



DROWNING REPORT 2007



Royal Life Saving
THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY AUSTRALIA



QUICK FACTS

37 people drowned in Western Australia in 2007

- 73% were males
- 59.5% occurred in regional areas
- 38% were aged 30-59 years
- 46% occurred at coastal locations
- 30% occurred at inland waterway locations
- 13.5% involved persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD groups)

Infants and Toddlers (0-5 years)

- 5 children under 5 years of age drowned in 2007 (13.5% of total drowning deaths)
- 3 (60%) were males
- 3 (60%) occurred in metropolitan areas
- 4 (80%) occurred at locations in or around the home
- Common contributing factors include – lack of supervision and non-compliant barriers to water locations

Children (6-14 years)

- 2 children aged 6-14 years drowned in 2007 (5% of total drowning deaths)
- Both occurred in regional areas
- Lack of appropriate supervision contributed to both incidents

Young Adults (15-29 years)

- 5 young adults aged 15-29 years drowned in 2007 (13.5% of total drowning deaths)
- All were males
- 3 (60%) were tourists
- 4 (80%) occurred in regional areas
- 3 (60%) occurred at coastal locations
- 3 (60%) were recreating around water locations at the time of the incident
- Common contributing factors included – alcohol and poor swimming ability

Adults (30-59 years)

- 14 adults aged 30-59 years drowned in 2007 (38% of total drowning deaths)
- 10 (71%) were males
- 9 (64%) occurred in regional areas
- 5 (36%) were swimming at the time of the incident
- 6 (43%) occurred at coastal locations
- 7 (50%) were contributed to by alcohol

Older Adults (60+ years)

- 11 adults aged over 60 years drowned in 2007 (30% of total drowning deaths)
- 8 (73%) were males
- 6 (54.5%) occurred in metropolitan areas
- 7 (64%) occurred at coastal locations
- 4 (36%) involved boating and 3 (27%) involved fishing
- 6 (54.5%) were contributed to by pre-existing medical conditions

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving would like to acknowledge the continued assistance and support of the Western Australian Coroner's Office and the Western Australian Police Service through the data collection process and compilation of this report.

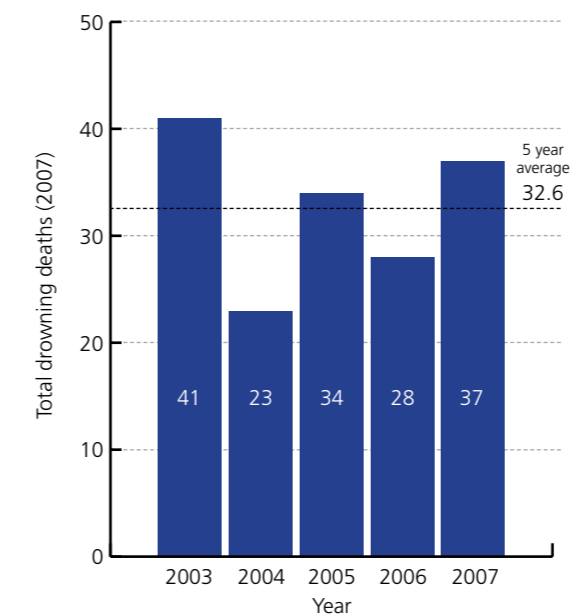
DROWNING REPORT 2007

Between 1st January and 31st December 2007, a total of 48 drowning deaths were recorded in Western Australia. Of these, 37 were classified as unintentional and have been included within this report. The remaining 11 cases were omitted due to insufficient information with an undetermined cause of death or intentional deaths. These incidents are not included in this report.

