



Curtin University

STUDENTS ON THE MOVE: PROFILING WATER SAFETY KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES & PRACTICES AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM SOUTH & EAST ASIA

COLLABORATION FOR EVIDENCE, RESEARCH & IMPACT IN PUBLIC HEALTH



The Collaboration for Evidence Research and Impact in Public Health (CERIPH) was commissioned to undertake evaluation of the Youth Water Safety Program. The project team was composed of Associate Professor Justine Leavy, Associate Professor Gemma Crawford, Malena Della Bona, Brooklyn Royce and Corie Gray.

Ethical approval: Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HRE 201/2014).

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COLLABORATION FOR EVIDENCE, RESEARCH & IMPACT IN PUBLIC HEALTH

The Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health (CERIPH) (formerly the Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research) is a multi-disciplinary research group within the School of Population Health at Curtin University, operating since 1986.

Vision

CERIPH seeks solutions that promote health, prevent disease and protect populations from harm. We build individual and organisational capacity through our partnerships, applied research, education and workforce training. In recognising the complexity of health and its determinants, our multi-disciplinary collaboration provides leadership and evidence to support action across educational, organisational, socio-economic, environmental and political domains to improve population health in our region.

Function

The team has expertise in developing, implementing, and evaluating formative and longitudinal intervention research in areas such as early childhood health and nutrition; physical activity and nutrition; alcohol and other drug use; seniors' health; mental health; drowning prevention HIV and sexual health. CERIPH is a unique research group in that all core staff hold front-line research and teaching positions. The group aims to foster the practice of health promotion by encompassing the nexus between research and practice.

CERIPH has built and demonstrated high-level expertise and research strength in:

- Building sustained partnerships and collaborations with vulnerable and most at-risk communities and relevant community, government and private sector organisations
- Health promotion approaches using community and settings-based interventions, peer and social influence, social marketing, advocacy, community mobilisation and sector capacity building
- Promotion and dissemination of evidence-based practice and building practice-based evidence
- Provision of research training and capacity building techniques to undergraduate and postgraduate students, allied health promotion professionals and community workers.

ABBREVIATIONS

Ads	Advertisements
CERIPH	Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health
CPR	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation
DDD	Don't Drink and Drown
DoHWA	Department of Health Western Australia
RLSSWA	Royal Life Saving Society WA
TV	Television
WA	Western Australia
YWSP	Youth Water Safety Project

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, migration is acknowledged as a risk factor for drowning, including for young people (1, 2), with drowning prevention among adolescents and young adults a complex public health issue. In countries such as Australia, preventing drowning among young migrants requires a range of additional considerations. Health outcomes for migrant populations are affected by the circumstances surrounding the relocation (e.g. rationale, duration of stay), in addition to a range of individual, social, economic, environmental and other determinants that can change and evolve throughout individual movement trajectories. However, in many areas of public health, migration has been poorly considered a factor influencing health. This is despite the fact that one in two Australians (or their parents) were born overseas (3) and the significant numbers of short- and long-term overseas visitors to Australia each year (1, 3).

The most common reasons to visit Australia are a holiday, to visit friends and relatives, and to study (1). However, overseas visitors, including students, are at higher risk of injury or death when travelling to unfamiliar areas, with most travel-related morbidity and mortality among international visitors being from injuries, such as water-related incidents (4). Recent research suggests over 70% of visitors go to the beaches and engage in activities in and around the waterways (4). The causes of drowning vary by visitor status e.g. data suggests that beaches were the most common location for drowning among overseas tourists, whilst inland waterways posed a greater risk for international students (1).

Accordingly, young migrants, specifically international students from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) background are a priority population for drowning prevention efforts. In January 2024, 82,890 international students arrived in Australia, an increase of 23,660 students compared with the corresponding month of the previous year (5). Considering this data, there is a real need to explore normative beliefs, knowledge, settings, and risk-taking behaviours when planning strategies to prevent drowning among international students from CaLD backgrounds.

Since 2004, Royal Life Saving Society WA (RLSSWA) has been funded by the Department of Health WA (DoHWA) to coordinate the Youth Water Safety Program (YWSP). The program targets young people aged 15-24 years to increase knowledge and skills regarding the prevention of drowning; including awareness about the risks associated with consuming alcohol and other drugs in and around water. The current program comprises several strategies including a state-wide media campaign, 'Be a Mermate', school and community presentations and resource distribution. Currently, there are no materials for international students from CaLD backgrounds, who are an emerging priority area.

This report presents insights garnered from an exploration of the perspectives, motivations and profiles of international students from CaLD backgrounds to inform the next steps of the Youth Water Safety Program (YWSP).

International students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) is a common term used by the Australian government and non-government sector to describe people of non-Anglo-Celtic origin.

The term international student refers to someone studying who is not an Australian or New Zealand citizen, an Australian permanent resident, or a holder of an Australian permanent humanitarian visa. While most international students arrive on a student visa, some international students may have lived in Australia for several years prior and/or are studying on a different visa.

Together, these terms reflect students from diverse backgrounds, including cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or religious diversity. For readability, we have used the term 'student' to reference international students from CaLD backgrounds.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022

METHODS

Using a range of methods, the research examined water safety and drowning prevention with international students from South and East Asia. Insights explored swim ability; recreational activities in and around the water; knowledge, attitudes and norms; risk; and campaign awareness and acceptability. This work was undertaken in four parts:



- State and national health and social survey indicators
- Peer reviewed and grey literature

- Interview guide
- Ethical approval
- Recruitment
- Interviews
- Transcription
- Thematic analysis

- Survey
- Ethical approval
- Recruitment
- Data collection
- Descriptive analysis

- Synthesised data to create personas for international students living in Western Australia.

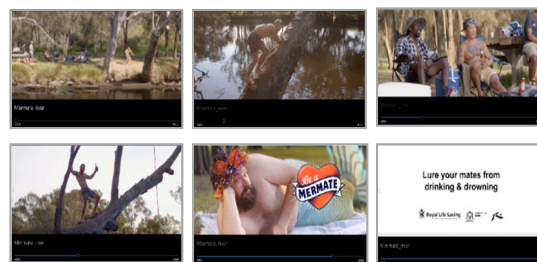
Multiple data sources were synthesised to provide a rapid review locating existing Australian campaigns, resources and guidelines for international and/or CaLD audiences and determine design considerations for materials for international students from CaLD backgrounds.

Semi-structured interviews (n=9) and qualitatively driven surveys (n=15) were conducted. The short 10-minute survey was administered to complement interviews and gain perspectives from those unable to take part in the interviews. Domains of enquiry included: Western Australia as a destination, aquatic locations, water-based activities, water safety, messages and imagery. Ads and posters from the current 'Be a Mermate' campaign (shown below) were assessed by participants. Deductive thematic analysis was undertaken on qualitative data and frequencies were generated from quantitative data for demographic characteristics.

Advertisement - Pool



Advertisement - River



Posters



PERSONAS

From the synthesised data outlined in this report, four personas were created of different profiles of international students living in Western Australia. These personas can guide an understanding of users' needs, experiences, behaviours and goals.

Persona 1: Zhang Wei

Sex: Male

Age: 24

Country of birth: Chinese

Migration journey: Zhang comes from a middle-class family in Beijing, China. Zhang decided to study abroad in Australia due to its reputation for high-quality education and was supported by his family. Travelling to Perth was his first experience being away from his close family, and with his limited English on arrival, he initially struggled to transition to life away from home. He had initially thought he would stay in Australia to pursue his PhD, but he is now reconsidering.

