NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT 2025

357

people drowned in Australian waterways

ROYAL LIFE SAVING AUSTRALIA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

SURF LIFE SAVING

SNAPSHOT 1 JULY 2024 TO 30 JUNE 2025

357
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ **27%** increase

281
10-Year Average

1.31
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

↑ **17%** increase

1.12
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

81%
OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS WERE MALES

33%
WERE ADULTS AGED 65 YEARS AND OLDER

32%
PEOPLE WHO DROWNED WERE BORN OVERSEAS*

TOP 3 LOCATIONS

28% River/Creek

23% Beach

11% Ocean/Harbour

TOP 3 ACTIVITIES

24% Swimming & Recreating

10% Unintentional fall into water

9% Boating

*Based on cases where country of birth was known (53%)

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FOREWORD

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The National Drowning Report 2025 presents a comprehensive analysis of fatal drowning incidents across Australia between 1st July 2024 and 30th June 2025. This 31st edition is the third report produced by Royal Life Saving Society - Australia, in partnership with Surf Life Saving Australia. By working together, we aim to create efficiencies, remove confusion over differing data, and maximise our impact on community awareness and policy action.

Lives, not numbers

We are mindful that the National Drowning Report reflects much more than numbers. For many families, communities, witnesses, and those who attempted rescues, these numbers represent the stories of real people, lost to drowning.

This report is designed to support the development and implementation of evidence-informed approaches to water safety and drowning prevention. We seek to advocate and collaborate to reduce the devastating impacts of drowning on our community.

After many years in decline, drowning rates are increasing.

In the past year, 357 people lost their lives to drowning, a tragic figure representing a 27% increase compared to the 10-year average. This is the highest reported number of drowning deaths since our records began in 1996.

Despite long-term success in reducing drowning rates over the past three decades, this trend appears to be reversing.

The increase is being driven by three main factors:

1. Exposure to water is evolving

Australians are exploring new and less crowded places to swim or spend time near water, often venturing further into national parks and regional areas. Climate change is shifting weather patterns, and changes in work and leisure are encouraging people to spend more time around water, earlier or later in the day, and further into autumn. Our increasingly diverse population brings more complex community vulnerabilities. As our exposure to water changes, so too must our approaches to surveillance, rescue, and education. It is critical that lifesaving services are equipped and resourced to keep pace with these evolving patterns.

2. Swimming skills are in rapid decline

Swimming skills are critical for safety and enjoyment but appear to be in rapid decline and are potentially at their lowest point since the widespread adoption of school-based programs in the 1970s. Many families struggle to access or sustain private swimming lessons, and schools often cannot provide the same level of instruction they once did. Even when children start lessons earlier, financial and other pressures mean many families stop before their children gain vital lifesaving skills. Reversing this decline requires sustained action so all children and adolescents, regardless of background, have equitable access.

3. One in three drowning deaths is a person aged over 65 years

Australians over 65 are increasingly vulnerable to drowning, now representing more than a third of all fatal drownings nationally (33% in 2024/25). This rising risk reflects a more active ageing population, with many enjoying water recreation, boating, or simply spending time near water. Factors such as reduced strength, mobility changes, medical conditions, and use of multiple medications all heighten drowning vulnerability. Unexpected falls and swimming alone are common scenarios for this age group. Many older adults underestimate their risk, lacking current water safety skills and knowledge.

Further insights from the National Drowning Report

Drowning fatalities in young children continue to decrease

Reducing drowning in children aged 0-4 years is our greatest long-term success, with deaths decreasing again this year to 21% below the 10-year average. Legislative changes, environmental redesign (e.g. pool fencing), public awareness, and education have combined to turn around what was once described as a national disgrace.

Drowning rates rise rapidly with adolescence

The lowest rates of drowning occur in children aged ten, but rates rise rapidly over the next decade of life, peaking at age 20. This reflects increasing independence and a shift from recreation under parental supervision to time spent with peers, often choosing locations and activities away from lifeguarded areas at beaches or pools.

Most age groups above 45 years have increased drowning rates

Drowning deaths in every age group 45 years and older were above the 10-year average. The highest drowning rates were recorded in the 75 years and older age group, which saw a 63% increase from the 10-year average.

Increases were widespread, affecting nearly all locations

All locations, except for ocean/harbour sites and lakes/dams, recorded increases in drowning deaths compared to the 10-year average. Notably, incidents on rocks rose by 41%, in rivers and creeks by 39%, and at beaches by 30%. This reinforces the need for consistent messaging to ensure people are prepared before visiting these locations.

Drowning in holiday periods remains elevated

December and January were especially tragic, accounting for 30% of drowning deaths this year. Drowning deaths in April almost doubled compared to the 10-year average for April (41 versus 21 deaths). Many people travel to unfamiliar locations during holidays. Nearly a quarter of all drowning deaths occurred 50km or more from the person's home.

Inequities exist in drowning fatalities

People who reside in low socio-economic locations (deciles 1–4) are much more likely to drown than those living in more advantaged areas, as are people living in regional areas compared to cities. Country of birth was known in 53% of drowning deaths, and one-third of those were known to be migrants. This burden may be even greater, especially considering length of time in Australia and higher drowning rates among children of migrants.

Drowning increased in most states

Significant increases in drowning were recorded in South Australia (71%), Queensland (36%), Western Australia, and New South Wales (30%). The Northern Territory and Tasmania experienced reductions, although small numbers can affect per cent change calculations.

What are we doing about the problem?

Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 Update

2025 marks the mid-point of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 (AWSS), and it seems we are not on track to achieve our aspirations in many areas.

Extensive data analysis and stakeholder consultation are underway. We are focusing on the priorities that matter most for our goal of reducing drowning by 50% by 2030. We are streamlining priorities and have elevated three national imperatives that will have widespread impacts and boost the likelihood of achieving long-term reductions.

Three National Imperatives

Strengthening swimming and water safety skills for all

A lack of swimming and water safety skills, particularly among children and young people, remains a key vulnerability that increases drowning risk. Specific hazards, such as unpredictable currents, deep and open water, and unfamiliar aquatic environments, further compound these risks. Reversing this trend is imperative.

Localising water safety efforts

All drowning is fundamentally local, with impacts felt most deeply by families, friends, neighbours, first responders, and others within the community. To reduce drowning nationally, we must focus locally. Local water safety coalitions and plans, which bring energy, commitment, resources, and local knowledge, must be the foundation of our efforts.

Aligning policies and partnerships for change

Reducing drowning demands united, whole-of-society action, spanning all levels of government and sectors, especially those able to integrate drowning prevention into existing programs. Aligning policies and initiatives from Canberra to State, Territory, and Local Governments, and extending them all the way to the community pool, beach, or riverbank, is vital. This joined-up approach is essential to scaling up evidence-informed strategies and ensuring they reach those most at risk.

Water safety advice

Following simple water safety advice can, and does, save lives:

- Always supervise children in, on, and around water.
- Learn swimming, water safety, and lifesaving skills.
- Wear a lifejacket when boating, rock fishing, or paddling.
- Swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs around water.
- Know the conditions; check the weather.

We urge you to join us in sharing water safety messages. Together, we can all prevent drowning.

UNDERSTANDING DROWNING AND HOW TO APPROACH THIS REPORT

This brief section provides an overview of drowning and some guidance on how to approach the data presented in this report. For detailed information on data sources and methods used, please see the methods section on page 96.

What is drowning?

The globally accepted medical definition of drowning is: *The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion or immersion in liquid.* [2] Importantly, there are three outcomes for a person who experiences drowning: death, survival with morbidity, or survival with no morbidity. [2] Terms such as "near-drowning," "secondary drowning," and "wet/dry drowning" are no longer used.

Fatal and non-fatal drowning

This National Drowning Report includes information on fatal drowning only, that is, people who die from submersion or immersion in water. However, the burden of drowning is not limited to deaths alone.

Each year, hundreds of non-fatal drowning events occur in Australia which have a range of outcomes. Sometimes the person who drowns and survives might only need to visit a clinic or hospital for a check. In other instances, non-fatal drowning events result in permanent, life-altering neurological disability that severely impacts the person who drowns, their family, community, and caregivers.