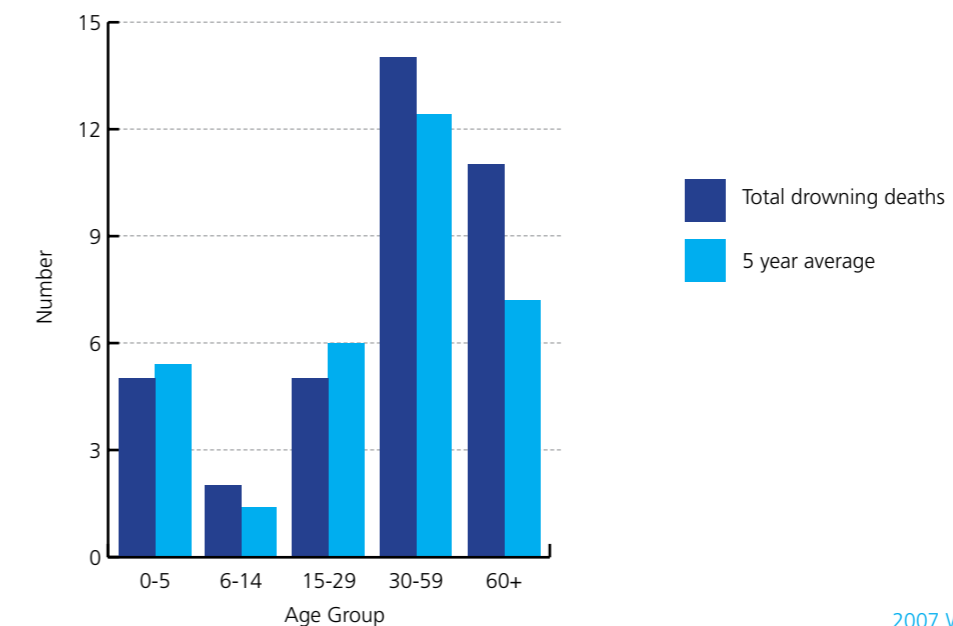
The cost of drowning deaths to the broader Western Australian community in 2007 amounted to \$59.2 million (based on \$1.6 million per drowning death).¹

5 year trends of drowning in Western Australia

Based on the figures recorded over the past five years (2003-2007), the annual Western Australian drowning death average is 32.6. The figures recorded in 2007 are higher than this average (37) due to a number of reasons which will be discussed throughout this report.



The current census data indicates a population of 2,149,100 persons residing in Western Australia. Based on this figure, the corresponding incidence rate of drowning death is 1.72 deaths per 100,000 persons.



INFANTS AND TODDLERS



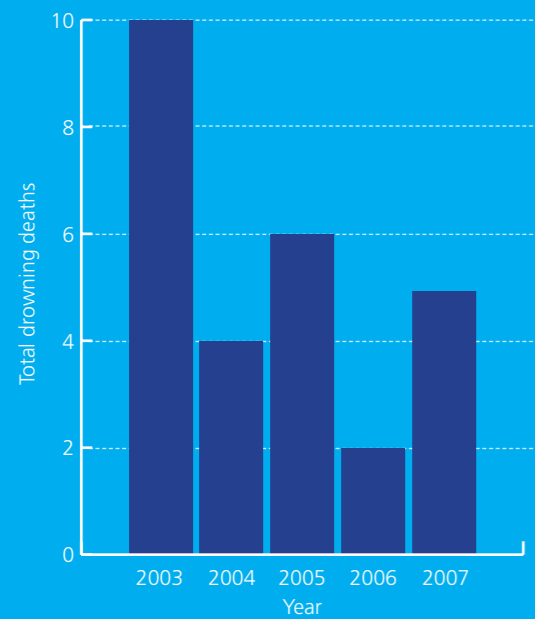
0-5 years

Drowning remains as one of the leading causes of preventable death in children under five years of age in Australia. In addition, on average over the past ten years one child drowns each week in Australia.

In 2007, 5 drowning deaths were recorded amongst the 0-5 year age group (13.5% of the total drowning deaths recorded). This is a slight increase from the record low number of deaths seen in 2006.

60% of incidents involved males, which supports previous evidence that two out of three children who drown are boys. All of these incidents involved children under two years of age.

However, despite this slight increase in the number of drowning deaths within this age group, the average number of drowning deaths over the past five years has continued to decrease. In addition, the number of deaths recorded in 2007 remains under the 5 year average.



BY ACTIVITY

The majority (80%) of toddler drowning deaths resulted from the child falling or wandering into the water (child recreating around water).

