

Multicultural Communities

**Water Safety
Workshop Statement
July 2024**



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA



**Australian
Water Safety
Council**

> SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

A national Symposium addressing Multicultural communities was last held in December 2018 in Sydney. The following action statements were an output of that Symposium.

The 2018 Symposium results and action statements, along with updated research, provided the rationale for the inclusion of Multicultural communities as a priority area in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030.

Four Key Action Statements and progress since then:

ENGAGEMENT		
Build closer ties between the drowning prevention sector and multicultural communities		
1. Improve knowledge and understanding of engagement among the drowning prevention sector	2. Develop best practice guidelines to community engagement	3. Simplify language to improve understanding of key water safety messages
Action started: more work needed	Action started: more work needed	Action started at national and state level

ADVOCACY		
Raise awareness of drowning in high-risk populations		
1. Improve drowning data relating to multicultural communities	2. Increase awareness of the drowning burden	3. Promote the benefits of swimming and water safety skills
Action completed	Action completed	Action ongoing

POLICY		
Develop and implement water safety policies specific to multicultural communities		
1. Advocate for sustainable funding of water safety programs for multicultural communities	2. Strengthen stakeholder collaboration	3. Develop policies that reflect community needs
Action started: more work needed	Action ongoing	Action started at the state and community level

PRACTICE			
Sharing of research, resources, and programs			
1. Improve coordination of program delivery	2. Conduct an audit of initiatives specific to multicultural communities	3. Carry out program evaluation	4. Develop a research agenda
More work needed	Action completed	More work needed	Action completed

> CURRENT CONTEXT: JUNE 2024

Over the 2023/24 Summer, 99 people lost their lives to drowning. People born overseas accounted for more than 25% of these deaths, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, international students and visitors. Several incidents occurred where two or more people drowned at the same time, from the same family or community.

Longer term trends over the past decade (2013/14 – 2022/23), identify that approximately one-third of people who die from drowning in Australia were born overseas, the majority being residents, and males aged between 25 – 44 years. Identified risk factors include length of time in Australia, with 40% of people born overseas who fatally drowned being new arrivals – people having been in Australia for five years or less. Other risk factors include unfamiliarity with water hazards and environments, and inadequate swimming and lifesaving skills and knowledge.

In response, Royal Life Saving – Australia and Life Saving Victoria convened a two-day, nationally focused workshop in Melbourne to discuss, explore and prioritise high-level solutions for addressing drowning among Australia's multicultural communities. The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 identifies Multicultural Communities as a priority area for reducing drowning by 2030.

Over 60 delegates from across the country spanning government, multicultural community leaders, young people and water safety agencies attended to share knowledge and learning, and to assess what is working and what is not, prioritise key actions and initiatives that will make a difference in behaviour change and drowning outcomes.

The Workshop objectives were to:

- > Bring together multi-sectoral policy makers, senior leaders at a local, state and federal level and community leaders, along with drowning prevention advocates, researchers and practitioners.
- > Review the key activities outlined in the [Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030](#) (page 50-51).
- > Identify and prioritise 2-5 actions required to reduce drowning among multicultural communities
- > Develop a workshop action statement for collective commitment to this issue

› SECTION 2: LESSONS LEARNED AND CORE TAKE AWAYS

The workshop focused on the importance of partnerships and working together. The summary below provides a short synopsis of each session. For more information on speakers, see appendix 1: Forum agenda

- › Examples of Government policy and initiatives (State and local government)
- › Community water safety programs implemented at the state and local level
- › Perspectives from Multicultural Agencies on developing partnerships
- › Communication campaigns and research
- › Youth perspectives and pathways

Session 1: Examples of Government policy and initiatives (State and local government)

Policy initiatives at a state level include voucher programs to assist with the cost of swimming lessons for children. Local government initiatives in Victoria were focusing on increasing availability of aquatic programs to their local community and hiring people from the local community to deliver programs. One local council shared their learnings and recommended 'Throwing away the rule book' in order to ensure local communities can access facilities and programs that best suit their needs, including hiring program staff from the community, which has resulted in increased participation from local multicultural community members.

Innovative solutions happening at the local government level as a result of collaboration and coordination and being united in a common goal to reducing drowning for their communities. Recognising that people are drowning in locations away from where they live, several councils partnered together with aquatic industry agencies to address drowning in their communities.

Session 2: Lessons learnt from programs implemented at the state and local level

Initiatives are being developed and delivered by a range of organisations and people, not only water safety agencies and councils. More community-led action is happening, unfortunately born from drowning fatalities of family or friends, with the desire to increase awareness and skills at the grass-roots level, especially connecting with universities. In WA, a Multicultural Steering Committee consisting of multicultural agencies and local councils, people delivering swimming programs in metro and regional location provides advice on programs, resources and campaigns aimed at multicultural communities, which may be an option in other states, if applicable.