The exact number of non-fatal drowning incidents is difficult to report with precision, which is why improving data systems for non-fatal drowning is a key activity in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. [1]

Understanding this year in context

This report often presents data from the current 2024/25 time period in comparison to a 10-year average. By looking at historical patterns, we can see how this year measures up to what we would expect from previous years, where numbers and rates have increased or decreased, and how the distribution of cases may be changing across different categories.

Throughout the different sections of this report, 2024/25 counts and rates are presented alongside the percent change as an increase or decrease from the 10-year average. This percent-change measure is helpful to understand the magnitude of difference for this year, but with small number counts sometimes can seem drastic. Take note when you see percentage changes from a small number of deaths.

The following sections also include several graphics that show breakdowns by the proportion of drowning deaths in a particular group compared to the 10-year average. These figures give an indication of how the distribution of cases this year align or differ with what we have seen historically over the last decade.

Understanding counts, proportions and rates

When analysing drowning data, counts, proportions and rates are frequently presented to offer different perspectives. Each of these measures are useful but serve a distinct purpose. Counts represent the number of drowning events that occur within a given time frame, geographic location, and/or subgroup. Counts are useful for understanding the scope of the problem, communication about the burden, and for determining the required capacity and scale of services or programs.

While useful for discussing the absolute number of people affected, comparing counts between subgroups, such as age or a geographic region, can make understanding the context of that subgroup challenging. Sometimes it is helpful to examine the data as a proportion of drowning deaths instead. Percentages are often easier to understand and communicate in context, and they allow for simple comparisons between different groups that vary in the number of cases. Note that throughout the report, proportions are rounded to whole numbers for presentation purposes and therefore may not add to exactly 100%.

While counts and proportions offer important information, drowning rates, presented here as crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents, consider the size of the population at risk. Rates are especially useful for making comparisons between groups or locations and identifying high-risk populations to guide prevention efforts.

Comparing counts alone may be misleading because larger populations are more likely to have higher drowning counts simply due to their size. By using rates, we can compare the drowning burden across populations that vary in size, allowing us to identify groups that are disproportionately affected by drowning and should therefore be considered a priority for prevention efforts.

The different sections in this report includes counts, proportions and rates. Be sure to take note which type of measure you are looking at.

National Fatal Drowning Dashboard

The Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database Dashboard is a public-facing interactive platform where users can query information from the Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database. The National Fatal Drowning Database features detailed variables on the circumstances of all unintentional drowning deaths that have occurred in Australian waterways since 1 July 2002. The Dashboard shows data published in this and previous National Drowning Reports, updated to reflect the most recently available information. Users may build custom graphics with fatal drowning counts or rates per 100,000 population, and a variety of filters. Updates to the dashboard primarily occur upon publication of the National Drowning Report, and periodically throughout the year as additional information becomes available.

Access to the Dashboard is free and highly encouraged for anyone interested in exploring Australian drowning data more in detail. For more information, scan the QR code below or visit: **https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/data**

SECTION ONE: People - Who drowns?

SECTION ONE: People - Who drowns?

Drowning prevention strategies are most effective when tailored to specific populations and age groups. This National Drowning Report provides details on the people who drowned in 2024/25 to improve understanding of who is at an increased risk and ultimately to help prioritise and direct prevention efforts. This section includes insights on drowning by age group, socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, remoteness of home residence, and country of birth.

INSIGHTS BY AGE GROUPS

Young Children 0-4 years
reported a drowning rate of 0.99 per 100,000 population, a 20% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 1.23 per 100,000 population. The sustained decrease in fatal drowning among this age group over the last two decades is encouraging, however it still remains too high.

↓ **20%**
DECREASE COMPARED TO THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN 0-4 YEARS

Drowning among children 5-14 years
reported a drowning rate of 0.33 per 100,000 population, a 6% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 0.35 per 100,000 population. Most drowning deaths in this age group resulted from swimming and recreating, reinforcing the need for swimming and water safety skills and knowledge to assist in unexpected situations.

↓ **6%**
DECREASE COMPARED TO THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR CHILDREN 5-14 YEARS

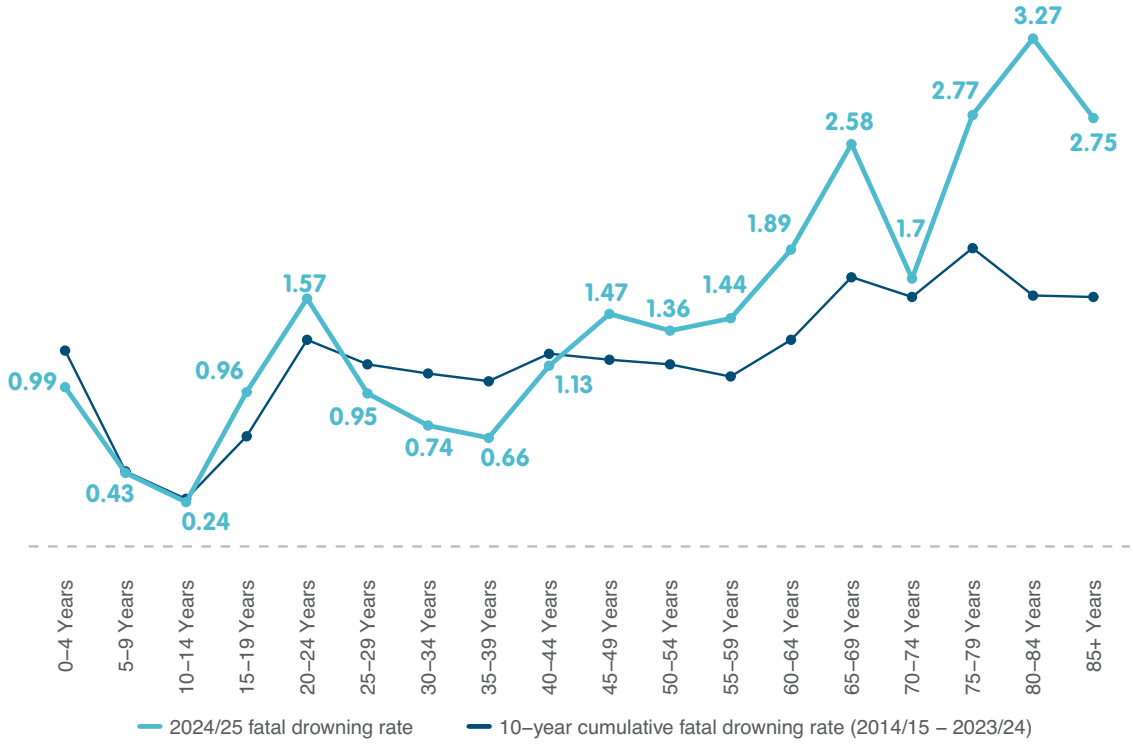
People aged 15-24 years
reported a drowning rate of 1.28 per 100,000 population, a 28% increase compared to the 10-year average of 1.00 per 100,000 population. Nearly a quarter (22%) of drowning deaths in this age group occurred 50km or further away from where the person lived, and 23% occurred in January. This suggests that people in this age group may be travelling to unfamiliar locations and environments during the summer and may be unaware or complacent of the water hazards and conditions where they are visiting.

