



## 2006 Western Australian Drowning Report

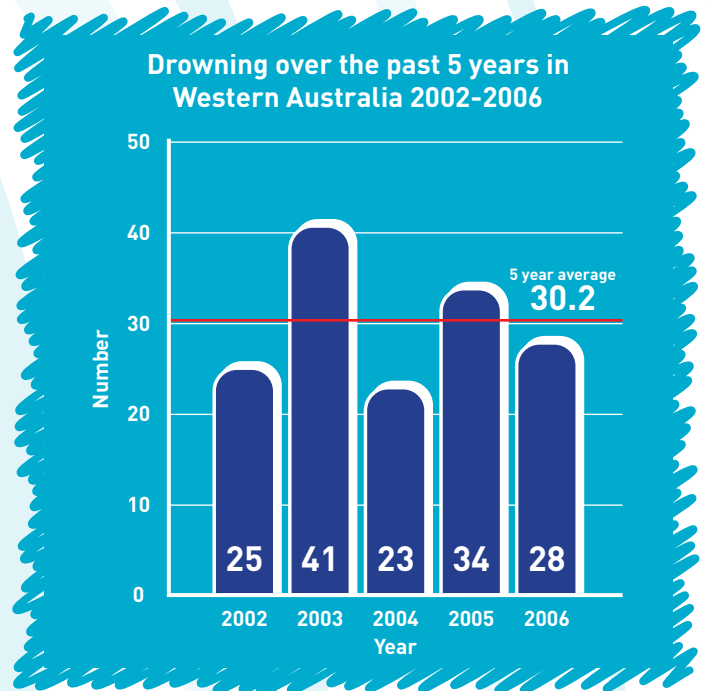
Between 1st January and 31st December 2006, a total of 32 people drowned within Western Australia. Of these 28 were classified as unintentional deaths and the remaining four were cases that were intentional or the cause was undetermined. This is a slight decrease from 2005.

The cost of drowning to the broader Western Australian community in 2006 amounted to \$44.8 million (based on \$1.6 million per drowning death)<sup>1</sup>.

### Drowning over the past 5 years in Western Australia

Over the past five years (2002 – 2006) an average of 30.2 drowning deaths are recorded each year in Western Australia. The figures reported in 2006 are lower than the five year average.

The 2006 Census Data indicated a population of 1,959,088 persons residing in Western Australia. Based on this figure, the corresponding incidence rate of drowning is 1.43 deaths per 100,000 persons.



**“Between 1st January and 31st December 2006, a total of 28 people drowned within Western Australia”**

**“The cost of drowning to the broader Western Australian community in 2006 amounted to \$44.8 million”**

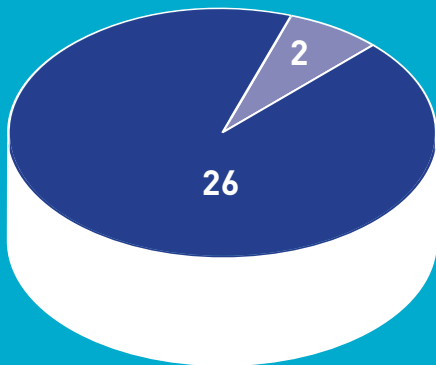




## Drowning By Gender

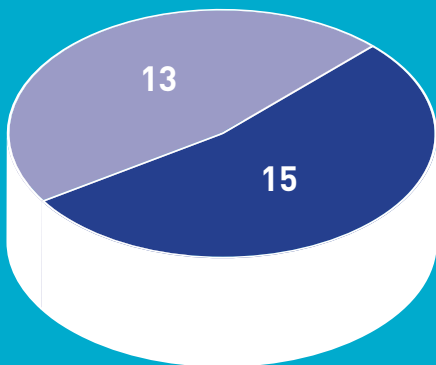
Of the 28 unintentional drowning deaths recorded in 2006, 93% were males. This has been a trend which has been highlighted in previous drowning reports and is consistent with national figures and across a number of injury areas.