Social networks: Zhang is reserved, and he has struggled to make friends while in Perth. The friends he has made are almost all from China. He stays connected to friends in China, who provide most of his social interaction.

Education: Zhang is enrolled in a Masters degree (coursework) in Management and Commerce. He chose this field because he believes it aligns well with his career aspirations and offers promising opportunities for employment both in China and internationally.

Language Proficiency: Although Zhang is fluent in Mandarin, he initially struggled with English proficiency upon arrival in Australia. His English proficiency has improved through immersion, and mostly his written, academic English, but he prefers speaking in Mandarin.

Living Arrangements: Zhang lives in private accommodation near his university campus, which provides him with independence and convenience. He lives close to other Chinese students, whom he often spends his free time with.

Financial Situation: Zhang's income is limited. To manage his expenses, he carefully budgets his finances. Zhang faces financial instability, which influences his spending decisions, prioritising essentials like education and healthcare over other expenses.

Water activities: Zhang received basic swimming lessons while growing up in China and knows the importance of swimming with a buddy. Zhang enjoys fishing and spends a bit of time near the beach on his own, but never enters the water.

Campaign considerations:

1. **Cultural relevance:** Zhang prefers campaigns that are tailored to the Chinese community and reflect his values around health, community, and water, including imagery that reflects his culture.
2. **Language:** Zhang prefers reading in Mandarin but finds it helpful to have information in English so he can build his vocabulary.
3. **Dissemination:** Zhang prefers information online, that comes from a trusted provider, such as the University or a government-based organisation.

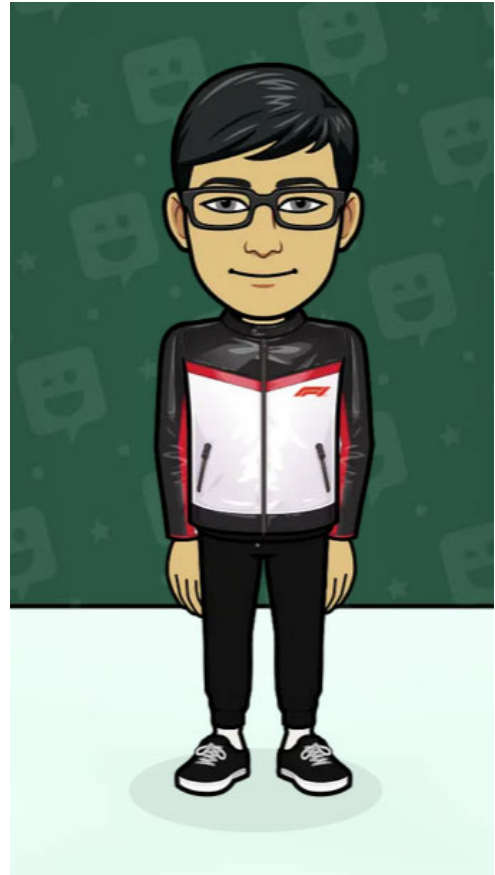


Image: Unsplash Wes Hicks

Persona 2: Aarav Patel

Sex: Male

Age: 21

Country of birth: Indian

Migration journey: Hailing from a middle-class family in Mumbai, India, Aarav chose to study abroad in Australia due to its reputable educational system, safety standards, and multicultural environment. He had siblings living in Perth before he arrived. Aarav has been living in Perth for two years on a tourist visa before enrolling in study.

Social networks: Aarav is very social and has made friends from diverse backgrounds during his time in Perth. His peer group is mostly other students from India and Australia, and they regularly catch up after class hours. He keeps connected with his parents living in India, but most of his social media is related to Perth.

Education: Aarav is enrolled in Vocational Educational Training (VET), specializing in Hospitality Management. He chose this field to enhance his employability, as he hopes to become an Australian permanent resident after he studies.

Language Proficiency: Aarav is fluent in Hindi and English. He has a strong command of verbal English, developed through his strong social networks, though it is mostly 'conversational English' and he has difficulty with English in a formal setting (e.g., doctor's appointment). Aarav's written English is poor, and he struggles with reading, despite being a confident speaker.



Image: Unsplash Amit Ranjan

Living Arrangements: Aarav resides in private accommodation with his siblings near his training institute, providing him with a conducive environment for studying and independence. He is close to other students from India but has also made friends with nearby students from other multicultural backgrounds.

Financial Situation: As a student, Aarav manages his expenses diligently. Aarav allocates his income towards tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses, with occasional discretionary spending on leisure activities.

Challenges and Concerns: Aarav faces challenges associated with adjusting to a new environment, academic workload, and occasional homesickness. He is particularly concerned about securing internships and gaining practical experience in his field to enhance his career prospects. Aarav is also mindful of maintaining his mental and physical well-being amidst the demands of his studies.

Water activities: Aarav had limited formal swimming lessons as a child, and self-taught himself after he moved to Perth. Aarav enjoys trying new activities, particularly with friends and enjoys swimming as a way of staying fit. He enjoys water sports such as kayaking, canoeing, or paddleboarding. Aarav also spends time at the beach, engaging in activities like beach volleyball, beach cricket, or at friends' pools, often with alcohol involved. Aarav considers himself a strong swimmer despite no formal lessons and is confident around water.

Campaign considerations:

1. **Multicultural campaigns:** Aarav prefers campaigns that reflect diversity, including imagery, and are inclusive of the broader international student population. Campaigns should include references to the experiences of international students.
2. **Language:** Aarav has a strong English proficiency and prefers resources in English.
3. **Practical relevance:** He prefers resources that are practical and gives clear, actionable behaviour strategies that can help keep him safe. He appreciates links to further information and services.

Persona 3: Tashi Wangmo

Sex: Female

Age: 23

Country of birth: Bhutan

Migration journey: Originally from Thimphu, Bhutan, Tashi decided to pursue her higher education abroad to gain global exposure and enhance her career opportunities. Arriving with a strong proficiency in English, and having connected to peers before she arrived, Tashi felt like she transitioned well to living in Australia. Tashi is planning on staying in Australia after her degree but is considering relocating to Melbourne.

Social networks: Tashi is well-connected to the small Bhutanese community in Perth and often spends weekends at community events. She has also made friends with other international students. Tashi stays connected with friends from Bhutan via social media.

Education: Tashi is enrolled in higher education, pursuing a Master's Degree in Business Administration. She chose this field because of her interest in entrepreneurship and her ambition to lead and manage businesses effectively.

Language Proficiency: Tashi is fluent in Dzongkha and English. She has a strong command of English, developed through her academic studies and professional experiences.

Living Arrangements: Tashi lives in shared accommodation near her university campus, allowing her to interact with peers and immerse herself in the student community. She values meeting new friends.

Financial Situation: As a student, Tashi manages her expenses diligently. Tashi allocates her income towards tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses, with occasional discretionary spending on cultural events and travel.

Challenges and Concerns: Tashi faces challenges associated with adapting to a new cultural environment, academic rigour, and balancing her studies with part-time work. She is particularly concerned about establishing a professional network and gaining practical experience in her field to pursue her career goals. Tashi is also mindful of maintaining her mental and physical well-being amidst the demands of her studies. Tashi also seeks support from university counselling services.