↑ **28%**
INCREASE COMPARED TO THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR PEOPLE AGED 15-24 YEARS

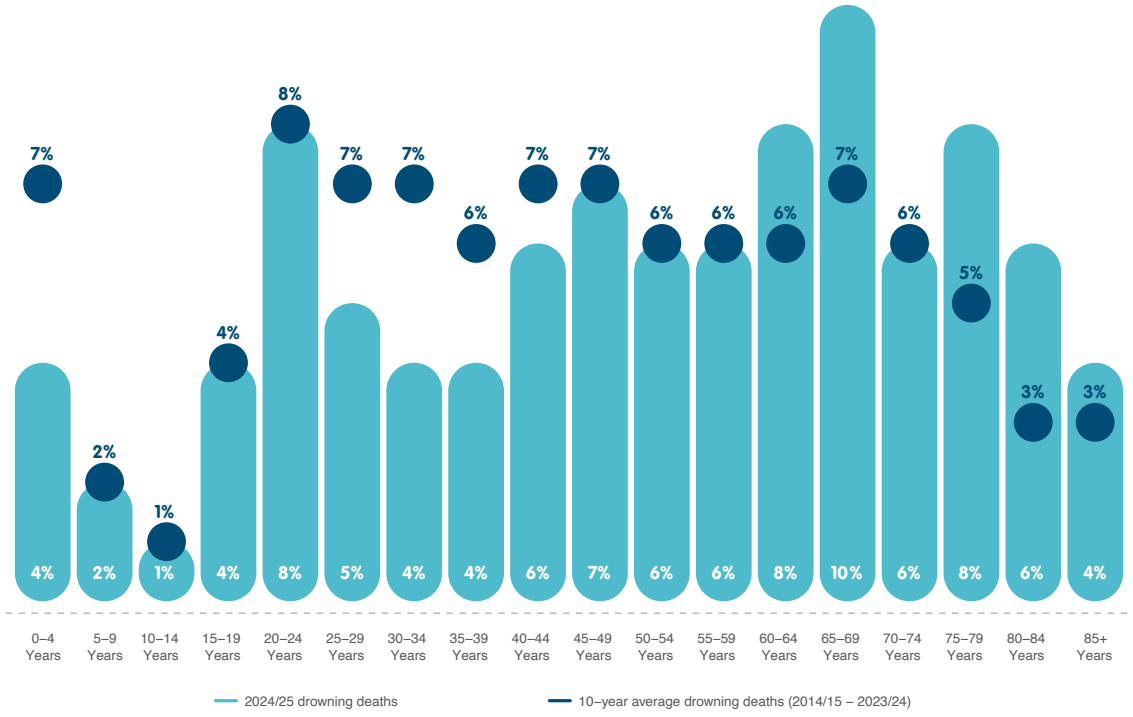
People aged 65 years and over
reported the highest numbers, proportions and rates of drowning in most states/territories, except Victoria. There has been a steady increase in drowning events among older age groups since 2017/18. This year, those aged 65+ years recorded the highest drowning rate of 2.51 per 100,000 of all ages groups, an increase of 48% on the 10-year average. Promoting swimming and water safety skills and prioritising tailored prevention interventions in this age group is a major priority.

↑ **48%**
INCREASE COMPARED TO THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR PEOPLE AGED 65+ YEARS

2024/25 fatal age-specific drowning rate compared to 10-year average fatal age-specific drowning rate in 5-year age bands



2024/25 Number of drowning deaths by 5-year age groups compared with the 10-year average



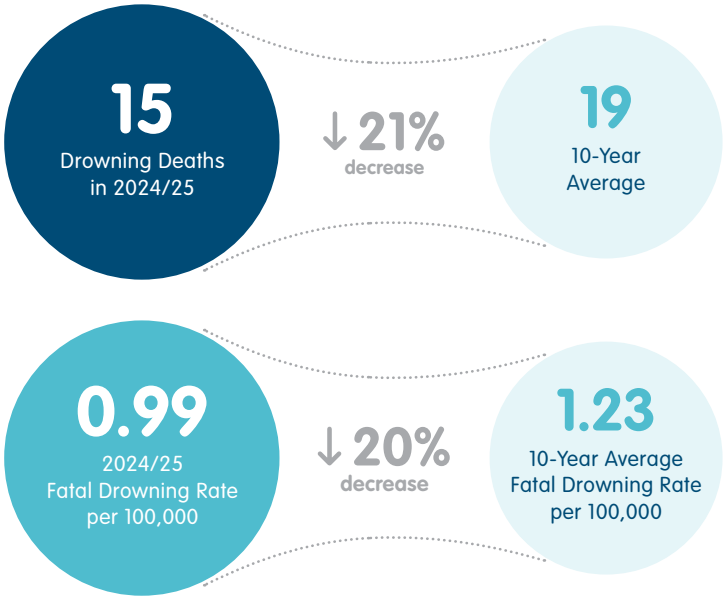
INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **CHILDREN AGED 0-4 YEARS**

Fatal drowning numbers and rates for children aged 0-4 years have reduced in recent years. Drowning deaths in the 0-4 year age group represented 4% of all drowning cases in 2024/25; 21% decrease from the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of the 0-4 year age group in 2024/25 also decreased by 20% compared to the 10-year average.

60% of all drowning deaths in this age group were males. Children aged 1-year accounted for the highest number of drowning deaths in this age group this year, with six 1-year-olds dying from drowning.

13% of drowning deaths among children 0-4 occurred in the home environment, most commonly in a swimming pool. The majority of drowning deaths occurred in a swimming pool (53%), with lakes/dams the second leading location (27%). The leading activity prior to drowning was an unintentional fall into water (53%) followed by swimming and recreating (13%). This year there were no drowning deaths that occurred in a bathtub for this age group.

Successful decreases in drowning number and rates in this age group have occurred over the years due to increased public awareness and education, advocacy and research, government policy and enforcement [4]. However, this age group remains a priority area in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. Clear and effective drowning prevention measures for this age group exist, [5] and continued focus is required to maintain the successful trends observed over the past two decades [14].



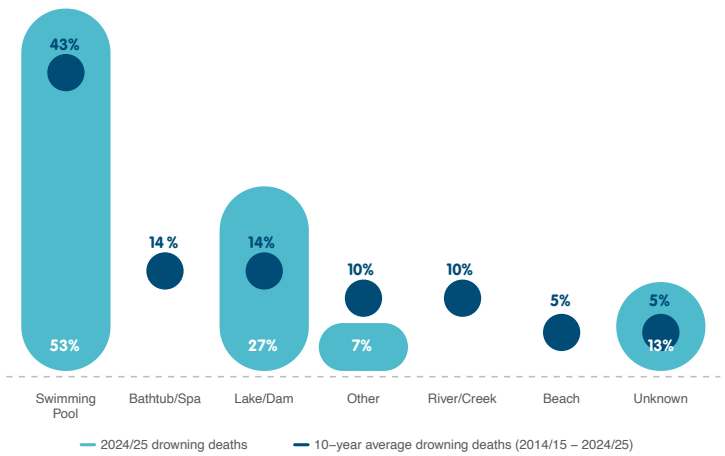
Drowning deaths of children aged 0-4 years by activity, 2024/25

53% Unintentional fall into water

33% Unknown

13% Swimming and recreating

Drowning deaths of children aged 0-4 years by location, 2024/25



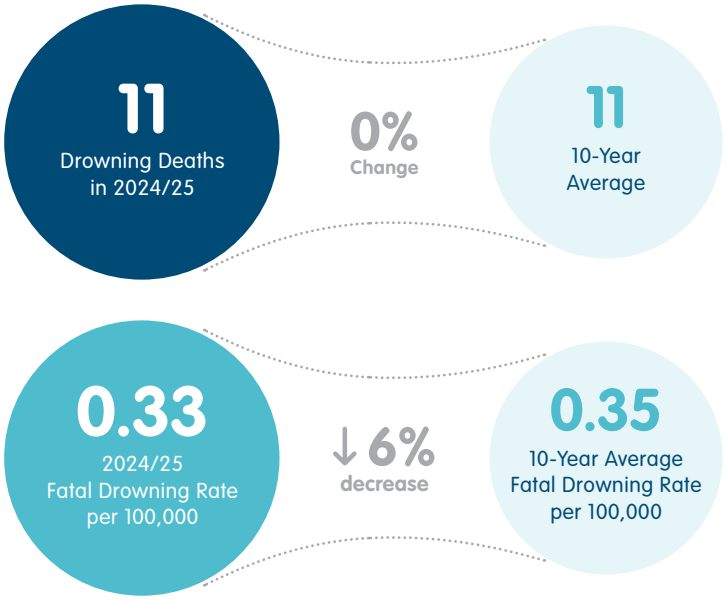
INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **CHILDREN AGED 5-14 YEARS**

Drowning deaths in the 5–14 year age group represented 3% of drowning cases in 2024/25. The number of drowning deaths did not change when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 0.33 per 100,000 population, also decreased by 6% compared to the 10-year average.

Almost two-thirds of drowning deaths were males (63%). By single year, children aged 5 years recorded the highest number of drowning deaths.

Drowning deaths in this age group most frequently occurred in rivers/creeks (55%) and happened as a result when swimming and recreating (55%) or from an unintentional fall into water (36%).