BY LOCATION

Three (60%) of the incidents recorded amongst toddlers in 2007 occurred within the Perth metropolitan area.

The majority of drowning deaths in this age group occurred at locations in and around the home including the home swimming pool, the bath and farm silos. This is consistent with national drowning statistics and previous research which indicates that the home is the most at-risk location for toddler drowning deaths.

Notably, the incidents in 2007 occurred at a range of locations in and around the home, differing from previous data which indicates that the home swimming pool is the most common incident site.

This continues to highlight the importance of educating parents and carers of young children of the range of hazards present in and around the home, and how to minimize these risks and prevent drowning death.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Almost all of these incidents were contributed to by a lack of adequate supervision and poorly maintained or faulty barriers to water locations around the home.

An emerging issue over the past few years is the reliance on older siblings to provide supervision for younger children while around the water and was highlighted again in 2007. It is important for parents and carers of young children to remember that older siblings cannot provide the level of supervision that is required for younger children while around the water.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Education for parents and carers of young children on toddler drowning prevention should be continued with a focus on the range of water hazards in and around the home and what constitutes adequate supervision
- Water safety and drowning prevention information and training should continue to be provided to child health nurses and other child health professionals to ensure they have access to up-to-date information and resources
- Given the increasing number of drowning deaths of children under the age of 2 years, additional education avenues should be developed such as greater involvement with antenatal classes and early years groups

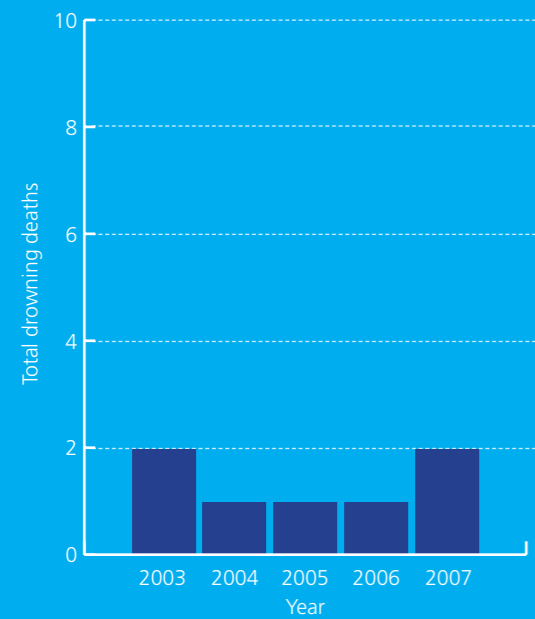
CHILDREN



6 - 14 years

There were two drowning deaths recorded amongst children aged 6-14 years in Western Australia in 2007.

Drowning amongst this age group in Western Australia has remained consistently low over the past five years with an average of 1.4 drowning deaths per year. This average has continued to decrease over the past five years.



BY ACTIVITY

The drowning incidents recorded amongst this age group involved swimming and recreating around water.

BY LOCATION

Both incidents involving children aged 6-14 years occurred at regional locations in Western Australia. This highlights the need to ensure that children in regional areas have access to learn-to-swim lessons and water safety information to ensure that low rates are maintained.

The incidents occurred at both inland waterway and coastal locations.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Both incidents in this age group were contributed to by a lack of appropriate supervision. In both instances, parents/carers only maintained audible supervision.

Children aged 6-14 years still require constant visual and audible supervision while around water locations due to their physical strength, coordination and their inability to discern danger.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to encourage children to undertake learn-to-swim lessons such as Swim & Survive, to equip them with the necessary swimming and lifesaving skills and water safety knowledge to reduce their risk of drowning
- Ensure that learn-to-swim programs and water safety information is available in regional areas of Western Australia
- Work together with schools to provide children with essential water safety information and lifesaving skills to prevent drowning death amongst this age group. Information should cover a range of coastal and inland waterway locations – what are the risks and how to avoid them
- Develop strategies to educate parents and carers of children aged 6-14 years of the importance of maintaining appropriate supervision (both audible and visual) at all times when in and around the water

