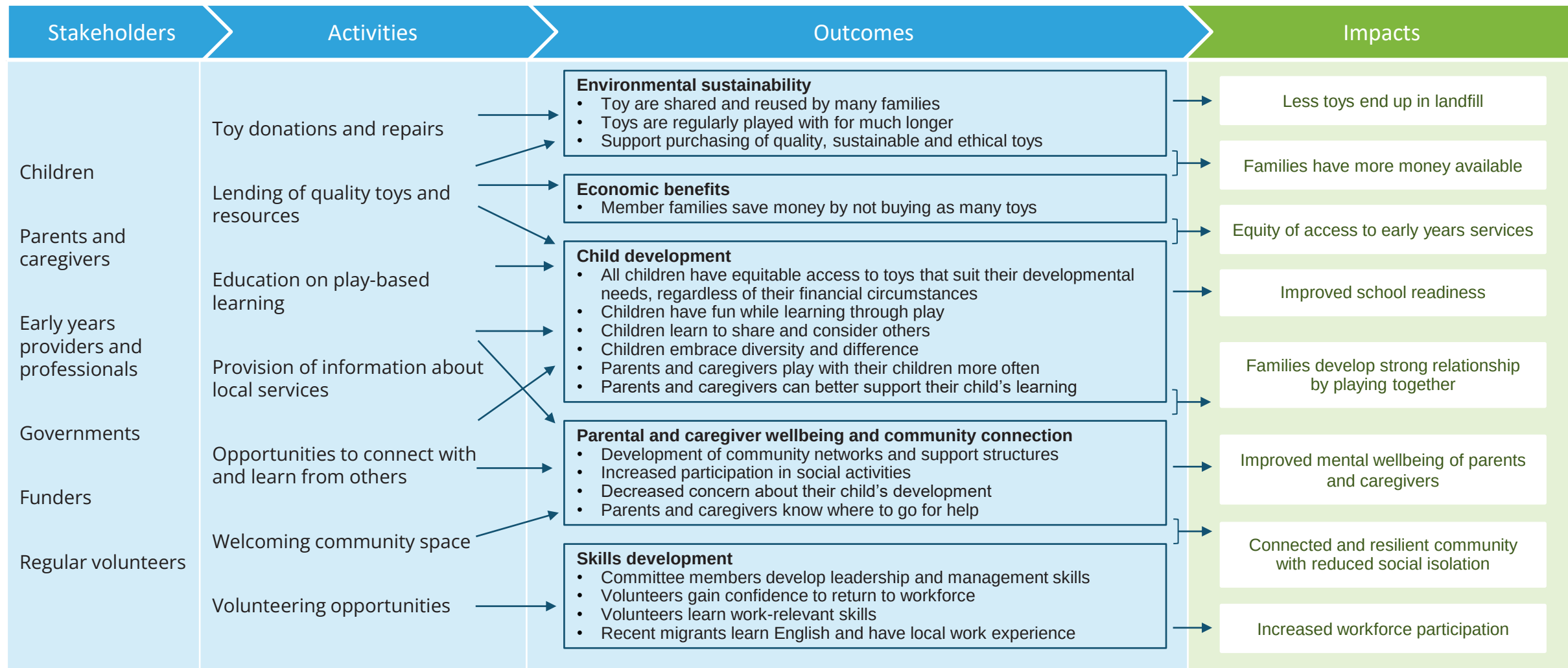


There is good toy library coverage in Victoria, WA and SA, but many gaps in Queensland, NSW, NT and Tasmania

Toy library distribution and membership
2023



Theory of change for Australian toy libraries



Note: activities and outcomes are ordered to simplify the flow of the arrows. The order is not an indication of importance.

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Toy Libraries Australia supports the early years strategy but would like to see 'play' and 'learning' combined in the outcomes