Interests and Hobbies: In her free time, Tashi enjoys exploring Perth with friends, such as attending cultural festivals, trying new cuisines, and visiting historical sites. She also enjoys engaging in outdoor activities like hiking and cycling to stay active and unwind from her studies.

Water activities: Tashi had limited access to swimming lessons growing up and has low confidence around water. However, she likes spending time alone and with friends at the beach and likes to hike near creeks and waterfalls. She has entered waist-deep water on her own while hiking, despite her low water confidence.

Campaign considerations:

1. **Visual appeal:** Tashi prefers resources that are visual-based and low on text, and that use illustrations or visual cues to help her understand.
2. **Online accessibility:** Tashi often shares links and videos with friends, as she worries about their health and safety. She likes online material that is easily accessed via her phone, as she does not have access to a personal computer.
3. **Practical relevance:** Tashi chooses resources that have practical strategies for reducing risk of drowning, as she has low confidence around water. She likes resources that refer to local settings and experiences.



Image: Pexels Vlada Karpovich

Persona 4: Fatima Ahmadzai

Sex: Female

Age: 18

Country of birth: Afghanistan

Migration journey: Originally from Kabul, Afghanistan, Fatima decided to pursue her higher education abroad to contribute to the reconstruction and development efforts in her home country. Coming to Perth was the first time Fatima has ever been on a plane, and living in Perth has been a culture shock. Fatima plans to return home after her degree.

Social networks: Fatima has struggled to make friends in Perth owing to cultural differences, and most of her friends are other Afghan or Asian female international students. Fatima regularly talks with her family and friends who are in Afghanistan.

Education: Fatima is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering. She chose this field because of her passion for infrastructure development and her desire to address pressing societal needs in Afghanistan, such as transportation and water management.

Language Proficiency: Fatima is fluent in Dari (Afghan Persian) but does not speak English well. Fatima has difficulty with the Australian accent and tries to avoid conversing with people who have a strong accent where possible. Her English vocabulary has been developed through her academic studies, and she often doesn't understand 'conversational English'.

Living Arrangements: Fatima lives in shared accommodation near her university campus, providing her with a supportive and communal living environment. Her accommodation mostly includes other students from Afghan and other Asian countries.

Financial Situation: Fatima has struggled to find employment while in Perth and only has a small amount of savings from occasional casual jobs. She had hoped to be able to send money back home so her sister could also attend university but is struggling to afford the cost of living in Perth.

Challenges and Concerns: Fatima is particularly concerned about staying connected with her family in Afghanistan, managing academic workload, and balancing her studies with casual work. Fatima is resilient and determined to overcome obstacles on her educational journey.

Water activities: Growing up in Afghanistan, Fatima had little access to swimming lessons, particularly as a girl. Fatima wears a hijab and has struggled to find modest swimwear that she could wear in Perth. She has found a female Muslim friend who has a pool, and her friend has been helping her learn to swim.

Campaign considerations:

1. **Cultural appropriateness:** As Fatima chooses to wear modest swimwear, she does not like resources that have images of people with typical Australian swimwear. She also does not relate to resources that discuss alcohol usage.
2. **Tailored information:** As Fatima connects mostly with other Afghan women, and is planning to return home, she often does not relate to content for a diverse group of international students. She would prefer information that was created for Muslim women.
3. **Language:** As Fatima struggles with the Australian accent, she prefers videos or audio to have captions, so that she can follow along in English.



Image: Unsplash Muhammad Haikal Sjukri

Persona images were created using the Bitmoji© app and used in accordance with [Snap Inc. 2022 Terms & Policies](#)

DESKTOP REVIEW

National and local data sources, peer- and non-peer-reviewed literature, including Australian campaigns, resources, and guidelines for international and/or CaLD audiences, were reviewed and synthesised as part of the desktop review. Please note the complete data and source (including sample size and percentages) are in the Appendix; a snapshot is provided below for India, Bhutan and China. While some data is specific to international students, some represents temporary residents more broadly. For some categories, not all data were available by jurisdiction and/or country of birth; however, where possible, it has been presented below and expanded in the Appendix.

Who is the West Australian migrant population?

About one-third of WA's population was born overseas (6), most commonly England, New Zealand, and India. Mandarin, Italian, and Vietnamese are the most commonly languages spoken at home (apart from English). Mandarin and Cantonese are common languages among Chinese-born residents, and most have no religious affiliation. Indian-born residents commonly speak Punjabi, Hindi, and Malayalam, and most of them follow Hinduism (6).

Where do international students come from and what do they study?

In 2023, almost 900,000 international students were enrolled in Australian tertiary institutions. In WA, Indian students comprise the largest proportion of international students, followed by Bhutanese and Chinese students. International students in WA have a similar study profile to the national profile and were enrolled in a Master's degree by coursework, a non-Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Awards course, or a Bachelor's degree (2).

INDIA

Around 60% of Indian temporary residents speak English very well (4). Just over sixty per cent of international students from India are male (2). Around one half are studying in higher education and the other half in Vocational Education and Training (VET). In universities, just under two-thirds are pursuing a Masters's degree by coursework, and around one-third are pursuing a Bachelor's degree in either management and commerce, information technology or health. For those in VET, most are studying in food, hospitality and personal services, management and commerce, or engineering (2). Overwhelmingly, the common reasons for studying in Australia are:

- personal safety and security;
- reputation of educational system;
- cost of living' (7). (see Appendix Table 2 includes other reasons for studying in Australia).

BHUTAN

Almost all Bhutanese temporary residents reported speaking English very well or well. Just over half of international students are female (2). Almost eighty per cent of students are enrolled in higher education, with the same percentage enrolled in a Master's degree (2). Almost half of the students were in management and commerce, followed by society and culture and information technology (2). Data for reasons for studying in Australia were not available for students from Bhutan.

CHINA

Almost half of Chinese temporary residents reported speaking English well (4). In 2023, there were an equal number of female and male Chinese students in Australia, with three-quarters enrolled in higher education (2). Most students were pursuing a Masters's degree, followed by a Bachelor's or Doctoral degree (2). The most common areas of study were management and commerce, society and culture, and information technology (2). Similar reasons for studying in Australia are reported by Chinese students, and included:

- personal safety and security;
- reputation of educational system;
- cost of living;
- opportunity to study in an English-speaking country (7).

Where do international students live, work and spend?

In Australia, most Indian students live in private accommodation, with around one-third living with their parents while studying in Australia (7). Over half of the Chinese students have private accommodation, and just over 10% live with their parents (7). Data were not available for Bhutanese students. Student visa holders have a median weekly income of around \$568, with most earning between \$300 and \$999 per week. However, almost one in five students have no weekly income. Two-thirds are employed. Financial instability affects decision-making regarding health-related expenses, causing many international students to prioritise education and urgent healthcare over mental health services, socialising, and purchasing food (5).

What is the future forecast?

THE NUMBERS ARE GOING UP IN WA.

Easing of the COVID-19 restrictions has seen the re-emergence of WA as a study destination of choice for international students. In 2023, over 66,000 international students were enrolled to study in WA tertiary institutions, almost 20,000 more students prior to COVID-19 (8). India and Bhutan are the emerging profile (see Appendix Table 7).

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS EXPERIENCE COST OF LIVING PRESSURES.