### Drowning by Gender 2006



Female  
Male

### Metropolitan versus Regional 2006

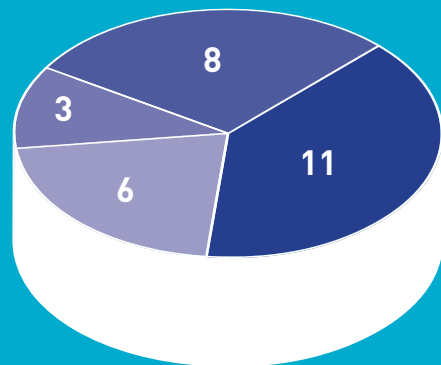


Metropolitan  
Regional

## Drowning by Season

The majority of drowning deaths in 2006 (39.3%) occurred during the Summer months, with 11 deaths recorded. 28.6% occurred during Spring and 21.4% occurred during Autumn. While the majority of drowning deaths occurred during the warmer months of the year, 2006 data illustrates an increase from 2005 in the number of deaths recorded in cooler Autumn months, highlighting the need for vigilance all year round.

### Drowning by Season 2006



Summer  
Autumn  
Winter  
Spring

## Metropolitan versus Regional

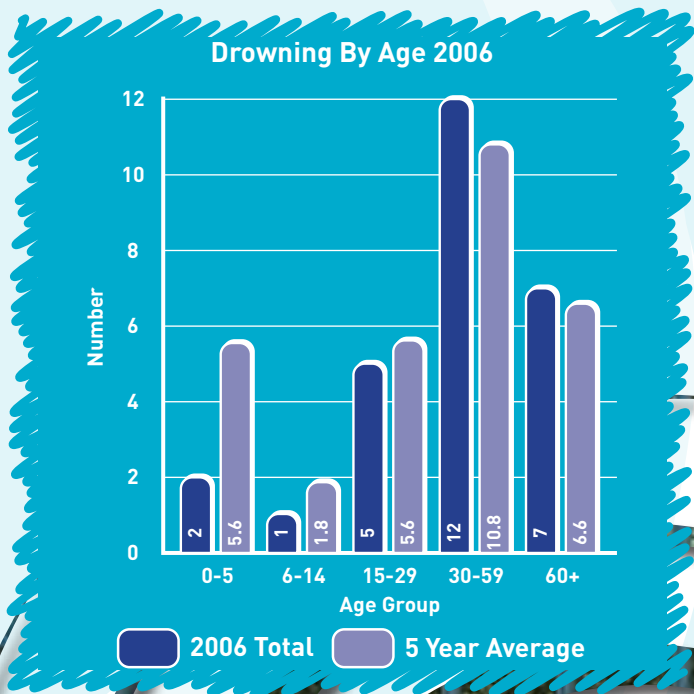
46.4% of drowning deaths in 2006 occurred within regional and remote areas of Western Australia. Given the population distribution within Western Australia, this group is over-represented in drowning statistics. This highlights the need for a greater focus on water safety and drowning prevention information and programs in regional and remote areas of the state.

**“Of the 28 unintentional drowning deaths recorded in 2006, 93% were males”**



## Drowning By Age

Drowning among adults aged 30-59 years remained high in 2006, recording the highest number of incidents of any age group. While drowning is the second leading cause of preventable death in children under the age of five years, numbers in Western Australia continue to decrease. In 2006, drowning deaths amongst this age group were the lowest seen in the past ten years.