The majority (54%) of drowning deaths among this age group occurred during the summer months, which falls within the peak school holiday period, and 54% occurred on the weekend, indicating potentially less supervision and when families may be travelling or going away on holidays. That drowning deaths in this age group were frequently the result of swimming and recreating reinforces the need for updating swimming and water safety skills and water safety knowledge, to assist in unexpected situations and in unfamiliar locations.



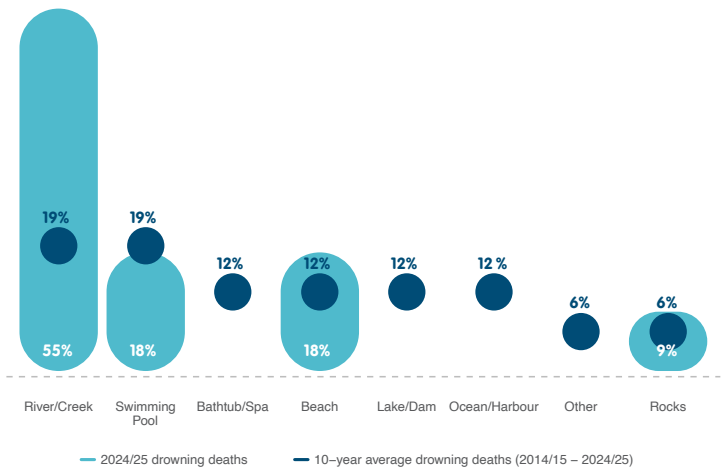
Drowning deaths of children aged 5-14 years by activity, 2024/25

55% Swimming and recreating

36% Unintentional fall into water

9% Unknown

Drowning deaths of children aged 5-14 years by location, 2024/25



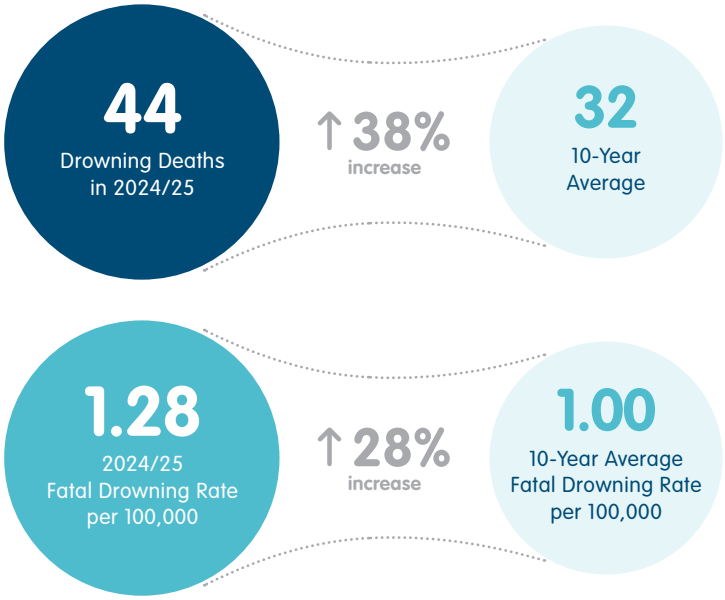
INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-24 YEARS**

Drowning deaths in the 15–24 year age group represented 12% of all drowning cases in 2024/25. The number of drowning deaths increased by 38% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 1.28 per 100,000 population, also increased by 28% compared to the 10-year average.

This financial year recorded the highest number of drowning deaths and drowning rates for this age group in the previous five years (since 2018/19 n=44, 1.24 per 100,000 population).

Drowning deaths in this age group were mostly among males (93%). Those aged 22 years recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in this age group (n=7).

Drowning deaths most frequently occurred at a rivers/creeks (39%) followed by a beach (20%). The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (41%) followed by an unintentional fall into water (14%).



Drowning deaths of young people aged 15-24 years by activity, 2024/25

41% Swimming and recreating

14% Unintentional fall into water

7% Non-aquatic transport

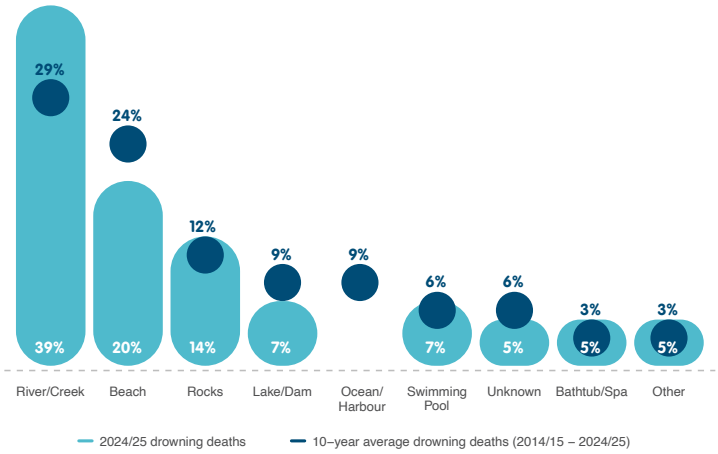
5% Jumped in

5% Rock fishing

5% Swept in

5% Unknown

Drowning deaths of young people aged 15-24 years by location, 2024/25



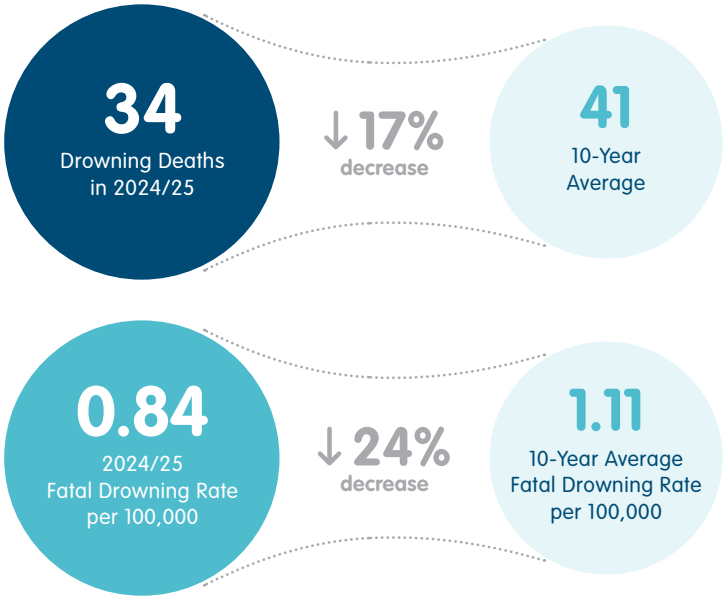
INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **ADULTS AGED 25-34 YEARS**

Drowning deaths in the 25–34 year age group represented 10% of total drowning deaths in 2024/25.

The was total of 34 drowning deaths, a 17% decrease compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 0.84 per 100,000 population, decreased by 24% compared to the 10-year average.

Males accounted for 94% per cent of drowning deaths in this age group. Those aged 26 years recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in this age group (n=7).

The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (24%). The majority of drowning deaths in this age group occurred at rivers/creeks locations (50%) followed by rocks (15%).



Drowning deaths of adults aged 25-34 years by activity, 2024/25

24% Swimming and recreating

12% Rock fishing

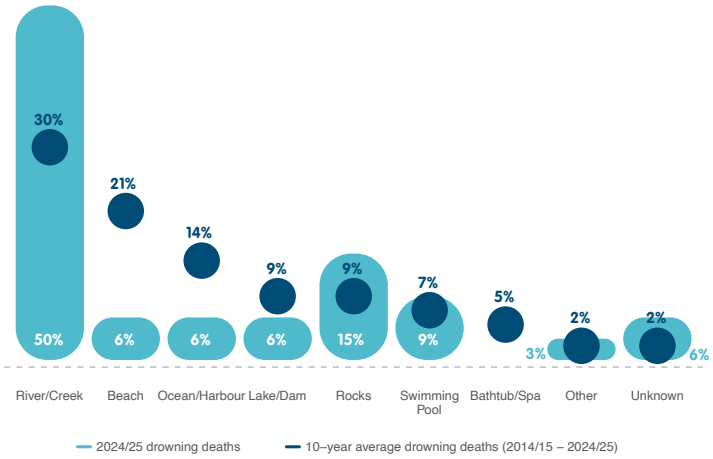
9% Non-aquatic transport

9% Unintentional fall into water

6% Attempted rescue

35% Unknown

Drowning deaths of adults aged 25-34 years by location, 2024/25



INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **ADULTS AGED 35-49 YEARS**

Drowning deaths in the 35-49 year age group represented 17% of total drowning deaths in 2024/25. The number of drowning deaths increased by 4% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 1.06 per 100,000 population, also decrease by 5% compared to the 10-year average.