Research conducted with WA university students explored food insecurity among both domestic and international students during the COVID-19 pandemic (9). Eight out of ten students who reported food insecurity were international students. International students were nine times more likely to experience food insecurity than domestic students, and the highest prevalence of severe food insecurity was reported among international students with children (9). This highlights how water safety and drowning prevention more broadly, may not be a high-order priority issue for international students considering the current economic and housing crisis.

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS ARE ON THE RISE.

Mental health challenges among international students have been highlighted in the literature, particularly among Chinese students living in Australia (10-12). International students may be at higher risk of poor mental health, as they adjust to new environments, are disconnected from family and friends, experience racism, and work-study conflict arising from financial pressures. Recently elevated levels of distress, as well as elevated risk of suicidal behaviours, and barriers to access to mental health service, and greater impacts of COVID 19 on international students compared with domestic students, have been reported (8). These are important considerations when framing water safety messages. Using positive messages, gain framing and avoiding the use of fear may be important to prevent increasing mental distress for international students.

ACTIVE LIVING IS IMPORTANT BUT THERE ARE BARRIERS.

Chinese students engage in a variety of physical activities ranging from playing badminton with friends, running, weight training, yoga, walking for transport, and walking for leisure (13). Gender roles based on cultural and religious factors contribute to lower physical activity levels among women, and this may be evident in international students from CaLD backgrounds. From a water safety perspective, conservative cultural beliefs within China, Afghanistan, India and Sri Lanka prevent women from participating in water-based activities (14). International students have expressed that living overseas provided an opportunity to experience new forms of physical activities that were not available in their home country, but made them more reliant on their peers over family for social support when trying new activities (13). This is an important point for designing and developing water safety messages for international students.

COMMUNICATION HAPPENS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

In 2018, researchers collected data on sexual health knowledge and behaviours and social media use among Chinese international students (15). Eight out of 10 used social media at least daily or weekly, and preferred to use applications such as WeChat or Weibo to communicate. Facebook was the most used App to communicate with classmates (15). Preferred dissemination channels to distribute sexual health information included email, internet, WeChat, online lectures/seminars, print material and university or health services (15). These insights can assist planning any tailored campaigns or messages for students from China or South and East Asia.

Existing campaigns

This section summarises a rapid review undertaken to locate existing Australian campaigns or resources for international students and/or CaLD audiences. Seven examples of Australian campaigns developed for students and/or CaLD audiences were located (Table 1). Three were specific to water safety. Four were specific to international students. Common design considerations for RLSSWA included using peers (using videos and/or stories from the target audience) and providing resources in-language.

Table 1. Health promotion international student and/or CaLD campaign examples

Organisation	Campaign	Audience	Resource/strategies	Design considerations
Sexual Health Victoria	Dating in Australia	International students	YouTube video series and eLearning modules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of peers
Surf Life Saving NSW	Multilingual resources	CaLD	Beach Safety factsheet, videos, and quizzes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed with Multicultural Advisory Group • In-language • Use of peers
Royal Lifesaving NSW	International Student Water Safety	International students	Water safety videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-language • Use of peers
NSW Government	Shisha No Thanks (18)	CaLD young people	Social marketing campaign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed with community members • In language • Use of peers
ISANA International Education Association	Lived Experience Toolkit (LET) (16) (International students)		Interactive online hub of stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of peers
NSW Health Sydney Local Health District	Lakemba COVID safe campaign (12)	CaLD	Resources, local pop-up clinics, engagement with local community leaders, distribution of resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement • In language
NSW Government	International Student Health Hub	International students	Sexual health information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual representation • Formative research with international students • Simple language
Royal Life Saving	Multicultural Resources	CaLD	Water safety information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-language

Evaluation of three campaigns was sourced and included pre-post survey, anecdotal information, and focus groups (16-18). The importance of culturally appropriate information, visual cultural representation, simple language and in-language support, and community engagement, were reflected in the evaluations. Specific details for each campaign are summarised below.

SHISHA NO THANKS – SOCIAL MARKETING AND YOUNG PEOPLE (18)

NSW Government's 'Shisha No Thanks' co-design social marketing campaign developed videos, social media content, and resources aimed at young people from Arabic speaking backgrounds. The campaign was developed in partnership with a community association, and resources were developed based on findings from co-design workshops and were evidence informed. Using a pre-post survey design, a significantly higher proportion of respondents reported seeing, hearing, or reading something about the harms of waterpipe smoking after the campaign; no other changes were significant.

COVID SAFE – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH CALD COMMUNITIES (17)

NSW Health and Sydney Local Health District Public Health Unit developed a campaign aimed at culturally and linguistically diverse Lamboka community members to raise awareness of COVID-19 risk and promote testing. The campaign included: translating existing resources in-language, face to face in-language outreach, engaging religious leaders as 'COVID Safe' champions, in-language media including television, radio and social media, and establishing a pop-up testing clinic. The campaign self-reports being "*an important real-world example of ... effective engagement with CaLD communities.*"

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HEALTH – RESOURCES (16)

NSW Government's 'International Student Health' hub was developed through interviews with international students and evaluated through focus group discussions. Interview participants wanted information that was free and easy to access, available both as a hard copy and online, came from a reliable source, and had cultural diversity visually represented. Evaluation of the resource confirmed that the language was simple and understandable but requested links to in-language support and for further information and sexual health testing.

Developing resources for people from CaLD backgrounds

This section consolidates existing guidelines and recommended design considerations for international students from CaLD backgrounds. Guidelines for developing such resources in Australia are limited, with all but one document published >2022 (Table 2).

Table 2. Guidelines for developing resources for people from CaLD backgrounds

Organisation	Audience
<u>Community of Practice for Action on HIV and Mobility (2022)</u>	Migrants and people from CaLD backgrounds
<u>Migration Council (2022)</u>	CaLD communities
<u>NSW Health (2023)</u>	People from refugee backgrounds
<u>NSW Government (2019)</u>	Multilingual audiences

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

RLSSWA has a sustained history of designing and delivering health promotion interventions, and know the value of campaign materials when developed with the end-user in mind (19). However, tailoring resources for international students from CaLD backgrounds includes considerations of the health literacy demands of resources, including cultural appropriateness (20).

Health literacy is the extent in which the audience can "*access, understand, appraise and apply [the] health information*" (Sørensen et al., 2012, pg. 3) (21), extending beyond functional literacy (literacy skills). Health promotion campaigns should reflect the complex, dynamic interaction between an individual and their social and cultural context, to support interactive health literacy (skills to actively participate and apply new information) (22).

A resource designed for international students from CaLD backgrounds is likely to be more effective when it (23):

- identifies the target audience (gender, age, language spoken and proficiency, culture)
- has been designed with target audience input, including input from international students of varying backgrounds (including ethnicity, length of time in Australia, water familiarity)
- considers the target audience's health literacy requirements
- uses appropriate language and images
- reflects cultural values, concepts and understanding
- is underpinned by relevant health promotion and/or learning theories using an appropriate cultural lens
- is part of a comprehensive health promotion program
- and has been tested with students prior to dissemination.