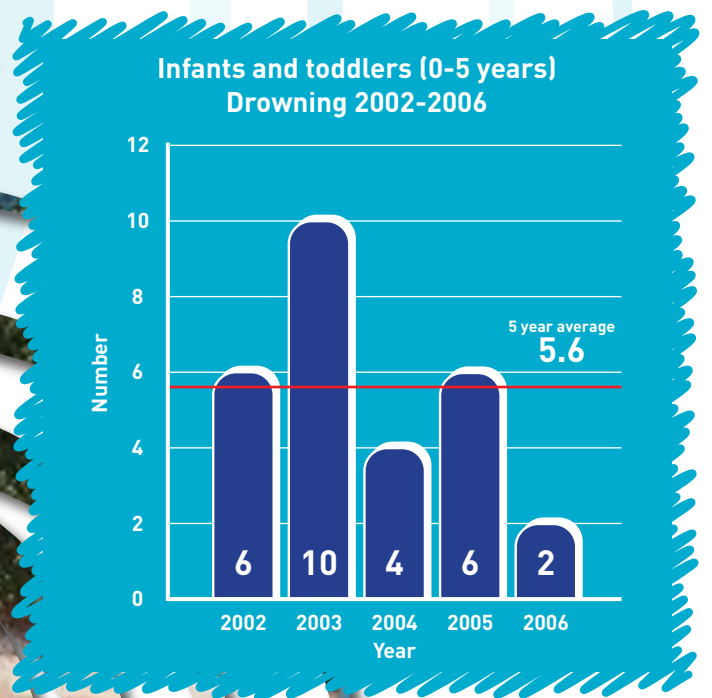
## Infants and Toddlers (0 – 5 years)

Infant and toddler drowning has been identified as the number one key priority area in the National Water Safety Plan, and based on data collected over the past decade, one child under five years drowns every week in Australia.

Only two infants and toddlers aged five years and under drowned in 2006, representing 7.0% of total drowning deaths in Western Australia. This is the lowest recorded number of drowning deaths amongst this age group over the past ten years.

Both these drowning incidents occurred within the home setting with a lack of supervision and inappropriate barriers to water locations cited as contributing factors.

These incidents continue to highlight the need for constant supervision of young children by parents and carers and the need to properly install and maintain barriers to water bodies in and around the home.

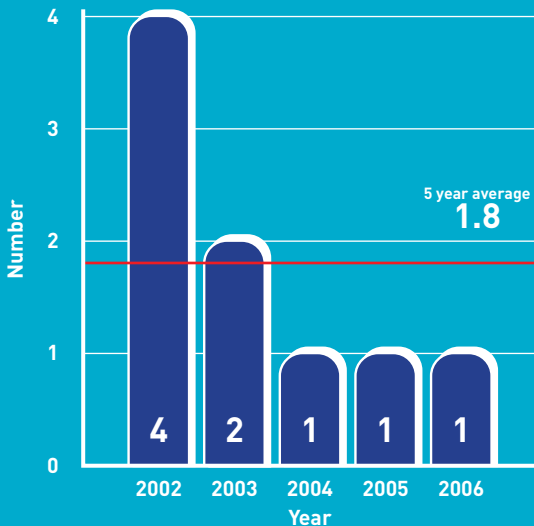




### Children (6 – 14 years)

There was one drowning death recorded in 2006 among this age group. Drowning amongst this age group has remained consistently low over the past few years. This continues to be a success story of drowning prevention and water safety, with levels lower than any other age group within Western Australia.

Children (6-14 years) Drowning 2002-2006



### Emerging Adults (15 – 29 years)

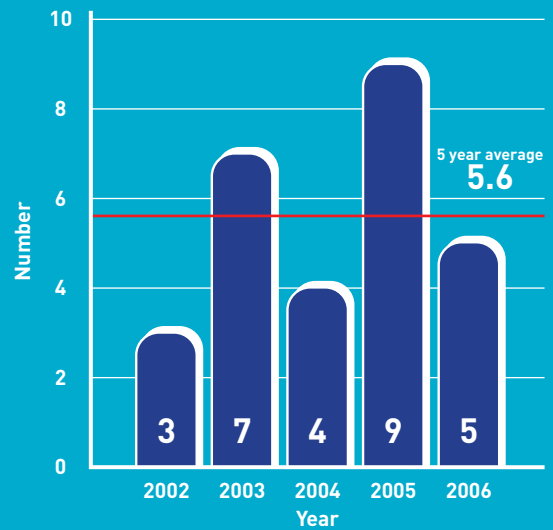
There were five drowning deaths recorded amongst this age group in 2006, a slight decrease from 2005. The majority of these incidents involved males, which is a common trend across other injury areas amongst this age group. Overall, young adults accounted for 18% of the total number of drowning deaths in 2006.

The majority of drowning deaths amongst this age group occurred in coastal locations (60%) and rivers (40%). These results are very similar to those reported in 2005. Swimming was the most common activity being undertaken at the time of the incident in the majority of cases (60%).