Recommendations for policy changes to reduce barriers at local swimming pools include concessions, employment policies, front desk experience, changing common 'aquatic language', including pool signage, e.g., 'no bombing' or 'aquatic centre' versus 'swimming pool.' Work is being done to ensure welcoming environment at aquatic centres and swim schools for community members, especially those who have never been to a pool before.

Session 3: Perspectives from multicultural agencies

Agency representatives emphasised that building genuine, trustworthy relationships is vital when working with communities. Strategic engagement and tailored programs are needed to tackle systemic prejudice and racism, unconscious bias, and the lack of cultural awareness across the emergency management and water safety / aquatic sectors. How can we adapt or change systems that traditionally cater for Western cultures to models and frameworks that support Australia's changing cultural diversity? Evaluation is important to assess what is working and not working, justify and apply for funding. The cultural iceberg analogy was presented, it's not just about the three F's - food, faith and festivals, or what's observable vs. non-observable, like attitudes, beliefs, values and relationships. Respectful partnerships can't be taken for granted and needs to be mutually beneficial not one-way (transactional).

Session 4: Communication and reaching people

Feedback from communities that water safety campaigns and messages should be informed by the communities you are trying to reach, and that messages should be direct and specific to the behaviour people should / shouldn't be doing, use simple visuals, show the consequences so people can understand what can happen. Visuals also need to reflect the communities you are trying to reach. There was a robust discussion on signage as a single solution at locations where people have drowned.

However, research reported that translated messages on signs may not be effective in conveying safety messages and often don't translate well into other languages, some cultures may not adhere to instructions on signage based on experience in their home country. Social media platforms can be helpful in engaging directly with multiple groups, but we need to work with communities to understand which platforms are used by different communities. Covid-19 in Victoria provided an opportunity to work better and directly with community leaders to ensure that the messages reached those who most needed it, through appropriate channels.

Session 5: Youth perspectives, pathways and programs

We heard from young community role models who shared their background and experiences in and around the water, and their journey learning to swim in Australia, including positive and negative experiences. All discussed their pathways to become employed in the aquatic sector, in positions where they are working to educate and influence their communities on the importance of learning swimming and water safety skills and knowledge.

It was acknowledged that not everyone will become swim teachers, lifeguards and surf lifesavers, and that young people and their families may only visit the beach or pool once or twice a year. This session highlighted that it is important to have influential role models, everyone is made to feel welcome and has a positive experience, which can open the door for these opportunities.

'You can't be what you can't see'

Acknowledging the intersectionality that multicultural communities experience is important, for example children and young people from multicultural backgrounds with a physical or neurological disability, needs to take a tailored, whole family approach when learning to swim. Raised awareness about the intersectionality that increases barriers to participation and the family centred approach – often learning to swim is very individual which may not suit families with additional needs. Water safety programs for international students are ad-hoc, some really great programs going on around the country, how to learn more about these programs, have a coordinated approach and understand what's working and not working. More programs are needed that encourage people to have a go at water activities such as surfing and paddling boarding safely while ensuring that water safety is a core focus along with having fun.

> SECTION 3: ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES FOR DROWNING PREVENTION AND WATER SAFETY EFFORTS THAT PRIORITISE MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

In order to reduce the burden of drowning in Multicultural Communities, the workshop delegates discussed and reinforced the importance of:

Respectful partnerships:

Fostering genuine, mutually beneficial, trusting partnerships ensures the approach meets community needs, builds capacity and capability, maximises resources, and enables a sharing of knowledge and experience.

Collaboration and sharing of experiences:

Sharing open and honest exchange of ideas, experiences, knowledge, and lessons learned is critical for limiting duplication, improving efficiency, strengthening capacity and maximising impact.

Co-design and community consultation:

Programs, campaigns, and drowning prevention initiatives where members are involved from the start are most likely to have the greatest impact.

Genuine representation and belonging:

Ensuring that all members of the community are reflected in the aquatic space serves to build trust and creates an environment where people feel welcome and that they belong, will lead to generational change.

Welcoming, accessible and equitable spaces:

Striving to create and maintain places where everyone can truly belong, contribute and thrive removes barriers and promotes expanded participation.

Flexibility:

Being adaptable and flexible is essential for working with multicultural communities; having an open mind and preparedness to change course facilitates navigation of barriers, improves opportunities and access, and increases the likelihood of sustainable success.

Organisational commitment to cultural awareness:

Building a culturally aware drowning prevention and water safety sector that is dedicated to continuous learning and focuses specific attention to address unconscious bias and systemic racism and discrimination will be best equipped to meet the needs of its community and changing demographics.

Strengths-based framing and language:

Taking a positive approach that is focused on creating opportunities rather than barriers, celebrating success at all levels and using positive, simple language that bridges the gap between the aquatic sector and community (e.g. replacing aquatic jargon).

Evaluation of our efforts:

Conducting independent and transparent assessment to understand what is working, what is not, and for whom is important because we can learn from each other, extend our efforts, and tailor to individual contexts, and provides justification and support for funding.