YOUNG ADULTS

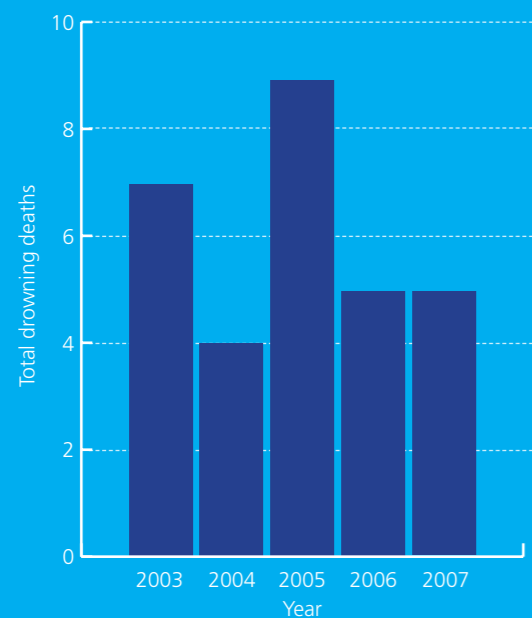


15 - 29 years

The number of drowning deaths in young adults has tended to fluctuate over the past few years. In 2007, there were five drowning deaths recorded amongst this age group (representing 13.5% of the total drowning deaths), the same as in 2006.

This number is less than the 5 year average of 6.0 drowning deaths since 2003, however, this rate has continued to increase over the past few years, making this group a for drowning prevention activities and interventions.

All drowning deaths for this age group involved males. This is a trend that has been highlighted throughout a range of injury statistics at both a state and national level. Young males are more likely to place themselves in high risk situations and act impulsively which can increase their risk of drowning and injury.



BY ACTIVITY

The most common activity being undertaken at the time of the incident amongst young adults was recreating around the water (60%).

Other common activities being undertaken at the time of the incident included swimming and boating, both which have been consistently undertaken over the past few years.

BY LOCATION

80% of incidents involving young adults aged 15-29 years occurred in regional Western Australia.

The majority (60%) of incidents occurred at coastal locations including the beach and the ocean. This is consistent with drowning statistics for this age group over the past few years. Other common locations included inland waterway locations such as rivers and dams.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

There were a number of factors that contributed to incidents in this age group. A continuing trend within drowning deaths amongst young adults is the influence of alcohol and participating in risky behaviours, which contributed to 20% of deaths in this group.

A number of incidents also involved tourists from a range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLD). These groups are often unfamiliar with aquatic surroundings and locations in Western Australia and also lack strong swimming skills. Current and previous statistics identify them as an at-risk group for drowning death.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Information and education targeted at young adults focusing on the risks and dangers associated with the consumption of alcohol in and around water locations should be continued, particularly in regional areas of the state
- Information and resources that are relevant to tourists, particularly for those persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should be developed and disseminated

ADULTS

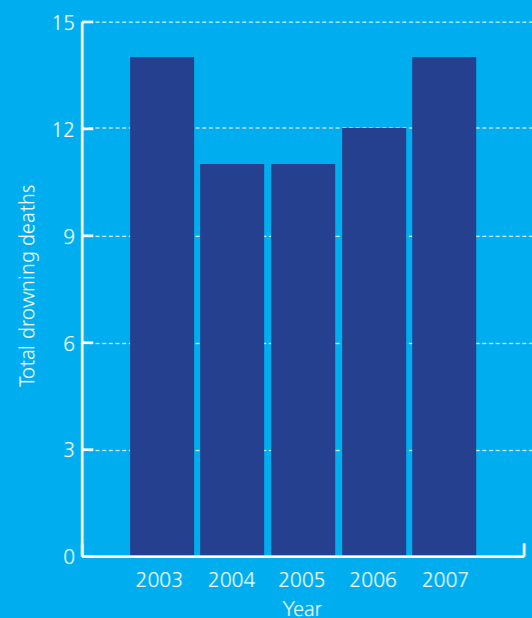


30 - 59 years

Adults aged 30-59 years again recorded the highest number of drowning deaths of any age group in 2007. 14 drowning deaths occurred in this age group, representing almost 38% of the total drowning deaths. This is an increase of three deaths from 2006.