Alcohol and other drugs combined with risky behaviour were contributing factors in 40% of incidents. In addition, 40% of incidents involved overseas tourists, a trend which has not been seen in this age group over the past few years.

The associated lack of awareness of local conditions, locations and activities were common contributing factors amongst incidents involving tourists. This highlights the need for education and information relevant to these groups to be developed and distributed.

Emerging Adults (15-29 years) Drowning 2002-2006





### Adults (30 – 59 years)

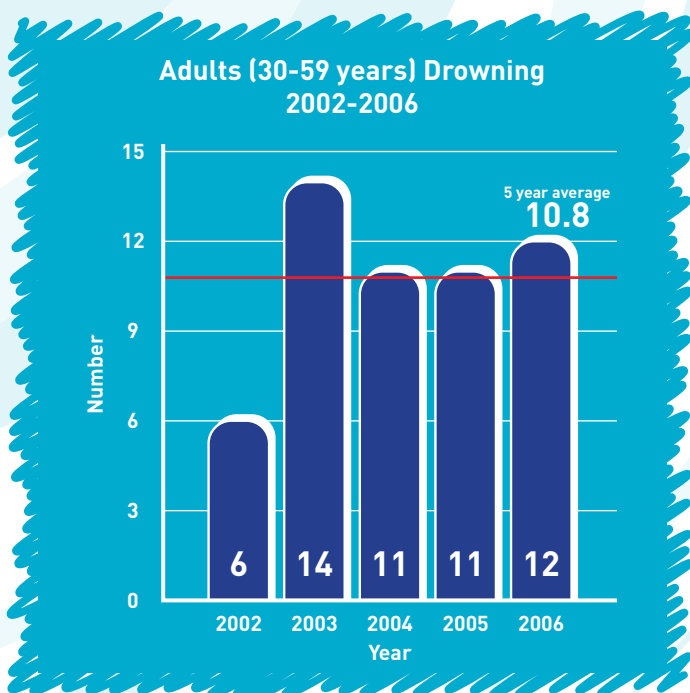
Adults aged 30 – 59 years again recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in 2006, accounting for 46.4% of total drowning deaths in Western Australia.

The majority of incidents occurred at coastal locations (50%), followed by rivers (33%) and home swimming pools (17%). Common activities being undertaken at the time of the incident were swimming (50%), boating (25%) and fishing (17%).

Alcohol and other drugs were identified as a major contributing factor in 50% of incidents amongst this age group. This has emerged as a significant drowning prevention and water safety issue requiring attention amongst this age group. Other contributing factors to these incidents included poor weather conditions and persons being unfamiliar with the location and the activity.

These incidents highlight the need for education to raise awareness of the risks and dangers associated with consuming alcohol and participating in aquatic activity and the importance of continually assessing weather conditions before and during participation.