Working cross-culturally means being aware that people bring their own cultural values, beliefs, and understandings to communication, including different understandings of health and perceptions of risk. Existing health beliefs and knowledge (24, 25), social networks and access to information sources (26), gender and cultural norms (27), and migration journeys (26), may be important factors to consider. For more on cross-cultural communication, visit <https://www.idrinstitute.org/resources/intercultural-communication/>

Prepare for a comprehensive approach

Good practice suggests campaigns will be more effective when they are supported by a comprehensive intervention, underpinned by theory, including a mixture of strategies (education, swimming lessons) and consider the heterogeneity of international students from CaLD backgrounds. For example, messaging around alcohol and water may not be relevant for some international students and risks them disengaging with it, or there may be additional considerations for female international students from specific backgrounds.

Get student input early

Community involvement helps ensure that the resources are necessary, consider community needs, reflect community values and attitudes, and are disseminated appropriately. Understand how and when to include target audiences, considering levels of participation and what is feasible for the project.

Levels of participation can be conceptualised as:

- Inform: Provision of information (i.e., an educational workshop).
- Consult: Obtaining community feedback (i.e., focus groups).
- Involve: Consultation that achieves complete understanding (i.e., a co-design workshop).
- Collaborate: Partnering with the community to plan, implement and evaluate (i.e., a project steering group).
- Empower: Decision-making is in the hands of the community (i.e., the community determines the need for a resource and what should be in it).

When planning, consider that it may not always be appropriate or desirable to have the highest level of participation, depending on timelines, resources, and outcomes. International students may be a difficult to engage target audience as there is a potential power differential and competing demands. RLSSWA should continue to consider how to best support their involvement. Offering different strategies for involvement (i.e., online workshops, interviews after class) can help support student's participation. It is also important to consider who is represented, for example, gender, visa status and literacy, water familiarisation, and how these factors intersect.

Engaging students

Consumer Participation and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: <https://www.ceh.org.au/resource-hub/consumer-participation-and-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-communities/>
Health Consumers' Council: <https://www.hconc.org.au/cald-community-workshops-and-events-2/>

Get the message right

Information presented in campaigns needs to be able to be understood and acted on. In drowning, there is a balance between safety awareness and enjoyment in messaging. We recommend RLSSWA test the message's relevance with students early, to ensure that the issue is important to them. Ideally, the campaign will support behaviour change and provide the necessary support and information to do so. Use titles and headings to clarify the resource is purpose, who it is for, and how to use it.

Consider language needs and tailoring resources to different groups

Tailoring resources for migrants often involves translating English resources into some common languages (28), but this approach alone fails to consider contextual factors that shape health literacy skills and practices (28-30). Direct translation risks inaccurate delivery of resource messaging and terms and fails to acknowledge diverse levels of English proficiency among students. If deciding to translate, certified translators are valuable to the process of adapting a resource to ensure readability and appropriateness (17); however, this is often resource-intensive. When writing, RLSSWA may like to develop resources for students with differing levels of English proficiency to meet different health literacy needs. Engaging with students in the development process to assess their understanding and relatability of the terms and language used is important.

Research also suggests avoiding:

- Colloquial/slang language or references that may be unfamiliar to people whose second language is English
- Over-simplification to the point where the message is too vague
- Patronising or stigmatising language
- Metaphor or irony

For more advice on translation

Translation: An introduction <https://www.ceh.org.au/resource-hub/translation-an-introduction/>

Check cultural appropriateness

A resource's cultural appropriateness (visual representation, language, messaging, and format) may be a barrier to students engaging with or understanding a message. Representation of students within visual resources allows the audience to identify with the resource and understand that they are the target audience (18, 31). RLSSWA should consider storytelling and using peers in campaign materials that can help tailor messages to students (32). It is recommended that RLSSWA use titles and headings to name who the audience is.

Diversify communication channels and formats

Presenting resources in a range of digital and print forms, available in accessible locations, helps reach a broader audience (33). We suggest RLSSWA consider how students currently access health information, their social networks, and sources of information they consider credible. For example, some students may prefer information from informal, peer-based sources (like social media), while others prefer static information that comes from a trusted organisation.

Campaigns also need to consider the most appropriate timing to deliver message, whether pre-travel, upon arrival and/or throughout their stay (34). Studies have recommended providing international students with water safety information prior to travelling (35-37). Additionally, several universities offer water safety programs (35, 36), though these vary on content, delivery, and participation.

Assess readability

The use of plain language is considered gold standard for broader audience inclusivity (38). Simple communication is used to minimise misinterpretation and improve understanding, without the use of 'dumbed-down' or casual language. Readability may also involve considering including another term of explanation in parenthesis. Plain language has the added benefit of working for any literacy level regardless of cultural or linguistic background (39).

Several tools are available for assessing readability, including The Fry formula (or Fry readability graph), SMOG (a simple measure of gobbledygook), and Flesch tests (Flesch-Kincaid and Flesch reading ease).

Tools

SMOG online calculator: <https://charactercalculator.com/smog-readability/>

Readability test: <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>

Assess health literacy demands

The Health Literacy INDEX tool is designed to evaluate the health literacy demands of health information (40). The INDEX was developed through a review of literature, expert feedback and validity and reliability testing. The INDEX can be used as a guide to assess, develop or pre-test a resource. The Health Literacy INDEX presents 10 criteria with 63 indicators to assess health literacy demands.

Criteria includes:

- Plain language
- Clear purpose
- Supporting graphics
- User involvement
- Skills-based learning
- Audience appropriateness
- User instructions
- Development details
- Evaluation methods
- Strength of evidence

Health Literacy INDEX

Access the complete INDEX, including further detail on each indicator, here: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10810730.2012.712612>

Pretest materials with students

Test resources with a diverse range of students, including different cultural backgrounds, English language proficiency, and water familiarity.

The sort of clarity that might be sought includes:

- What they think the purpose of the resource is
- Who they think the resource is for
- Words or sentences that aren't clear
- Whether it makes them want to change their behaviour.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

This section presents findings from qualitative interviews and qualitatively driven survey data. Most students were aged 18 and 24 years and female voices were overrepresented. International students had lived in Perth for 1- 2 years and had arrived from India, China and Bhutan (see Table 3 below). Narratives revealed that Australia is different to home, friendly but challenging. Student swimming ability varied widely, with almost half being poor or non-swimmers; one had experienced a mishap around water. Gender, culture and family values influence practices, knowledge and attitudes. Word choice is vital when designing messages. Some students thought water safety = water quality. There are low levels of awareness of water safety messages or risks. 'Be a Mermate' met with mixed reactions; the TV ads were poorly understood, and while the look of the posters was liked, the message was unclear. Participants suggested that the mainstream campaign and the language used were unsuitable for international students from South and East Asia. Students suggested strategies for disseminating water safety messages, including collaborating with universities during orientation week, poster distribution, and social media, specifically YouTube and Instagram.

