

Migrant drownings in Australia; how can high risk groups be addressed?

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Australia is a country rich in its beaches and swimming culture. Often overlooked in our everyday lives is the importance of water safety and swimming for its health and safety implications. The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health recently published an article on migrant drownings in Australia based off Australian drowning data collected between 2009 and 2019 by Royal Life Saving (1) (article available from

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.13102>). Exclusive of other influences, there were three main elements that contributed to drownings; these were gender, alcohol consumption and time of year (1). Making sense of this, males were deemed more likely to drown and it can be easily deduced that the summer period recorded more drownings due to more people visiting water ways (1).

Further divulging into the statistics 26% of drownings in the last decade were of people who were born overseas (1). This is inclusive of people who migrated and short-term international visitors (1). Interestingly, the majority of drownings that make up this statistic were people who had migrated to Australia (1). The main identified factors that place people at higher risk of drowning are lower socioeconomic status, living in rural areas and minority groups (1). Migrants may be of higher risk of drowning in Australia due to limited swimming ability and limited water safety knowledge (1). The highest proportion of these drownings were recorded in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia (1). In order to address this discrepancy in Australian drownings, broader demographics need to be addressed in water safety and swimming programs (1).

Widely recognizable are the media campaigns promoting water safety messaging delivering key information to large audiences (2). Although, more targeted action is required to address minorities. (2). While the number of drownings overall annually has reduced, there is a need to further fine-tune campaigns and education programs towards more marginalized communities (2). Water safety and swimming programs need to be more culturally and language inclusive (2). The benefits that were perceived from participants included improved confidence around water alongside health and social benefits (2). Participants varied in how long they had been in Australia for, a range of only a few years up to decades (2). A pushing factor in participation in these water safety programs included their children's experiences with swimming lessons being incorporated into the schooling experience (2). It is a clear takeaway from these programs that culture and religion cannot be overlooked, and accessibility should be simple (2). So, what may yield the best results? Extended course time, low or no cost participation and accommodating local needs to ensure inclusivity were found to be the most effective strategies (2). Further investment in this area of public health is important. CAPHIA supports public health equity and programs that efficiently accommodate inclusivity.

1. Willcox-Pidgeon, S., Franklin, R.C., Leggat, P.A., & Devine, S. Epidemiology of unintentional fatal drowning among migrants in Australia. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 2021. doi:10.1111/1753-6405.13102
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3. Taylor, D. H., Peden, A. E., & Franklin, R. C. Next steps for drowning prevention in rural and remote Australia: A systematic review of the literature. *The Australian Journal of Rural Health*. 2020;28(6):530–42. doi:10.1111/ajr.12674