**“Adults aged 30 – 59 years again recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in 2006”**

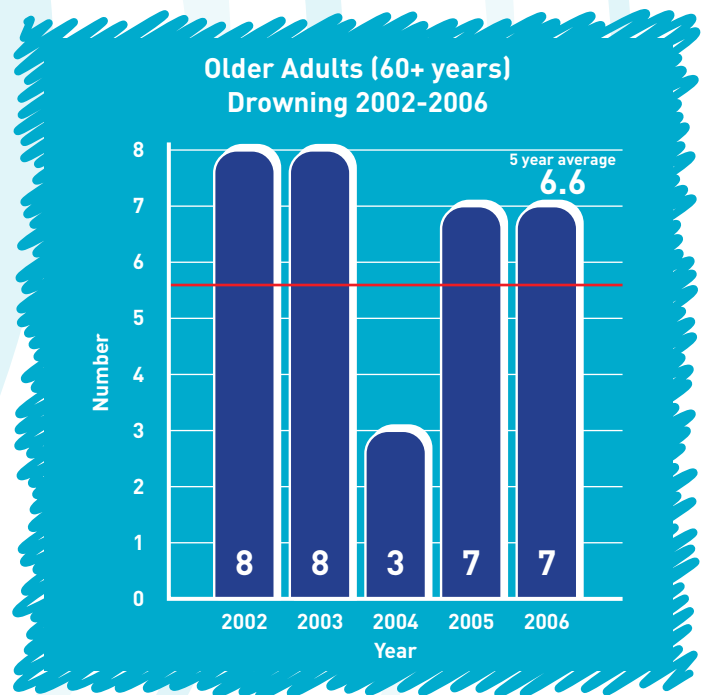


### Older Adults (60+ years)

Seven older adults drowned in 2006, representing 25% of total drowning deaths in Western Australia. This group remains at a high risk of drowning, with a similar number of drowning deaths recorded as in 2005.

43% of incidents amongst this age group occurred in coastal locations. Similar to 2005, the majority of incidents occurred while fishing (43%), followed by boating and swimming. The presence of medical conditions was a contributing factor in 43% of incidents amongst this age group.

Other contributing factors included poor weather conditions, wearing inappropriate clothing for the activity being undertaken and people being unaware and unfamiliar with the location and their surroundings.



**“43% of incidents amongst this age group occurred in coastal locations. Similar to 2005, the majority of incidents occurred while fishing (43%), followed by boating and swimming”**

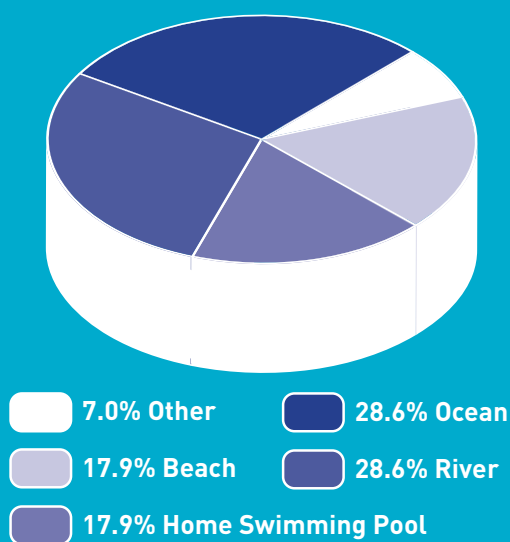


## Drowning By Location

Drowning typically occurs in three types of locations – coastal, inland and within the home. Coastal locations include the ocean and beaches. Inland locations include rivers, harbours, estuaries and dams and home locations include backyard swimming pools, fishponds and bathtubs.

Location Total

Drowning by Location 2006



## Coastal Locations – Ocean and Beach

A total of 13 (46.5%) incidents occurred in coastal locations in 2006, more than any other location. This reflects 2005 statistics, however this year, the ocean was associated with the greatest number of drowning deaths.

All incidents recorded in coastal locations involved persons aged 15 years and older, with the majority being aged between 30 – 59 years (46.2%).

Activities commonly involved with incidents occurring in coastal locations included fishing, boating, swimming and snorkelling.

Poor conditions, use of inappropriate safety equipment and lack of awareness and familiarity with locations and surroundings were factors which contributed to the incidents.

61.5% of coastal incidents occurred within regional areas of Western Australia in 2006. This highlights the need for greater education and more accessible information regarding coastal locations within regional Western Australia. In addition, information for overseas and interstate tourists is required.

## Inland Locations – Rivers, Harbours and Estuaries

Inland waterways accounted for 32.1% of drowning deaths in 2006, with the majority of incidents occurring in rivers (89%).

Drowning deaths occurring in inland waterways involved people across all age groups, with the majority of incidents involving people aged 30-59 years (44.4%). Swimming, fishing and recreating around water were common activities being undertaken at the time of the incident.

Alcohol and other drugs were identified as contributing factors in 78% of drowning deaths occurring in inland waterways. Other contributing factors included participation in aquatic activity alone and at night.

The consumption of alcohol and subsequent participation in risky behaviours in and around inland waterways has emerged as a significant issue which needs to be addressed. This highlights the need for education and awareness of the risks and hazards associated with consuming alcohol and participating in aquatic activities.