This age group has emerged as a high-risk group for drowning death, with consistently high numbers recorded over the past five years. This highlights the need for drowning prevention and water safety interventions and strategies specifically for this age group.

10 incidents (71%) amongst adults aged 30-59 years were males.



BY ACTIVITY

Swimming (36%) was the most common activity being undertaken at the time of the incident amongst adults aged 30-59 years in 2007. Other common activities being undertaken included recreating around water (29%), boating and fishing (14% each).

These activities are similar to statistics reported in previous years, highlighting the need to develop education and awareness strategies that specifically target the risks and dangers associated with these activities.

BY LOCATION

Similar to 2006, the majority of incidents amongst this age group occurred at coastal locations (43%) including beaches and the ocean. Other common locations were inland waterway locations including rivers and lakes (29%) and the home swimming pool (14%).

64% of drowning deaths amongst adults aged 30-59 years occurred at regional locations throughout Western Australia.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

In a continuing trend, the use of alcohol and other drugs were contributing factors in 50% of drowning deaths amongst this age group. This is becoming an emerging issue for this age group and strategies to address the issue need to be developed.

As in previous years, pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease and epilepsy were once more a common contributing factor in 36% of incidents amongst this age group. In the majority of these cases, the persons involved were participating alone. Persons with pre-existing medical conditions need to be aware of their limitations when in and around the water.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Current alcohol and water safety messages need to be expanded to include relevant information for adults aged 30-59 years, particularly in regional areas with a focus on swimming, fishing and boating
- Strategies need to be developed to raise awareness amongst persons in the 30-59 year age group with pre-existing medical conditions of the importance of having someone nearby when participating in recreation in and around the water
- All adults should undertake some form of first aid/resuscitation or lifesaving training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge required to assist someone in an emergency situation

OLDER ADULTS

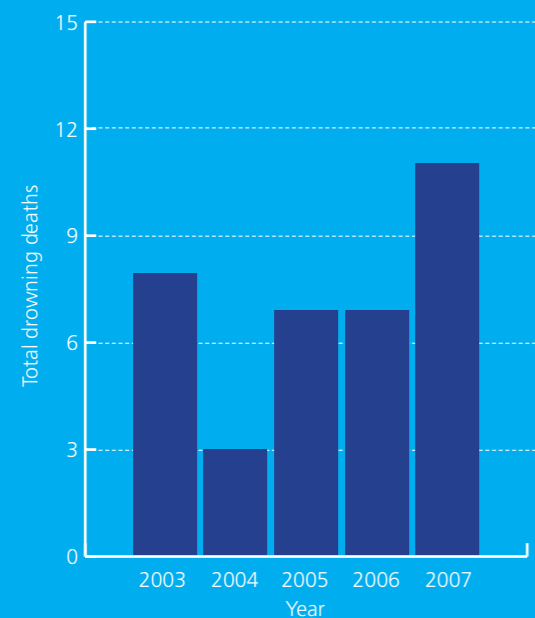


60 years and older

11 drowning deaths were recorded amongst older adults aged over 60 years in Western Australia in 2007.

This is a significant increase from 2006 and is the highest number recorded for this age group in the past five years, exceeding the average by four deaths. One boating incident recorded in this age group in 2007 resulted in four drowning deaths which accounts for this increase.

The majority of incidents involved males (73%), which has been a common trend in drowning statistics.



BY ACTIVITY

Boating (36%), fishing (27%) and recreating around water (27%) were common activities being undertaken at the time of the incident. However, as previously mentioned, the boating incident involved four drowning deaths.

BY LOCATION

54.5% of drowning deaths amongst older adults in 2007 occurred in regional Western Australia.

The majority of incidents occurred at coastal locations (64%) including beaches and the ocean and inland waterway locations (27%) including rivers and estuaries.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Medical conditions such as pre-existing heart conditions and depression contributed to almost 55% of drowning deaths within this age group, a trend which has emerged over the past few years. In majority of these cases the person was participating alone. This is a significant increase from 2006 and the highest number recorded over the past five years.