Males accounted for 83% of drowning deaths in this age group. Those aged 45 years recorded the highest number of deaths overall with 10 fatalities (equal to those aged 63 years).

The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (16%). The highest number of drowning deaths occurred at beaches (33%), followed by rivers/creeks (24%). Almost a quarter (22%) of drowning deaths in this age group occurred 100km or further away from where the person lived.

58
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 4% increase

56
10-Year Average

1.06
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

↓ 5% decrease

1.11
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

Drowning deaths of adults aged 35-49 years by activity, 2024/25

16% Swimming and recreating

10% Diving/snorkelling

9% Attempted rescue

9% Rock fishing

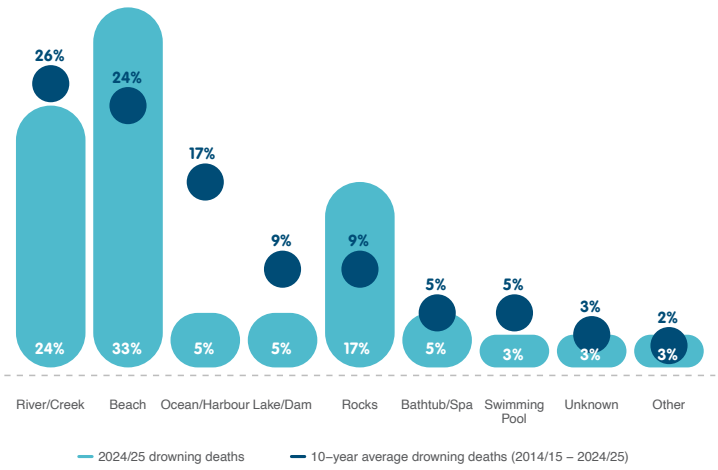
7% Watercraft

5% Boating

5% Swept in

24% Unknown

Drowning deaths of adults aged 34-49 years by location, 2024/25



INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **ADULTS AGED 50-64 YEARS**

Drowning deaths in the 50-64 year age group represented 21% of total drowning deaths in 2024/25. The number of drowning deaths increased by 42% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 1.56 per 100,000 population also increased by 34% compared to the 10-year average.

Males accounted for 84% of drowning deaths in this age group. Those aged 63 years recorded the highest number of deaths with 10 drowning fatalities (along with people aged 45 years).

The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (15%), followed by boating (11%) and diving/snorkelling (11%). Drowning deaths in this age group most frequently occurred at rivers/creeks (27%) followed by beaches (26%). One quarter (25%) of drowning deaths occurred within 5km of where the person lived, including in their home environment.

74
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 42% increase

52
10-Year Average

1.56
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

↑ 34% increase

1.16
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

Drowning deaths of adults aged 50-64 years by activity, 2024/25

15% Swimming and recreating

11% Boating

11% Diving/snorkelling

9% Watercraft

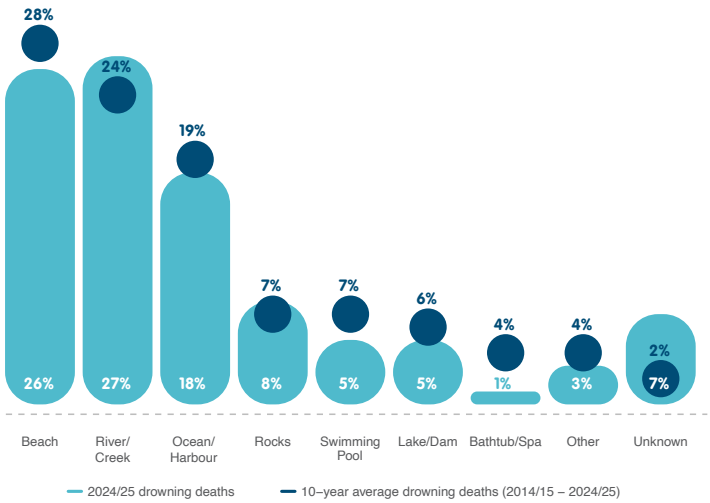
9% Non-aquatic transport

5% Unintentional fall into water

3% Other

26% Unknown

Drowning deaths of adults aged 50-64 years by location, 2024/25



INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: **OLDER PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER**

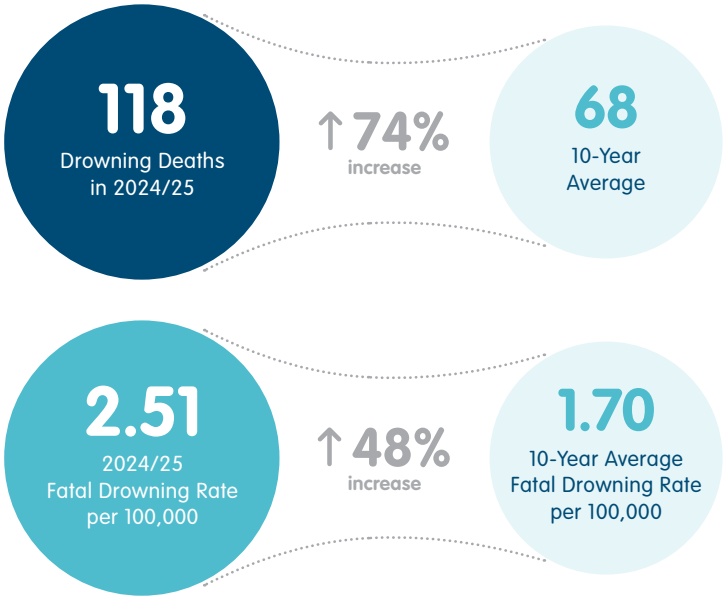
Drowning deaths in this age group represented 33% of total drowning deaths in 2024/25, a proportion that has increased steadily over the last decade from 19% in 2014/15.

The number of drowning deaths increased by 74% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 2.51 per 100,000 population also increased by 48% compared to the 10-year average.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 acknowledges people over 65 years as a priority age group for drowning prevention, and identifies areas in which water safety awareness, swimming skills, and campaigns around medical check-ups and fall prevention, need to be implemented to promote and strengthen water safety behaviour [1].

Males accounted for 84% of all drowning deaths of people aged 65+ years. Those aged 66 and 78 years respectively recorded the highest number of deaths in this age group (9 fatalities each).

Drowning deaths in this age group occurred mainly at beaches (26%) followed by rivers/creeks (19%). Swimming and recreating were the leading activity prior to drowning (28%) followed by boating (14%). Interestingly, drowning in this age group most commonly occurred mid-week, on a Tuesday (17%) and Monday (15%), a departure from patterns observed in other age groups. Almost one quarter (23%) of drowning deaths occurred within 5km of where the person lived, including their home environment.



Drowning deaths of older people aged 65+ years by activity, 2024/25

28% Swimming and recreating

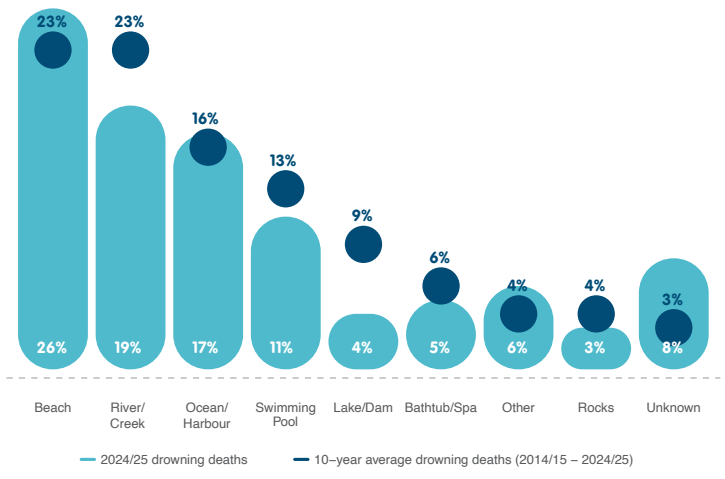
14% Boating

8% Diving/snorkelling

8% Non-aquatic transport

6% Unintentional fall into water

Downing deaths of older people aged 65+ years by location, 2024/25



OLDER ADULTS SNAPSHOT

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 identifies older adults as a priority population for drowning prevention (1). Similar trends observed in other developed countries; Australia's population is aging due to declining fertility rates and increase life expectancy (6).