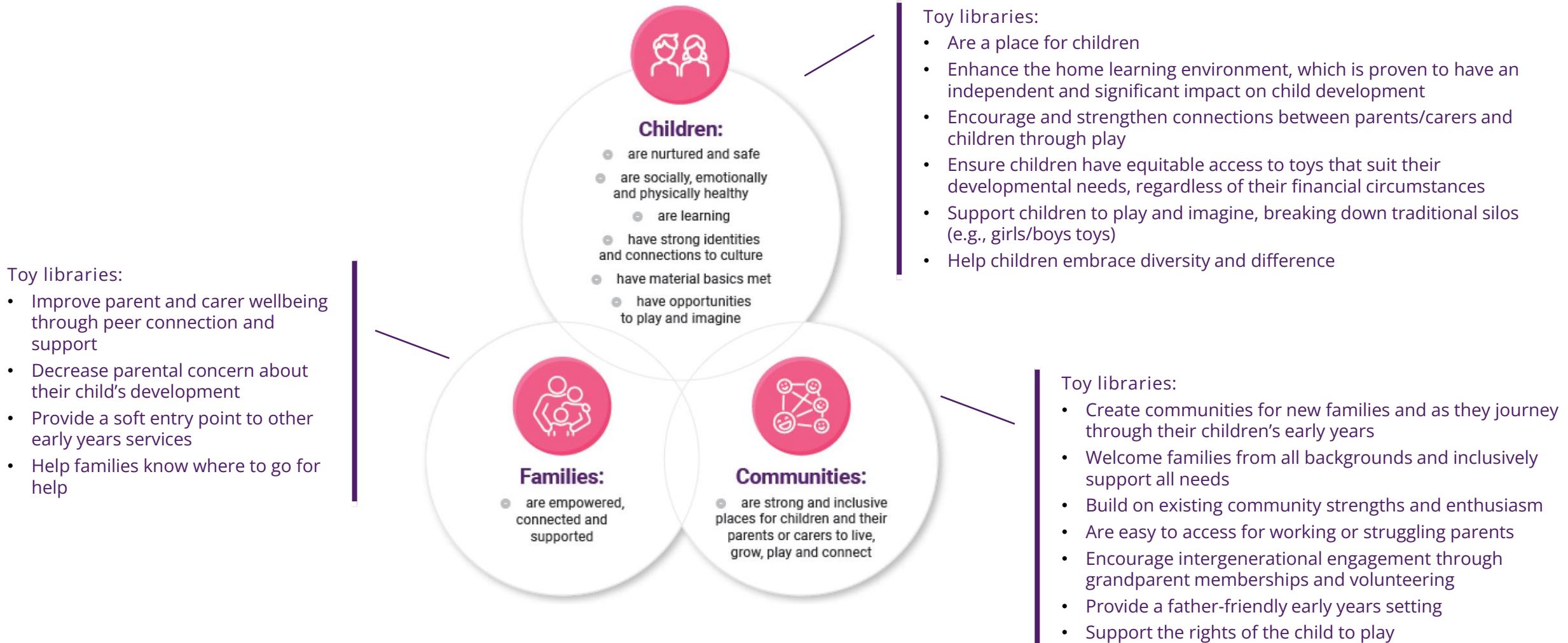
Consultation question	Toy Libraries Australia's response
Does the vision reflect a strong aspiration for children in the early years?	We strongly agree that the vision articulates a strong aspiration. We support the framing of the vision using Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory of child development. The vision may be a little wordy to be easily understood by parents and the general public.
How important is it to you that the vision includes a reference to a) children thriving? b) children reaching their full potential c) the role of families? d) the role of communities?	Children thriving and the role of families and communities are very important to be retained in the vision. Although 'reaching their full potential' talks to the future aspirations of families for their children it could be removed to improve understandability. If children are thriving in the early years then they are provided with a strong foundation to reach their fulfil potential later in life.
How important is each of the outcomes in the Early Years Strategy?	All the outcomes articulated are critical to be included in the early years strategy. We are particularly pleased that the role of play is specifically called out. However, we suggest not separating the concepts of 'play' and 'learning'. As Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia acknowledges, pre-school children learn through play. Play is <u>both</u> fun and educational. If young children are playing, they are learning and if we want them to learn we should provide more opportunities for them to play!
Do you agree that the 5 guiding principles align with the Australian Government's goal of supporting children and families in the early years?	We agree with the 5 guiding principles. Regarding principle 5, we support 'continually building' the evidence base by undertaking Australian research to understand what innovative community-led approaches work in the early years. This includes developing mechanisms to collect and assess qualitative as well as quantitative evidence for community-led interventions that don't have the same resources for evaluation as professional led services.

We also suggest separating the second priority focus area into 'empower parents' and 'make services and supports accessible and responsive'

Consultation question	Toy Libraries Australia's response
How important are each of the following priority focus areas? a) Value the Early Years b) Empower parents c) Support and work with communities d) Strengthen accountability and coordination	These four priority focus areas are all extremely important and should be retained in the strategy. However, we would suggest splitting priority focus area 2. Points 2.1 and 2.2 are about empowering parents and caregivers, whereas 2.3 and 2.4 are about making the services and supports accessible and responsive to the needs of families.
Does the draft Early Years Strategy include a clear explanation of what matters most to improve early childhood outcomes.	Yes, however, it is not particularly succinct, and the importance of families, communities and society is hidden in the middle of a longer discourse.
The draft Early Years Strategy is inclusive and respectful of the diversity of all children.	Yes, but with the recent release of the NDIS review the final version of the strategy and the first action plan should integrate relevant recommendations from the NDIS review.
I found the Strategy easy to understand.	The core elements of the strategy are easy to understand for people working in the sector. A summarised version in plain language is required for the wider community to engage with the strategy.

Toy libraries can play a significant role in delivering the desired Early Years Strategy outcomes

Early Years Strategy outcomes: How toy libraries can help realise the vision



Toy libraries can support the priority focus areas of the Early Years Strategy

Proposed items for the first Early Years Action Plan



Value the early years

1. Use toy libraries to engage with fathers, working parents and diverse communities
2. Promote the Rights of the Child to Play (Article 31) through celebration of World Play Day (28 May)



Empower parents and caregivers

3. Fund toy libraries to run parent education and community connection events
4. Support toy libraries to better understand and coordinate with other early years services to better advise and support families
5. Expand funding to TLA to support toy library volunteers and families



Makes supports accessible and responsive

Proposed new focus area

6. Provide base/grant funding to all toy libraries to provide the financial sustainability required to grow
7. Make toy libraries part of a continuum of supports to address the needs of all children with disability and developmental concerns
8. Increase parents' awareness of toy libraries through greater promotion



Support and work with communities

9. Support communities to establish toy libraries in areas of need that do not have a toy library
10. Establish toy libraries in integrated child and family centres and other place-based approaches



Strengthen accountability and coordination

11. Articulate the role and responsibilities of the Australian Government in relation to toy libraries
12. Undertake research to:
 - a) quantify the social value of toy libraries
 - b) develop the evidence base for different toy library models to guide future development



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