Certain medical conditions and medications can affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Therefore it is important for people with pre-existing medical conditions to be aware of their limitations and the importance of having someone nearby when participating in and around the water.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that further research be conducted regarding drowning deaths in this age group to gather more detailed information and assist in addressing drowning issues amongst older adults in Western Australia
- All adults aged 60 years and over should undertake some form of first aid/resuscitation or lifesaving training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge required to assist someone in an emergency situation
- Older adults (especially those with medical conditions) should always participate with others to reduce the risk of drowning death and injury

ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY INITIATIVES



Keep Watch

Keep Watch aims to increase awareness amongst parents and carers of young children of toddler drowning prevention strategies. The program has formed a partnership with other child injury organisations to deliver important child safety and injury prevention information to regional and remote areas.

As the partnership strengthens, the partnering organisations are now working towards developing a comprehensive set of resources that encompass key relevant areas of child injury prevention, which are relevant for Indigenous populations.



Don't Drink and Drown

Don't Drink and Drown looks to educate young adults about the risks and dangers of consuming alcohol while participating in activities on or around the water. The program has been expanded to include a greater focus on regional and remote areas, with Indigenous specific resources being developed.



Remote Aboriginal Swimming Pools Project

Royal Life Saving manages swimming pool facilities within remote Aboriginal communities in the north-west – Burringurrah, Jigalong and Yandeyarra. The pools provide Aboriginal communities access to a range of swimming and lifesaving programs. In addition, the facilities provide a number of health and social benefits for the communities.



The success of the program led to the opening of two new facilities in the remote Aboriginal communities in Warmun and Bidadanga in October 2007. There are plans to further expand this program over the next few years.



Swim & Survive

The Swim & Survive program provides children 6-14 years with not only swimming skills, but also essential water safety knowledge and lifesaving skills. The program has recently been expanded to include access to programs and information for targeted community groups including:

- CaLD women and youth groups and
- Indigenous populations in Kwinana and the north-west

This will help ensure that drowning rates amongst children remain low in Western Australia.

This program has also initiated a number of Open Days run through aquatic facilities. These sessions aim to encourage participation in swimming and lifesaving and include free swim assessments for children to assist with skill development. These sessions are run throughout metropolitan, regional and remote areas of the state.



Training

Royal Life Saving has continued to provide a range of training opportunities to the Western Australian community to ensure that qualified community lifesavers are readily available throughout the state to prevent drowning death.

In addition to providing first aid and vocational training courses, Royal Life Saving has recently completed a training needs analysis project within Aboriginal communities. This project looked at identifying barriers to participation in training courses and traineeships and will be used to modify courses to suit Aboriginal learners.

For more information visit www.rise.com.au



Safety and Risk Management Services

The Royal Life Saving Society has been conducting home swimming pool barrier inspections on behalf of local government organisations for the past ten years. This works to ensure that adequate barriers to home swimming pools are maintained to a high standard to assist in preventing drowning death.

In addition, Royal Life Saving conducts safety and risk management audits at other aquatic locations ranging from public aquatic facilities (Group 1 facilities) through to aquatic facilities in strata-titled bodies (Group 5 facilities) to ensure they comply with legislative standards.

This department has recently expanded the scope of their safety and risk management services to include inland waterway locations such as rivers and lakes to ensure that all water locations remain safe for aquatic activity.



For further information or to obtain additional copies of the 2007 WA Drowning Report, please contact:



The Royal Life Saving Society Australia – WA Branch
McGillivray Road, Mt Claremont WA 6010
PO Box 28, Floreat Forum WA 6014
Phone: (08) 9383 8200
Facsimile: (08) 9383 9922
Email: info@rlsswa.com.au
Website: www.lifesavingwa.com.au

Disclaimer – While all care is taken to ensure that the results presented in this report are as accurate as possible, they are only provisional and are subject to change based on ongoing coronial investigations.