Between 2000 and 2020, the proportion of Australians aged 65 years and over increased from 12.4% to 16.3%, with growth observed across all states and territories (7). In addition, we see a more active older population compared to previous generations, with aquatic activities being a recommended and preferred form of exercise for those with limited mobility. This demographic shift highlights the growing national importance of addressing health and injury prevention among older Australians (7).

Between 2005/06 to 2024/25 there were 1273 drowning deaths in those over the age of 65-years. Highest number of drowning deaths occurred in those age 66-years, with 81 drowning deaths.

There was no statistically significant change over the 20 years, however, drowning deaths were found to increase by 8% per year as of 2019.

- **53%** of drowning deaths occurred in the 65-74 year age group
- **84%** were males
- **58%** had a pre-existing medical condition
- **25%** of drowning deaths occurred in a River/Creek
- **22%** occurred while swimming and recreating

OLDER ADULTS DROWNING ANALYSIS, 2005/06 TO 2024/25

65-74 YEARS

677 Count

1.73 Rate per 100,000

22% River/Creek

22% Swimming and recreating

74-84 YEARS

443 Count

1.95 Rate per 100,000

26% River/Creek

23% Unintentional fall into water

85+ YEARS

153 Count

1.77 Rate per 100,000

31% River/Creek

30% Unintentional fall into water

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

The Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is a score assigned to geographic areas by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. [3] While a simplification of the realities Australians face every day, the score summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households to provide a relative measure of disadvantage (lower score) and advantage (higher score).

The resident areas of people who drowned in 2024/25 were more or less evenly distributed across the socio-economic spectrum, 15% from the most disadvantaged areas (decile 1-2) versus 22% from the most advantaged areas (decile 9-10), noting 23% of deaths were unable to be classified by the time of publication. However, the drowning rates per 100,000 population show that those who live in the most advantaged areas drown at lower rates. Of note, greater proportions of the children and adolescents under the age of 14 years who drowned this year were from disadvantaged areas compared to those in older age cohorts.

We know that low socio-economic populations experience inequities in accessing public aquatic facilities and swimming and water safety education programs. For further reading, see the research and policy highlight section at the end of report.

Swimming Skills for everyone

Royal Life Saving Australia research reports that people living in lower socio-economic areas, and those in regional areas are less likely to have access to swimming pools and swimming lessons. (8,9)

- One in ten children aged 5-14 years have never attended swimming lessons in any form, most are from low socio-economic backgrounds and those living in regional locations.
- Schools in remote locations had to travel further to a swimming pool (25% to a pool 26km or further).
- 31% of schools did not offer a learn to swim program, over half cited the cost of lessons and one-third cited costs of travel to the pool as barriers to delivering a school swimming program.
- One in ten children aged 5–14 years have never attended a swimming lesson.

This research highlights that the disparities in children's access to swimming and water safety education, particularly for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and living in regional areas, are creating a significant impact on skill development and widen the gap between those who can confidently swim and those who remain at risk. This increases the likelihood of drowning incidents and limits opportunities for safe participation in aquatic activities.

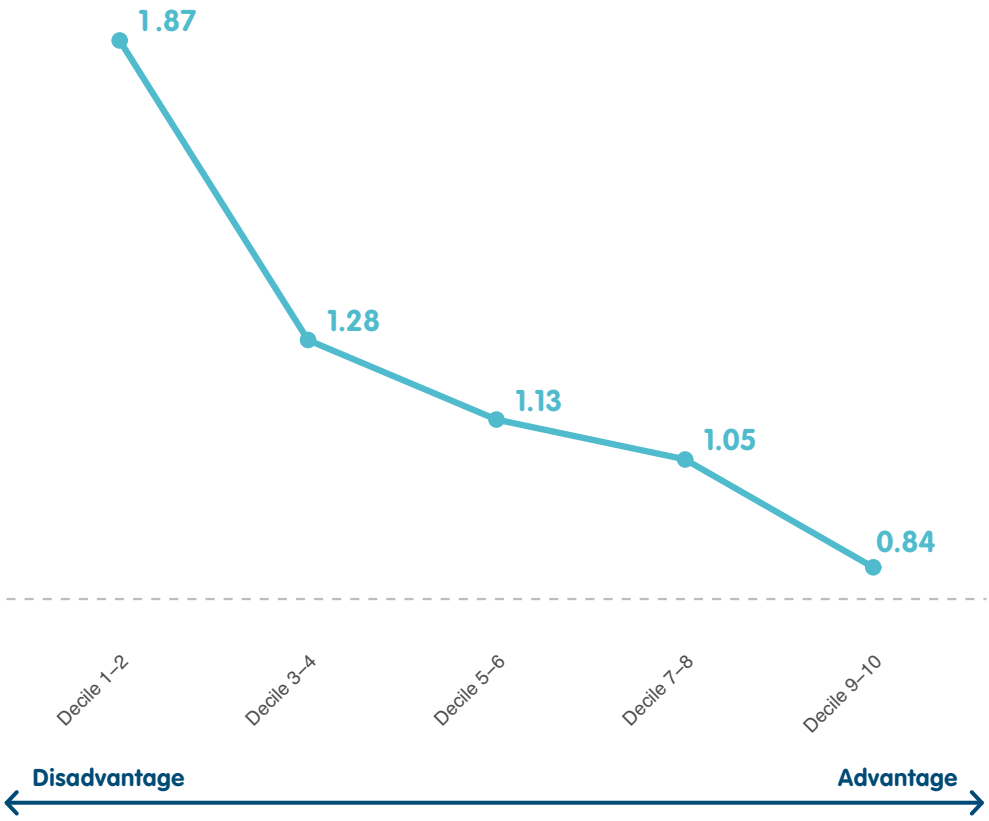
Improving swimming skills for all is a national imperative in the updated Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030.

To read the report: www.royallifesaving.com.au/research-and-policy/research-by-topic/risk-factors

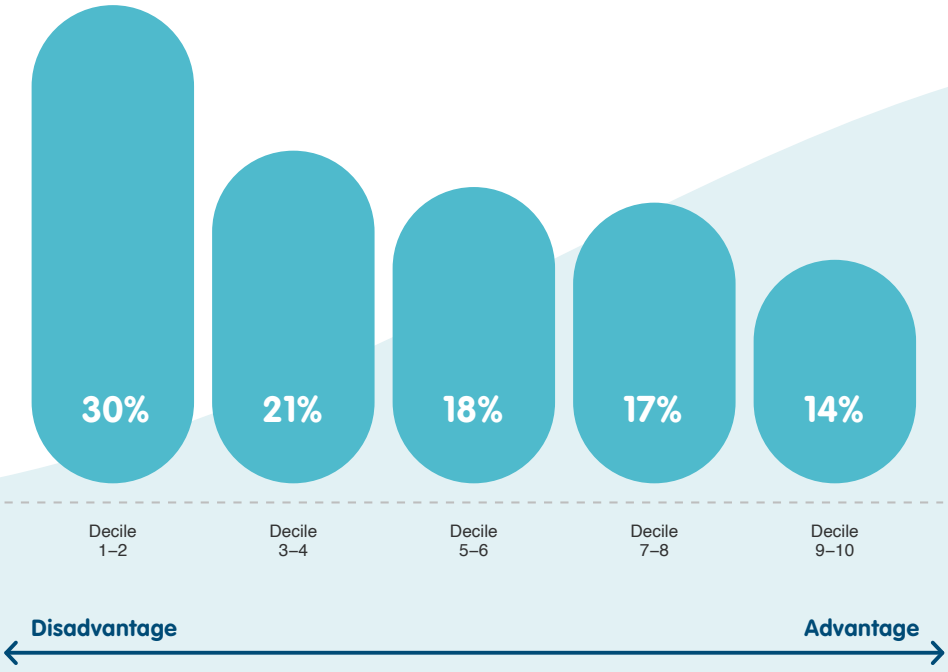
2.2x

PEOPLE RESIDING IN THE MOST DISADVANTAGED AREAS DROWNED AT A RATE 2.2 HIGHER THAN PEOPLE WHO RESIDED IN THE MOST ADVANTAGED AREAS