## Home Locations – Home Swimming Pools and Bathtubs

Six incidents occurred in and around the home in 2006, accounting for 21.4% of total drowning deaths in Western Australia.

All recorded drowning deaths of toddlers and young children in 2006 occurred within the home setting. Lack of adequate and constant supervision and inappropriate barriers to water locations were key contributing factors to incidents amongst this age group.

There was an increasing number of drowning deaths recorded in home swimming pools amongst adults (30-59 years) and older adults (60+ years) in 2006. The consumption of alcohol and presence of medical conditions were identified as key contributing factors amongst these older age groups.

These incidents highlight the need for continued education regarding what constitutes adequate supervision of young children and the importance of installing and maintaining barriers to water locations around the home. In addition, information regarding the risks of consuming alcohol around home water locations is required.



## Drowning By Activity

In 2006, a number of activities were being undertaken at the time of the incident including swimming, fishing, boating and snorkeling.

Numerous drowning deaths occurred whilst the victim was participating in activities around an aquatic environment and have unintentionally entered the water. These incidents have been termed 'recreating around the water.'

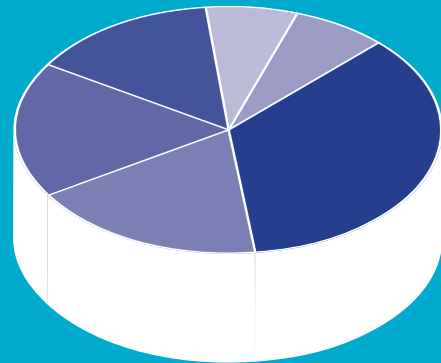
Swimming has re-emerged as the most common activity involved with drowning deaths in 2006. Alcohol was a key contributing factor to these incidents with many incidents resulting from risky behaviour and impaired perceptions of risk and personal abilities.

Fishing and boating emerged as high-risk activities for drowning in 2005 and remained high in 2006 accounting for approximately 39% of total drowning deaths.

These incidents were usually caused by a lack of awareness and familiarity of the location and activity itself and poor weather conditions. Lack of appropriate safety equipment was also identified as a contributing factor in a number of cases.

**“Fishing and boating emerged as high-risk activities for drowning in 2005 and remained high in 2006”**

Drowning by Activity 2006





## Drowning By Contributing Factors

There were a range of additional factors which contributed to the occurrence of drowning deaths in 2006. These include the use of alcohol and other drugs and the presence of medical conditions.

### Alcohol and Other Drugs

Ten drowning deaths were contributed to by alcohol consumption and/or the use of other drugs in 2006, three more than 2005. This represents almost 36% of total drowning deaths and 40% of those aged 15 years and over.

The consumption of alcohol and participation in recreational aquatic activity was most prevalent amongst 30-59 year old age group where 50% of incidents were contributed to by alcohol.

In previous years, alcohol consumption and participation in aquatic activity has primarily taken place in coastal environments. In 2006, rivers and home swimming pools have also emerged as common locations where alcohol related drowning deaths occur.

### Medical Conditions

The presence of medical conditions was a contributing factor in 18% of drowning deaths in 2006, a decrease from 2005. Common conditions reported include diabetes and heart disease.

Medical conditions were more likely to be factors contributing to drowning amongst older age groups. Those affected by medical conditions need to be aware of their limitations in and around the water and where possible should avoid participating alone.

### High Risk Populations

There were no drowning deaths recorded for people from culturally and linguistically diverse background in Western Australia in 2006. Similarly, there were only a small number of Indigenous Western Australians involved in a drowning incident.

In 2006, three overseas tourists drowned while visiting Western Australia. This has emerged as a group at a high-risk of drowning in this state. A lack of awareness and knowledge of the locations and their surroundings contributed to these incidents.

This highlights the need for strategies targeted at overseas and interstate tourists. Greater information specific to tourists needs to be made more readily available and accessible to tourists to educate them on local conditions and water safety hazards.