Table 3: Demographics interview and survey participants (n = 25)

Involvement	Age (years)	Gender	Country	Time in Aus
Interview	16	Male	Vietnam	More than 10 years
Interview	17	Male	Australia (1 st generation)	More than 10 years
Interview	18	Female	Pakistan	1 - 2 years
Interview	19	Female	Sri Lanka	Less than 1 year
Interview	18	Female	India	Less than 1 year
Interview	19	Female	Bangladesh	Less than 1 year
Interview	23	Female	Afghanistan	5 -10 years
Interview	27	Female	China	1 - 2 years
Interview	19	Female	Hong Kong	Less than 1 year
Survey	25	Female	Pakistan	1 - 2 years
Survey	21	Female	Nepal	Less than 1 year
Survey	23	Female	Bhutan	Less than 1 year
Survey	21	Male	Vietnam	Less than 1 year
Survey	24	Female	Bhutan	1 - 2 years
Survey	24	Female	Bhutan	1 - 2 years
Survey	22	Male	India	Less than 1 year
Survey	29	Male	Pakistan	Less than 1 year
Survey	18	Male	China	1 - 2 years
Survey	20	I prefer not to say	India	Less than 1 year
Survey	23	Female	Nepal	Less than 1 year
Survey	22	Female	Nepal	Less than 1 year
Survey	25	Female	Nepal	Less than 1 year
Survey	18	Female	China	4 - 5 years
Survey	17	Female	India	1 - 2 years

Experiences of settling in Perth

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

Several participants mentioned Australia's multicultural nature, who were exposed to a broader range of people and cultures in WA compared to their country of origin. Participants mentioned the summer heat; for some participants, this was unexpected. Participants indicated that the Australian way of life is different to home, with Perth considered a more friendly, closer community where life is quieter. Some participants reported that this was initially challenging, but all believed they had adjusted well and were excited to live an Australian way of life.

TRANSITION DIFFICULTIES

Some participants found it difficult to transition to life in Australia. Their initial focus was on fitting in, dealing with language barriers, accommodation issues, getting to know the city and meeting new friends. As may be expected, the transition appeared easier for those with stronger English proficiency.

"...Australian culture is totally different. Like boys and girls, they can communicate, they can shake hands, but in our religion, in our culture, back to our country... boys and girls, like they can't like shake their hands."

Female, 23-year-old, Afghanistan

"Every time I talked, like, I tried to talk with another person, my English just goes out of my head. Like, oh, my God, I'm like, starting so bad. But now it's good."

Female, 19-year-old, Bangladesh

"For me Perth is quite opposite of where I used to live in like, I'm from Mumbai. So it's all rushed [in Mumbai]."

Female, 18-year-old, India

MISSING FAMILY & FRIENDS

Some participants indicated that being away from family has been difficult. Those who lived in on-campus accommodation appeared to find it easier to make friends. International students are considered by the participants to be a close group.



"I came from five different cultures and five different religions."

Female, 18-year-old, Pakistan

"Everyone's like, kind of new here. So, everyone is just trying to get to know each other. And yeah, I met like, I think over thirty people. I don't know all of their names."

Female, 19-year-old, Hong Kong

Survey participants said they chose to study in WA because...

I was interested in Australia It's multicultural
Quality of life and access to opportunities
Vibrant culture, Practical Learning, Top tier educational institutions
To have global exposure and for exploring global opportunities.

Its a very beautiful country and I wanted to explore and experience the Australian atmosphere
In Australia, it provides a lot of opportunity, high-quality education and research facilities. Australia has better health care and a relaxed lifestyle, I'm enjoying this life!
I always wanted to study at Curtin and this opportunity granted me what I always wanted to do and achieve. Hence, I came to Australia

Affordable for Better education
quality education as well as accommodation and transportation.
Diverse environments with industrial experiences
Good weather, education, reputation
Good education system
High quality education

Swim ability & water-based activity

International students reported a wide variety of swimming abilities. Some participants described having swimming lessons at home and others learnt informally with family. Others indicated they couldn't swim at all but were keen to learn. Some learnt to swim once they arrived in Australia.

CULTURAL NORMS

For some participants cultural norms in their country of origin meant only boys had taken part in lessons and were more likely to swim. For younger participants, parents played an important function as *'role models'* or gatekeepers impacting their choice of activities. However, they acknowledged that the role of parents differed depending on *'family values'* and *'experience'*.

"if parents are not involved in it [a learn to swim program]... they will kind of discourage like, put students off going to these water safety activities."

Male, 16-year-old, Vietnam

WHERE, WHAT & WITH WHOM

Despite not knowing how to swim, a few participants indicated they had taken part in recreational water-based activities in Australia, including kayaking and snorkelling. One participant had entered the water at a local beach alone, despite not knowing how to swim, and got into trouble in the water. One participant attended a Muslim-only time slot at her local pool. Participants went to the beach with family, other international students and alone.

"I don't know how to swim. But yeah, like, but still I have done kayaking [in Australia]."

Female, 18-year-old, India

"We don't get swimming lessons or anything. We just figure it out on our own. ...if they know how to float it, that's it."

Female, 18-year-old, Pakistan

"I've only seen one pool [in Australia] and I've only been once, that's it. It was my friend's apartment. So we just had to hang out, so we just went there. We just had a good time there. We did swimming and then we just had fruit and just enjoyed being laid back."

Female, 18-year-old, Pakistan

"..they made it compulsory in like a school [at home] to learn swimming. So, grade 1 to 5 you have to do it."

Female, 19-year-old, Hong Kong

"Many people [in my community] don't swim...they don't even get involved in it [water-based activities]."

Male, 17-year-old, 1st generation Australian

"I've learned that people here love swimming. I've been to so many places with my family here. Like, beside the water. Yeah. But in Bangladesh, you can't really see people swimming."

Female, 19-year-old, Bangladesh

Survey participants said...

Eleven participants were **below average**, **poor** or **non-swimmers**. Very few interacted with waterways at home, but nine had **gone to a beach location in WA**, six identified the **beach** as **'secluded'**. Seven participants indicated they had swum at the **beach** or **pool**. Other locations and activities included **river, dam or lake, boating, snorkelling** and **kayaking**.

Water safety & risk perception

AT HOME

When asked about water safety messages they had heard at home, many participants initially discussed water quality. Those that did understand the term water safety highlighted safety signs. However, they indicated that people usually ignored them. One participant recalled advertising they had seen at home.

"There will be a sign or a pole that 'okay, this is the deep end'. But being us, we don't follow rules."

Female, 18 years old, Pakistan

"Yeah, always. But in China, people just don't have such caution. But be just 'oh, I would like to have fun in water'."

Female 27-year-old, China

"I just remember [at home]... they put up these advertisements on TV. They always like tell people to think twice, think about your family. Stuff like that. Before you do something stupid [in the water]."

Female, 19-year-old, Sri Lanka

"Yeah, it's really gross... plus, it kind of gives you like itchy skin staph rashes, so I rarely go to beach in Mumbai."

Female, 18-year-old, India

"Maybe one of the teachers [at home] might have, like, said something about, 'oh, yeah, we should teach the students like how to swim and stuff'. But it's not really an important thing."

Female, 19-year-old, Bangladesh

"On beaches, we don't see any lifeguards or anything."

Female 18-year-old, India

IN AUSTRALIA

Participants had low levels of awareness of water safety messages or risks. When asked about weather conditions they spoke about the heat and sun damage rather than local conditions. Participants could identify few risks in Australia; usually it was things they had learnt from risky experiences.

"The beach experience [in Australia] where the current was too strong. ... we never had [at home], I felt actually pretty scared... I was alone by myself that time. So it kind of felt daunting... I got pretty shook."

Female, 18-year-old, India

"Not every country has the same water currents [as Australia] ... you need to know about water currents more than you need to know about swimming."

Female 18-year-old, Pakistan

"I haven't seen like any news about these things, on social media and stuff. I've always seen like, the safety nets and the signs on the beach side."