Crude fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population by IRSAD decile, 2024/25

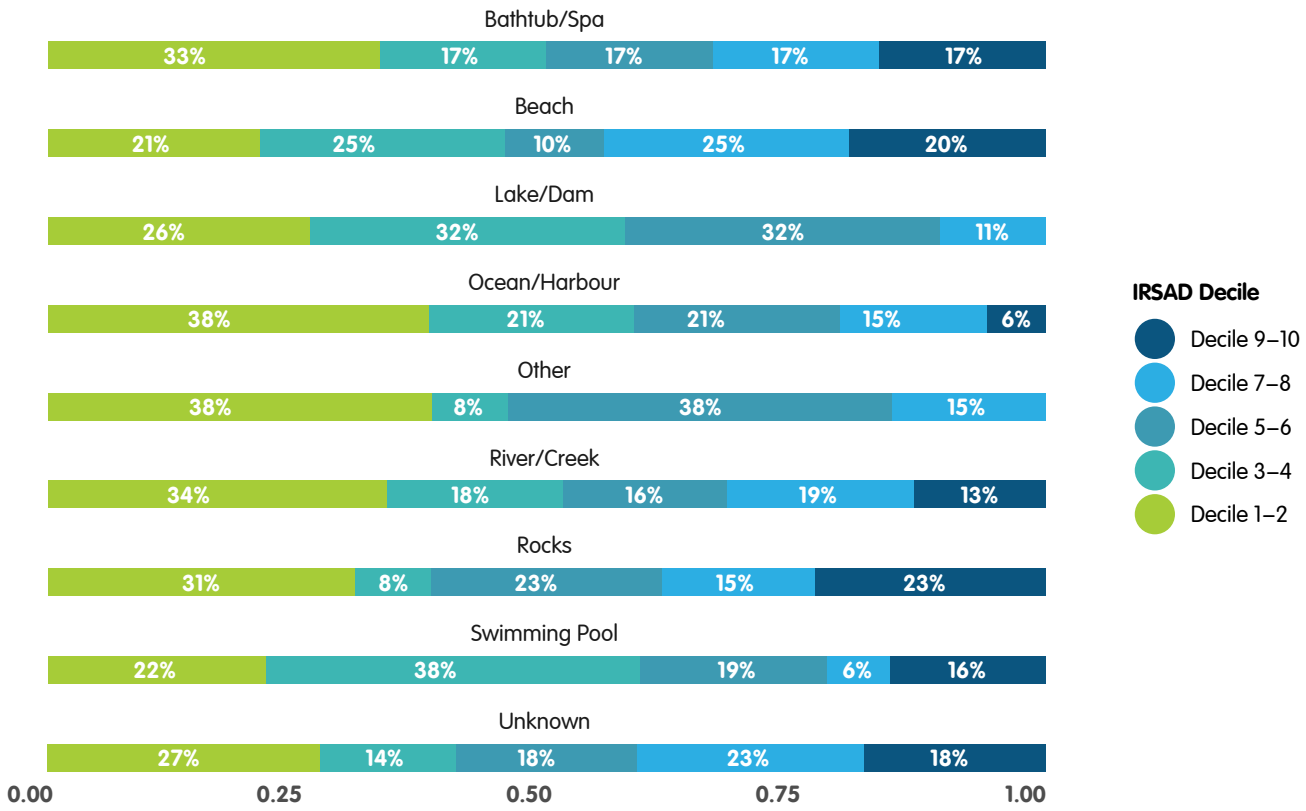


Drowning deaths by IRSAD decile, 2024/25

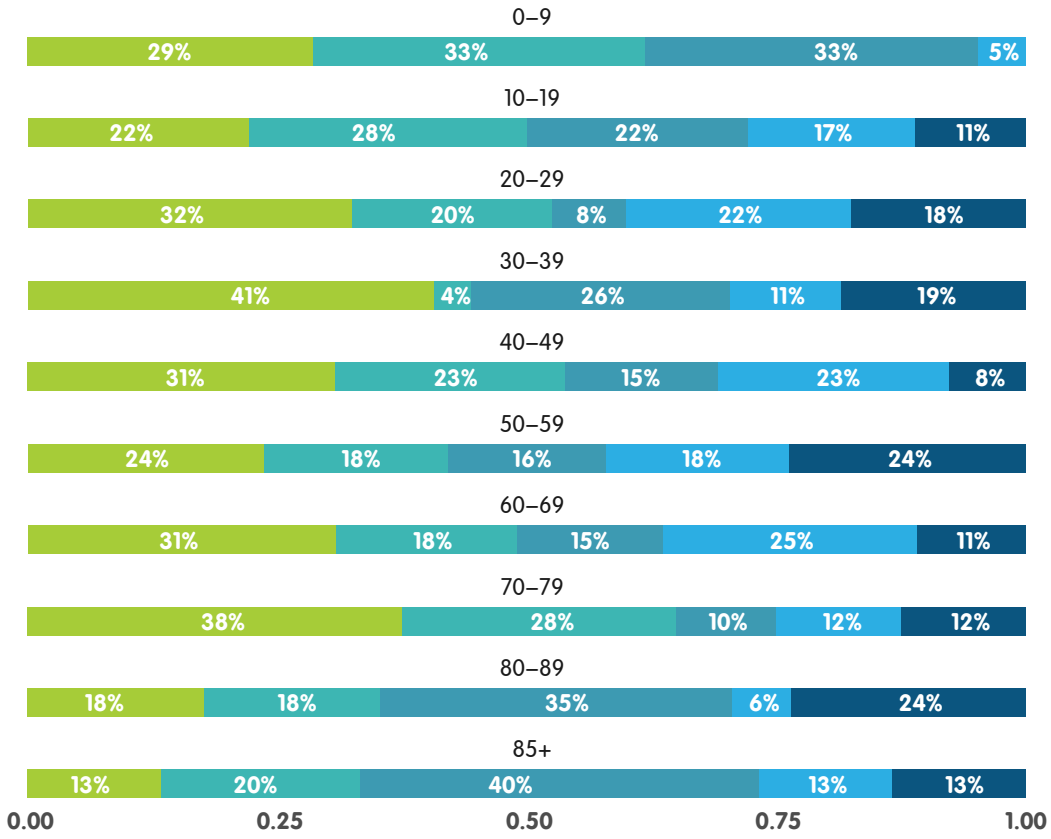


**Note: 13% of fatal drowning incidents are an unknown IRSAD score*

Drowning by body of water location and IRSAD decile, 2024/25



Drowning by age group and IRSAD decile, 2024/25

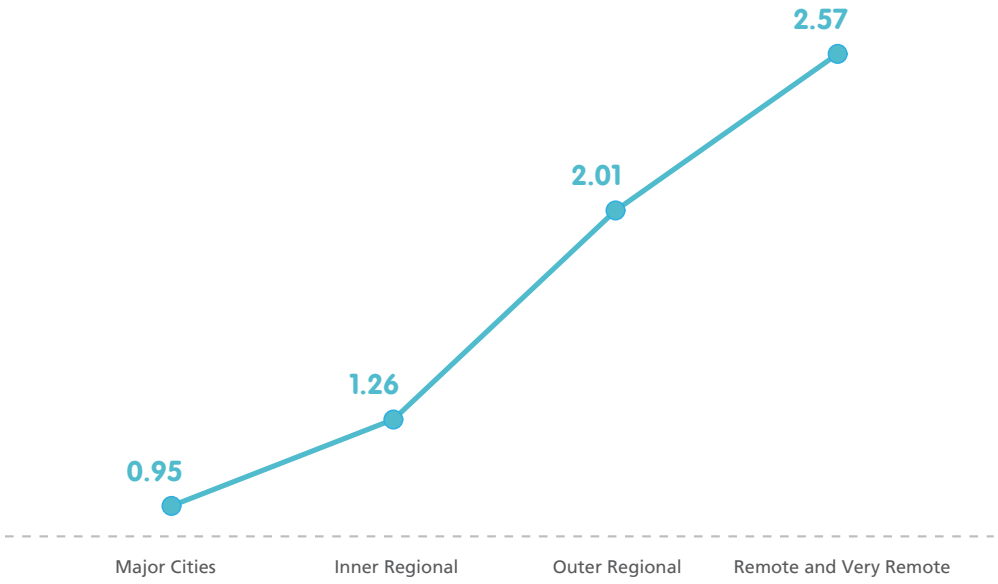


REMOTENESS OF HOME RESIDENCE

The majority of those who died from drowning in 2024/25 lived in major cities, but those who were from outside major cities drowned at higher rates. 2.7 times higher for those from remote and very remote areas compared to people reside in major cities.