> SECTION 4: CORE TAKEAWAYS

- > Fostering cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration among water safety organisations, swim program providers, multicultural agencies and community leaders is required to drive community level change.
- > Sustained, expanded investment (funding) is needed for the ongoing implementation of targeted programs and initiatives aimed at reducing the drowning toll in vulnerable communities across Australia.
- > Co-designing education campaigns and safety messages with community from the outset to ensure appropriateness, relevance and greater reach, what works for one community might not work for others.
- > Robust communication of water safety messages need go beyond translation and signage, in order to raise awareness and ensure safety messages reach and are understood the intended audience.
- > Removing barriers and providing opportunities to participation and increasing access to appropriate swimming and water safety education programs for people of all ages, from all backgrounds and abilities.



APPENDIX 1:

Attendees included representatives from (in alphabetical order)

- Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Management and Climate Change, Sheena Watts MP
- Australian Red Cross
- AUSTSWIM
- Bass Coast Council
- Belgravia Leisure
- Brimbank Council
- Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Department of Education, Victoria
- Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), Victoria
- Emergency Management Victoria
- Hemant Govekar Foundation
- Life Saving Victoria
- Monash University
- Mornington Peninsula Shire
- Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership
- Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
- Royal Life Saving – WA
- Royal Life Saving – SA
- Royal Life Saving – Queensland
- Surf Life Saving Australia
- Surf Life Saving NSW
- Surfing Victoria
- Swimming Australia
- The Aqua English Project
- The LOTE Agency
- The Neighbourhood Collective Australia
- The University of New South Wales (UNSW)
- Triple Zero
- The Y (Victoria)
- Triple Zero
- Victorian Police
- Welcoming Cities

APPENDIX 2: Multicultural Water Safety Workshop Agenda

AGENDA DAY 1

9:30 – 10:00AM	Arrival and networking
10:00AM	Welcome and introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Catherine Greaves – Life Saving Victoria, CEO• Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services – Sheena Watt, MP
10:00AM – 12:00PM	SESSION 1: SETTING THE SCENE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keynote 1: Tony Pearce, Tony Pearce Advisory (Former Inspector-General for Emergency Management for Victoria)• Personal Story: Amrita Jathar, Founder, Hemant Govekar Foundation• Keynote 2: Australia's changing population: David Bartlett, The LOTE Agency• Who is drowning: Stacey Pidgeon, Royal Life Saving – Australia• What does the media tell us: Lauren Miller, Royal Life Saving - Australia
12:00PM – 1:00PM	LUNCH
1:00PM – 2:30PM	SESSION 2: PARTNERSHIPS – PANEL DISCUSSIONS <p>Government initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Amy Peden, UNSW• Jonathon Burton, Brimbank Council• Nick Grant-Collins, Bass Coast Shire Council• Sarah Podesta, Belgravia Leisure• Abbey Evans, Mornington Peninsula Shire <p>State and community Water Safety initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achol Madong, Royal Life Saving – WA• Sarah Scarce, The Aqua English Project• Amrita Jathar, Hemant Govekar Foundation <p>Perspectives from multicultural agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bridget Tehan, Australian Red Cross• Junior Melo – Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)• Kate Steenvoorden – Neighbourhood Collective Australia <p>Communications and reaching people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• David Bartlett, The LOTE Agency• Michelle Windsor, Department of Justice and Community Safety• Linto Thomas, Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership• Masaki Shibata, Monash University
2:30PM – 3:00PM	AFTERNOON TEA
3:00PM – 5:00PM	SESSION 3: AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY THINK TANK <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey results and discussion• Prioritising the big issues• Workshopping
5:00PM	Close Day 1
5:00PM – 6:00PM	Networking function

APPENDIX 2: Multicultural Water Safety Workshop Agenda

AGENDA DAY 2

9:00AM **Day 2 open and reflection from day 1**
Keynote 3: Carmel Guerra, Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), CEO

9:15AM **SESSION 4: ENVISIONING THE FUTURE**

Personal stories

- Ramzi Hussaini – Life Saving Victoria
- Sahar Ehseni – Life Saving Victoria
- Winta Eyob – Life Saving Victoria & Brimbank Council
- Zahra Rahimi – The Aqua English Project
- Zarin Hakimi - The Aqua English Project

Presentations

- Madhav Raman & Oliver Jackson, University of NSW
- Jess, Welcoming Cities (Victoria)
- Jordie Campbell, Surfing Victoria

Panel discussion with all speakers

10:30AM – 11:00AM MORNING TEA

11:00AM **SESSION 5: WORKSHOPPING AND DRAFTING OF A CONFERENCE STATEMENT**

12:30PM – 1:30PM LUNCH

1:30PM – 3:00PM **SESSION 6: REFLECTIONS AND CLOSING STATEMENTS**

3:00PM Close day 2



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call 02 8217 3111

Email info@rlssa.org.au

CONNECT WITH US



RoyalLifeSaving



RoyalLifeSaving



RoyalLifeSaving



RoyalLifeSavingAust



RoyalLifeSaving.com.au