Female,
18-year-old,
Pakistan

"I think I've seen flags, but I never knew what they meant."

Female,
19-year-old,
Sri Lanka

Survey
participants
identified
ways they
decide water
is safe
(prompted &
unprompted)...

General knowledge
Weather conditions
See lifeguard on duty
Swim between the flags
Common sense
Lifeguards or family and friends
Other people already in the water
Knowing the water depth
Signs warning of hazards
Water conditions
Ask people from WA
From the internet

Campaign acceptability

RIVER



Some of the participants understood the RIVER advertisement was about alcohol and water safety.

However, they didn't feel it was appropriate for an international student audience.

"I think is to be alert not about only about yourself about people that you are with.... Yeah, because back, even in Hong Kong, people would probably buy like, drinks and they put it in the icebag. And they would drink. Wow, on the beach. So, I'm aware of that."

Female, 19-year-old, Hong Kong

"Yeah, I cannot get too much from it. Due to my language barrier."

Female, 27 years old, China

"This would take [international student's] attention, but it doesn't give the message nicely, or it doesn't portray the message at all."

Female, 18-year-old, Pakistan

POOL



Interpretations of the POOL advertisement was mixed.

Fewer participants appeared to understand the intended message.

"I wasn't sure what was going on, until I saw the message and I pieced everything together in this context.... It's a good ad, I just didn't really get it".

Male, 16-year-old, Vietnam

"I did not understand the point."

Female, 18-year-old, India

[When asked if the advertisement was for newly arrived international students]: *"Not as much, but I would see this as if we ever have a party, then we have to be aware of these things."*

Female, 19-year-old, Hong Kong

"I saw people in the swimming pool. Yeah. So, people fell down accidentally."

Female, 27-year-old, China

POSTERS



Most participants liked the look of the posters but were not sure what their message was.

Notably, participants with higher spoken English proficiency interpreted the posters more accurately than other participants.

"Actually [it's not clearly about water safety] until you probably read the whole entire thing."

Female, 19-year-old, Hong Kong

"It [poster 2] looks like it's for a club."

Female, 18-year-old, India

"it's [poster 2] not giving me you know, impression of okay we're talking about water or anything."

"[poster 3] 'It's not giving me a message.'"

Female, 18-year-old, Pakistan

Female, 18-year-old, Pakistan

For survey
participants, the
first thing that
came to mind
was...

Safety Live your life Mermaid
Mermate fish Enjoy life
Be careful before you go in the water
It's creative and trying to create awareness
They are glorifying drowning
Strange story Funny
Book covers

VIDEOS

Mermaid fish Learn to swim
Danger might occur Swimming
The effects of alcohol?
Not really relevant to drowning preventions
Fun way to advertise swimming precautions
Be careful before swimming
Come out of the water
Know how to swim

Key messages
described by
survey
participants
were ...

Live happy life *Be careful*
To practice safe practices *Be safe*
Life is once, spend it well
Do not go to beach
Swimming
Enjoy life **To be safe in water**

VIDEOS

Be safe around water
To engage in fun activities *Be safe*
Having fun when swimming
To be careful before swimming or getting into water
To prevent people from drowning and over drinking
advertising food and juice drinks
How to swim if you drowning
Unsafe Safe during swimming *Be safe*
Safety near water

Drowning prevention messaging for international students

Participants considered mainstream campaigns and the language used **not appropriate** for international students from South and East Asia, as well those with weaker conversational English skills, reading or comprehension.

TARGET GROUP INVOLVEMENT

Participants recommended that the target group and *'people who know the culture'* are involved in both the development and dissemination of messages to their communities. They identified the need for simple, grassroots activities to explain the importance of water safety to the community. They identified existing *'community meetings'*, *'online messaging groups'* and *'language schools'* as ways to involve parents and young people respectively.

USE IMAGES NOT WORDS ...

when developing new campaigns for multicultural audience, the participants believed we could work to limit *'language and cultural barriers'* by ensuring messages are simple and *'direct'* with clear cues to action.

Campaigns should rely on *'visuals'* rather than *'the actual words'* for international communities.

DELIVERY

Suggested strategies for water safety messages to international students included:

- collaborating with universities during orientation week and poster distribution.
- use of social media, specifically YouTube and Instagram.

One participant recommended putting information about water safety together with a resource highlighting water-based activities available in Perth.

"if I had [a resource] about water activities to do in Perth, and then safety [information] side by side, I would definitely go through everything"

Female, 18-year-old, India

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APPENDIX

Profile data

For this report, multiple data sources were synthesised to overview the profile of international students from CaLD backgrounds. The data sources are summarised in Table 1. Note that the data includes data specific to international students and temporary residents more broadly. Not all data was available by jurisdiction and/or country of birth.

Table 1: Data sources and links

Organisation	Source	Year	Data
Social Research Centre, Australian Government Department of Education	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching survey program, Student Experience Survey	2022	2022 commenced international students Australia wide; nationality; reasons for choosing to study in Australia; living arrangements
Australian Government Department of Education	International Students Monthly Summary – PRISMS extract of September 2023	2023	2019 – 2023 WA international student enrolments; nationality
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Temporary visa holders in Australia, Census 2021	2021	Temporary visa holders; age; location; country of birth; English proficiency; education; employment and income
Australian Government Department of Education	International Education Data and Research	2023	International students in Western Australia course enrolments
Australian Government Department of Education	International Graduate Outcomes Survey, 2018	2019	Indian and Chinese international student graduates in Australia

Who is the West Australian migrant population?

One-third of the Western Australian population was born overseas (32%), with the most common birthplaces being England (7.4%), New Zealand (2.8%) and India (2.3%) (1). Almost a quarter (17.5%) of WA residents were born in non-main English-speaking countries. Mandarin was the most commonly reported language spoken at home other than English (1.9%), followed by Italian (1%) and Vietnamese (0.9%) (1).

Among Chinese-born WA residents, 95.4% spoke another language other than English, with common languages including Mandarin (79.7%) and Cantonese (13.5%). Most Chinese-born WA residents reported no religious affiliation (n=21,890, 77.1%) (1).

WA residents born in India commonly reported speaking another language other than English (78.9%), with languages including Punjabi (24.7%), Hindi (15.2%) and Malayalam (11.4%). Approximately half of Indian-born WA residents reported their religious beliefs as Hinduism (43.9%), followed by Christianity (25.9%) and Sikhism (20.9%) (1).

Where do international students come from and what do they study?

India

International students from India are mostly male (61%, n=76,726; female n=49,069) (2). Most Indian are enrolled in either higher education (52% n=84,621) or VET (46%, n=74,920). Of those in higher education, the majority are completing a Masters Degree (Coursework) (59%, n=50,244) or a Bachelor degree (31%, n=26,119), with most studying in the field of management and commerce (34%, n= 29,095), information technology (25%, n=21,228) or health (12%, n=9,755). For those enrolled in VET, most are studying in the field of food, hospitality and personal services (34%, n=25,319), management and commerce (24%, n=17,870) or engineering and related technologies (16%, n=11,682) (2). Most common reasons for studying in Australia included 'personal safety and security' (98%), 'reputation of educational system' (97%), and 'cost of living' (97%) (3) (Table 2).