**“Ten drowning deaths were contributed to by alcohol consumption and/or the use of other drugs in 2006, three more than 2005”**







## Recommendations and References

### Recommendations

1. Drowning amongst toddlers and young children in 2006 was the lowest in ten years. Education on toddler drowning prevention should be continued with a focus on what constitutes adequate supervision and the importance of installing and properly maintaining barriers to all water bodies in and around the home.
2. Regional and remote Western Australia continues to record increasing rates of drowning, particularly within coastal locations. Additional focus on education and training to these areas is required.
3. Alcohol contributed to almost 37% of total drowning deaths in 2006 and has emerged as a key factor amongst adults aged 30-59 years. Education and awareness strategies should be expanded to target this age group. In addition, strategies should be developed to educate the community of the risks and dangers associated with drinking alcohol in and around inland waterways and home swimming pools.
4. There was an increase in the number of overseas tourists involved in drowning incidents during 2006. Information regarding local conditions, locations and water safety issues needs to be developed and distributed.
5. Swimming, fishing and boating remain activities associated with a high risk of drowning. Education and awareness campaigns should address the potential risks associated with these activities and how to react to and avoid them.

### References

- 1 *Hendrie, D. (2004). The cost of accidental drowning and near-drowning in Western Australia. Injury Research Centre, Perth.*

**“Regional and remote Western Australia continues to record increasing rates of drowning, particularly within coastal locations”**

**“Drowning amongst toddlers and young children in 2006 was the lowest in ten years”**





## Royal Life Saving Society Drowning Prevention Initiatives



### Keep Watch

Keep Watch is a state-wide campaign supported by the Department of Health that aims to increase awareness of toddler drowning prevention strategies and promote behaviour change in parents of young children. Keep Watch promotes four key action areas;

1. Supervise Your Child
2. Provide Barriers to Water Locations
3. Familiarise Your Child with Water
4. Learn Resuscitation



### Watch Around Water

Watch Around Water is an industry initiative developed by the Royal Life Saving Society, LIWA Aquatics and the WA Aquatics Industry. The campaign was developed to address growing industry concern regarding the supervision of children whilst visiting public aquatic facilities.



### Don't Drink and Drown

Don't Drink and Drown is a state-wide campaign that looks to increase the awareness and knowledge of the risks and dangers associated with consuming alcohol and participating in recreational aquatic activity amongst 15-29 year olds.



### Remote Aboriginal Swimming Pools Project (RASP)

The Royal Life Saving Society with support from the Department of Housing and Works and BHP Billiton provide and manage swimming pool facilities in the remote Aboriginal communities of Burringurrah, Yandeyarra, Jigalong, Bidyadanga and Warmun.



The program aims to provide well maintained, well supervised aquatic facilities and programs that promote regular participation in aquatic activity amongst the remote Aboriginal communities they operate within.



### Swim & Survive

The aim of the Swim and Survive program is to increase swimming and lifesaving skills for all Australians, and is designed to equip children with the necessary life skills to participate safely in all water related activities.

SAFETY  
FIRST



# Initiatives



## Infant Aquatics

The Infant Aquatics program encourages individual progression in developing aquatic skills suitable for a child's developmental stage. The program develops water familiarisation whilst building water confidence and social bonding between the child and parent.



## Bronze Rescue

The Bronze Rescue program gives a child the knowledge and skills to be able to make the right survival decisions that may help the individual, or those around, survive an aquatic emergency.



## Junior Lifeguard Club

The Junior Lifeguard Club offers a unique aquatic alternative for those who love the water, who want to be challenged and who want more than just lessons. The Junior Lifeguard Club provides opportunities for children to keep interested and active in aquatics, especially quick learners and those caught between levels and programs. It's a fantastic opportunity to further develop swimming skills at the same time as developing new and challenging lifesaving skills.



## Home Pool Inspections

The Royal Life Saving Society conducts home pool inspections on behalf of a number of local government organisations. The Home Pool Inspection program specifically works toward the second Keep Watch strategy – Provide Barriers to Water Locations.

To see if your pool complies with state legislation check out [www.poolsafety.com.au](http://www.poolsafety.com.au)



## Heart Beat Club

Heart Beat Club's are an introductory resuscitation course designed specifically for parents and carers of young children. The three hour workshops also covers how to minimise risks, and first aid treatment for incidents including burns and choking.



# EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER

