

# Towards a water-loving nation free from drowning: The role of learn to swim

## Australian children are missing out on learn to swim

Learning to swim is critical for all Australians to be safe around water, but despite the supports offered, some Australians miss out on learn to swim education or, despite participating in lessons, fail to achieve the National Swimming and Water Safety Benchmarks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded this issue, with close to two years of swimming lessons disrupted and an estimated 10 million lessons cancelled. Now, due to cost-of-living pressures and staff shortages, the return of Australians into learn to swim is slower than is necessary to facilitate a sufficient 'catch-up' of learn to swim.

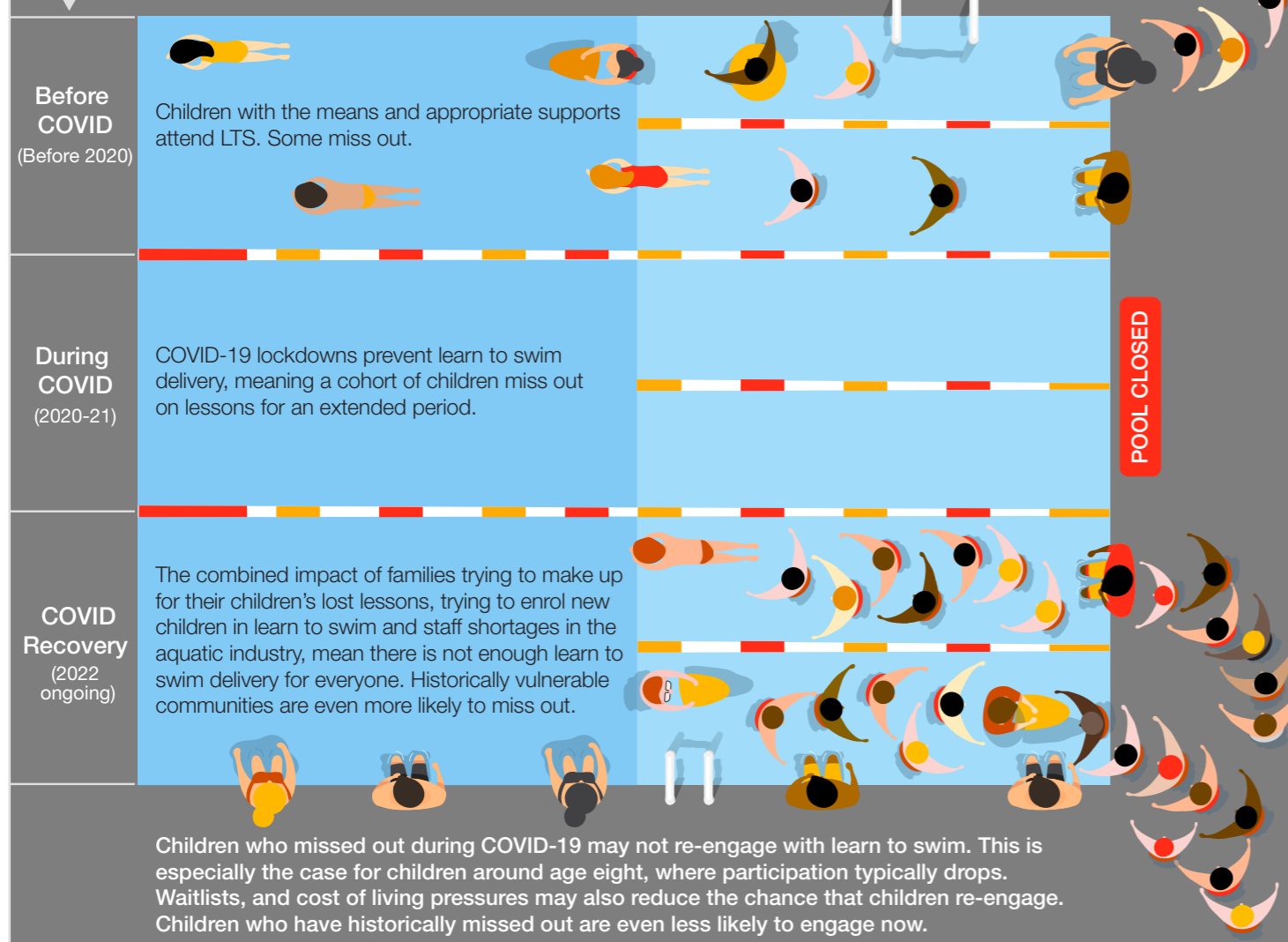


**More than 40 per cent of children leave primary school unable to achieve the minimum National Swimming and Water Safety Benchmarks.**



**Long wait lists for lessons and high cost of living pressures are current key risks to swimming skill attainment. These are likely to have long-term impacts on drowning rates, without significant intervention.**

### Illustrative example of the impacts of COVID-19 on learn to swim.



## Towards an Australia where everybody learns to swim

Our assessment of the learn to swim ecosystem and the outcomes it delivers presents a range of findings and associated opportunities for further consideration by stakeholders.

	Relevant findings	Identified opportunity
Access pathways	1.1 Programs targeted to high drowning risk groups are emerging, but not yet established.	Implement expanded and nationally-available targeted programs, funding or grants, focusing on groups at a higher risk of drowning.  Explore partnerships and market based solutions to maximise access to water safety education.
	2.1 Children are very likely to disengage from formal learn to swim education by age eight, and hence miss the opportunity to achieve the Benchmarks.	Explore incentives and funding which support greater retention and participation in swimming lessons for children aged between eight and 14, and to reach the cohort who missed out entirely due to COVID-19.
	2.2 Due to COVID-19, two years of swimming lessons have been disrupted for a cohort of students, who are now at risk of disengaging with swimming lessons.	Explore programs and education initiatives that increase parent and child engagement in preschool water safety programs, and increase access to primary school learn to swim education.
	3.1 School and early engagement programs can enable access for many Australian children who would otherwise face financial barriers to learn to swim education.	Embed consistent data collection and open reporting into government funded learn to swim programs, allowing more effective program evaluation and developing a broad dataset on Australian childrens' swimming ability.
Delivery providers	4.1 Data on and evaluation of program success are not standardised or widely available.	Consider incentives for learn to swim operators to provide services for groups at a higher risk of drowning, and for older children who have not achieved the benchmarks and who require greater pool space.
	5.1 Commercial delivery generally targets areas and population groups with high demand for learn to swim education.	Explore opportunities to increase the availability of swimming teachers, such as employment pathway programs, funding training and ensuring mutual recognition of qualifications and licenses domestically (between States and Territories) and internationally.
	5.2 There are some examples of collaboration between commercial and public learn to swim operators, such as tendered management.	
	6.1 Remote and regional learn to swim delivery is sparsely available during out of season months.	
	6.2 The aquatic industry is reporting acute labour shortages, which impact the availability and cost of lessons.	
	7.1 Swimming and water safety education is not always delivered in alignment with the National Benchmarks.	Assess the benefits and costs of potential reforms or incentives which promote greater alignment between learn to swim curricula and the Benchmarks.
	7.2 Inconsistent evaluation and data reporting are contributing to lower national achievement of the Benchmarks.	
Infrastructure	7.3 Australian swim teaching certifications are recognised globally for quality and safety.	
	8.1 Australia has a strong portfolio of public aquatic facilities, although there are challenges emerging.	Assess the need for state and national level strategic aquatic infrastructure planning to ensure sufficient infrastructure is maintained and developed to meet the needs of Australia's growing population.
	9.1 Challenges exist to ensure regional and remote communities have access to aquatic infrastructure.	Increase aquatic facility access in regional communities, particularly remote Aboriginal communities. This may include cost-effective incremental investments, such as staffing, employment pathway programs or water heaters for summer-only facilities.
	10.1 Privately-owned learn to swim facilities are often lower cost and smaller scale, and hence more responsive to demand. However, they often have less sophisticated facilities, which are not purpose built to teach swimming to a wide range of participants.	Consider options to address deficiencies in private learn to swim infrastructure, such as partnerships with better-equipped public facilities.
	11.1 Public and private partnership on aquatic infrastructure development is rare.	Explore the potential of private-public partnerships and outcome-based funding of commercial aquatics facilities in order to enhance the impact of the private sector, and more effectively serve high-risk communities.

### Find out more:

#### Our full report considers:

1. The benefits unlocked by learn to swim
2. The current gaps in Australia's swimming ability
3. The current state of Australia's learn to swim ecosystem
4. Opportunities to work towards an Australia where everyone learns to swim



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