Table 2: International students' reasons for choosing to study in Australia country of birth (%)

	China %	India %	Hong Kong %	Sri Lanka %
Reputation of education system	89.1	97.3	88.9	96.8
Personal safety & security	94.1	98.3	93.8	98.0
Ability to work part-time	62.8	90.7	63.4	94.5
Opportunity to study in an English-speaking country	87.4	91.2	86.3	93.2
Having friends and family already in Australia	51.7	69.2	49.3	70.6
Chance to experience a new culture/lifestyle	86.9	93.8	83.7	91.3
Possibility of migrating to Australia	52.3	77.0	78.2	84.3
Weather/climate	68.5	80.0	71.1	69.2
Cost of living	88.5	97.1	90.8	97.0

Data sourced from the 2022 Student Experience Survey (3)

The majority of Indian temporary resident's self-reported speaking English 'only' (8%) or 'very well' (59%), with only five-percent reporting 'not well' (4%) or 'not at all' (1%) (4). (Table 3)

Bhutan

Almost all (95%) Bhutanese temporary residents reported speaking English very well or well. Just over half (54%, n=5,291 female and n=4,479 male) of international students are female (2). Almost 80% (n=7,656) of students are enrolled in higher education, with the same percentage enrolled in a Master's degree (n=6,099) (2). Almost half of students were in management and commerce (48%, n=3,641), followed by society and culture (17%, n=1,323) and information technology (11%, n=825) (2).

China

National 2023 data report an equal split of female (50%, n=83,238) and male (50%, n=82,743) Chinese students (2). Chinese international students are largely enrolled in higher education (74%, n=142,409), with the majority completing a Masters Degree (Coursework) (52%, n=74,183), Bachelor Degree (34%, n=47,814) or Doctoral Degree (4%, n=6,142). Of those enrolled in higher education, most are studying in the area of management and commerce (39%, n=55,051), followed by society and culture (13%, n=18,94) and information technology (12%, n=16,659). Other courses of study included ELICOS (10%, n=19,331) and VET (10%, n=18,441) (2). Most common reasons for studying in Australia included 'personal safety and security' (94%), 'reputation of educational system' (89%), 'cost of living' (88%), and 'opportunity to study in an English-speaking country' (87%) (3) (Table 2). Almost half of Chinese temporary resident's self-reported speaking English 'well' (47%), with almost a third self-reporting 'not well' (20%) or 'not at all' (8%) (4) (Table 3).

Table 3: Spoken English proficiency by country of birth among temporary residents.

	Speaks only English n (%)	Very well n (%)	Well n (%)	Not well n (%)	Not at all n (%)	Not stated n (%)	Total n (%)
China	2,224 (1.9)	24,746 (22.0)	53,170 (47.3)	22,558 (20.1)	9,359 (8.0)	426 (0.38)	112,471
India	15,284 (7.9)	113,682 (58.9)	52,744 (27.3)	7,863 (4.1)	2,722 (1.4)	876 (0.4)	193,177
Sri Lanka	2,449 (8.8)	12,695 (45.6)	10,190 (36.6)	2,086 (7.5)	295 (1.1)	109 (0.4)	27,828
Pakistan	1,629 (6.5)	13,444 (56.5)	7,269 (30.5)	1,115 (4.7)	230 (1.0)	114 (0.5)	23,802
Hong Kong	1,148 (9.9)	4,010 (34.4)	5,366 (46.1)	997 (8.5)	100 (0.9)	26 (0.2)	11,649
Bangladesh	859 (8.9)	5,414 (55.1)	2,875 (29.3)	545 (5.5)	104 (1.1)	26 (0.1)	9,820
Bhutan	306 (3.9)	5,340 (68.2)	2,106 (26.9)	46 (0.5)	15 (0.2)	26 (0.3)	7,835

Data sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics (4)

Western Australia

In WA, Indian international students contribute the highest proportion of international students (16.7%, n=11,045), with Bhutan (14.3%, n=9,487) and China (8.8%, n=5,875) comprising a significant number (5). International students in WA are mostly enrolled in higher education (i.e., university) and Vocational Education and Training (VETS) (2). Most students were enrolled in a Masters degree (coursework), a non-Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Awards course, or a Bachelors degree (2) (Table 4).

Table 4: International student enrolment study types in WA January - August 2023

Study type	Enrolment numbers
Higher education	32,788
Vocational education and training (VET)	19,623
English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS)	8,171
Non-award	2,551
Course type	Enrolment numbers
Master's degree (Coursework)	17,360
Non-AQF Award	10,718
Bachelor's degree	10,047
Diploma	7,596

Data sourced from Australian Government Department of Education (2)

Where do international students live, work and spend?

While in Australia, most Indian students had private accommodation (57%) or were living with parents (11%) (3). Most Chinese students had private accommodation (44%) or were living with parents (30%) while living in Australia (3) (Table 5). ABS census data (2021) report the median income of student visa holders as \$568 per week (4). Almost two-thirds (60%) of student visa holders in Australia weekly income lies between \$300-\$999 per week. Nearly one-quarter (16%) of respondents reported no weekly income. Two-thirds (64%) of students reported being employed (4) (Table 6). Research among international students exploring health related financial decision making reported that financial instability influenced hesitancy to spend on mental health services, socialising and food over education and urgent healthcare (6).

Table 5: Living arrangements among international students in Australia (%)

	University college or hall of residence %	Student house controlled by university %	Private hall or student hostel %	Private rented house/flat /room %	Homestay with a family %	Living with parents %	With friends or relatives %	Other %
China	9.7	7.4	7.9	57.3	1.7	10.5	4.2	1.4
India	8.7	4.0	3.9	44.0	6.0	29.5	2.9	1.1
Hong Kong	23.2	10.5	12.1	36.7	3.1	9.4	3.9	1.0
Sri Lanka	8.7	5.3	5.4	49.5	4.4	21.3	4.1	1.4

Data sourced from the 2022 Student Experience Survey (3)

Table 6: Weekly income among student visa holders in Australia

Income	n	%
Negative/nil	55,925	16.0
\$1-\$299	24,254	7.0
\$300-\$649	122,654	35.2
\$650-\$999	88,190	25.0
\$1000-\$1499	39,938	11.5
\$1500-\$1999	7,529	2.0
\$2000-\$2999	2,254	0.7
\$3000 or more	1,038	0.3
Not stated	6,775	2.0
Total	348,556	100

Data sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics (4)

What is the future forecast?

Nationally, 896,960 international students were enrolled in 2023; comprised mostly of students from China (159,484) and India (122,391) (5). Easing of COVID-19 restrictions has seen the re-emergence of Western Australia as a study location for international students. 66,260 international students were enrolled to study in Western Australia in 2023 (5), higher than pre-COVID-19 numbers (Table 7).

Table 7: International student enrolments in WA by nationality (n)

	India	Bhutan	China	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Hong Kong	Bangladesh	Other	Total
2023	11,045	9,487	5,857	4,858	1,478	1,430	1,179	39,871	66,260
2022	7,797	2,296	4,908	2,157	895	1,236	419	24,878	39,879
2021	7,729	1,725	5,598	1,800	842	1,215	312	23,963	39,015
2020	8,548	2,180	6,819	1,837	902	1,201	323	29,621	47,168
2019	8,286	2,077	7,941	1,545	803	1,313	277	31,353	49,657

Data sourced from Australian Government Department of Education (5)

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