Crude fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population by residence remoteness classification, 2024/25

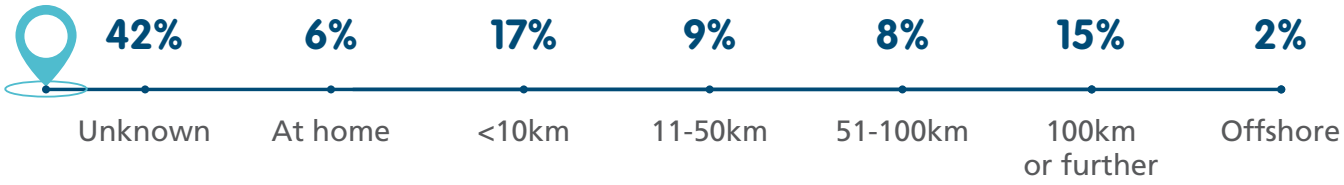
**Note: 2.5% unknown residence remoteness*



VISITOR STATUS

Most people who drowned were not visitors (17%), that is, they drowned within 10 km of where they lived. Visitor status was unavailable for 42% of drowning cases at the time of publication.

2024/25 Drive distance between residence and drowning location



COUNTRY OF BIRTH

53%

of people who drowned country of birth was known

Of those, 61 people (32%) were born overseas, consistent with the 10-year average.

The highest number of people who drowned in 2024/25 were born in United Kingdom and China, followed by people from India, Malaysia, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea.

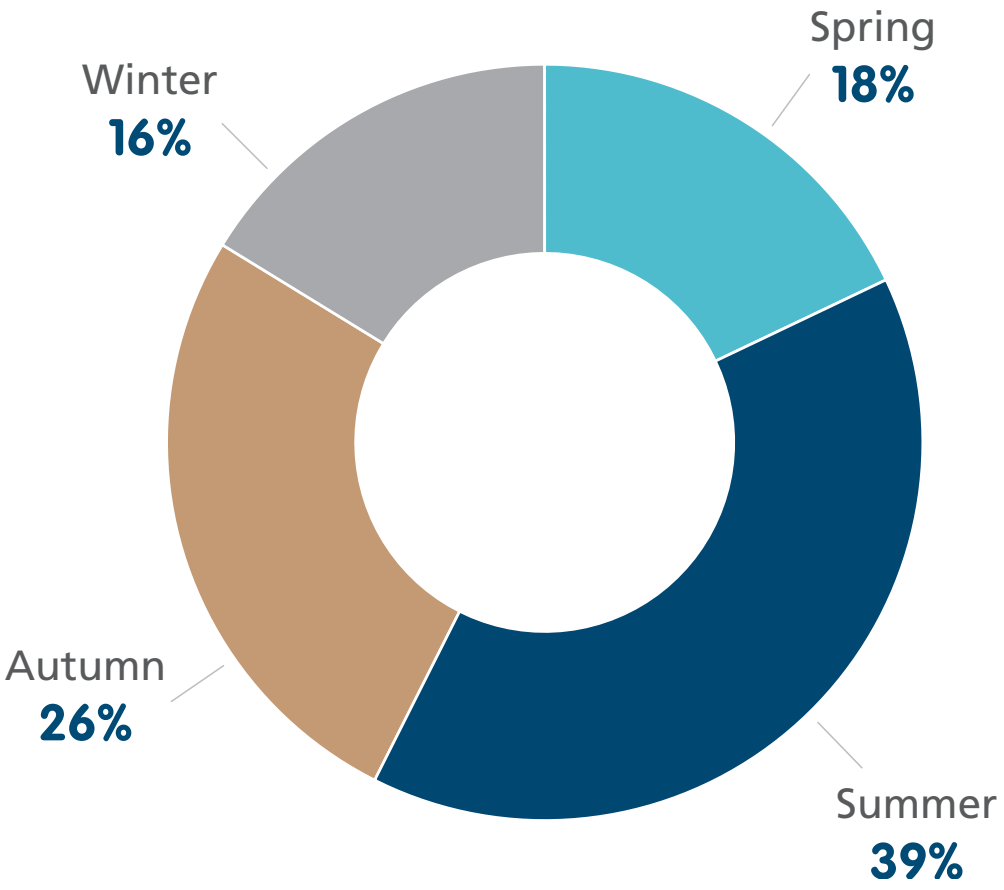
SECTION TWO: When and how does drowning happen?

Drowning deaths occurred most frequently during the summer months, consistent with previous years, with December and January having the highest number of drowning deaths in the 2024/25 financial year (30% total). Of note, 41 drowning deaths occurred in the month of April, a 95% increase on the 10-year average of 21. (This may be due to the Easter holiday long weekend, ANZAC day and school holidays fell in April this year).

Typical with previous years, weekends (Saturday and Sunday) were the highest for drowning incidents, with Saturday having the highest number of drowning deaths (n=63), up by 37% on the 10-year average.

SEASON

Percent of 2024/25 drowning deaths by season

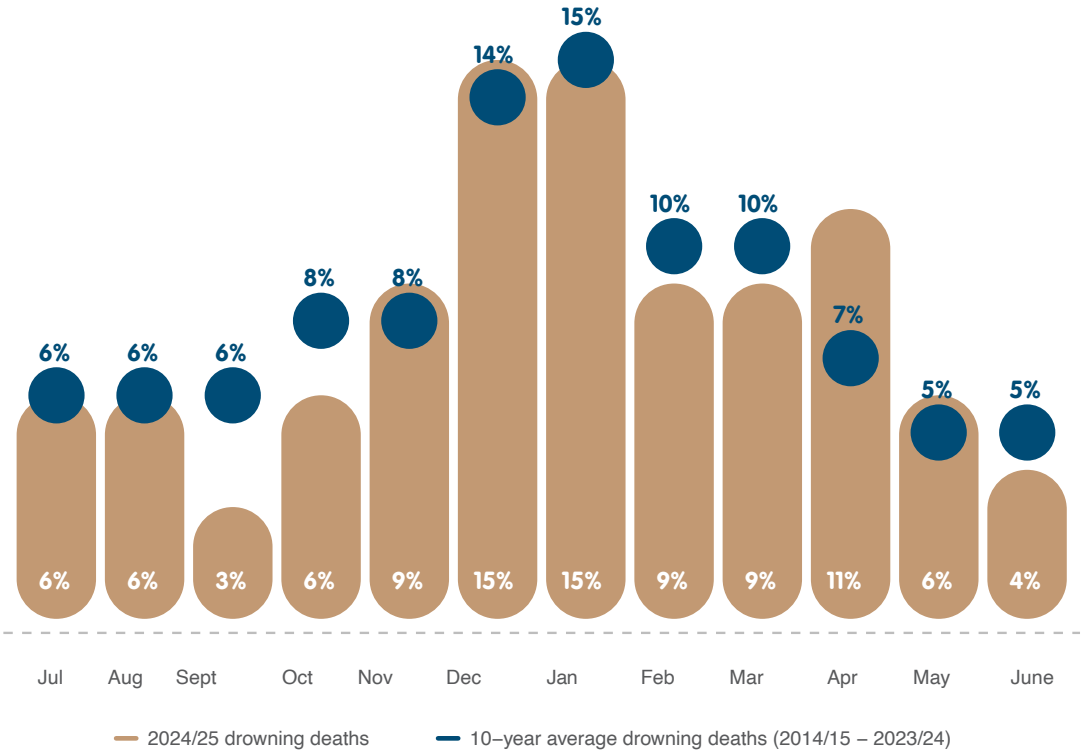


41

DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED IN THE MONTH OF APRIL, A 95% INCREASE ON THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE OF 21.

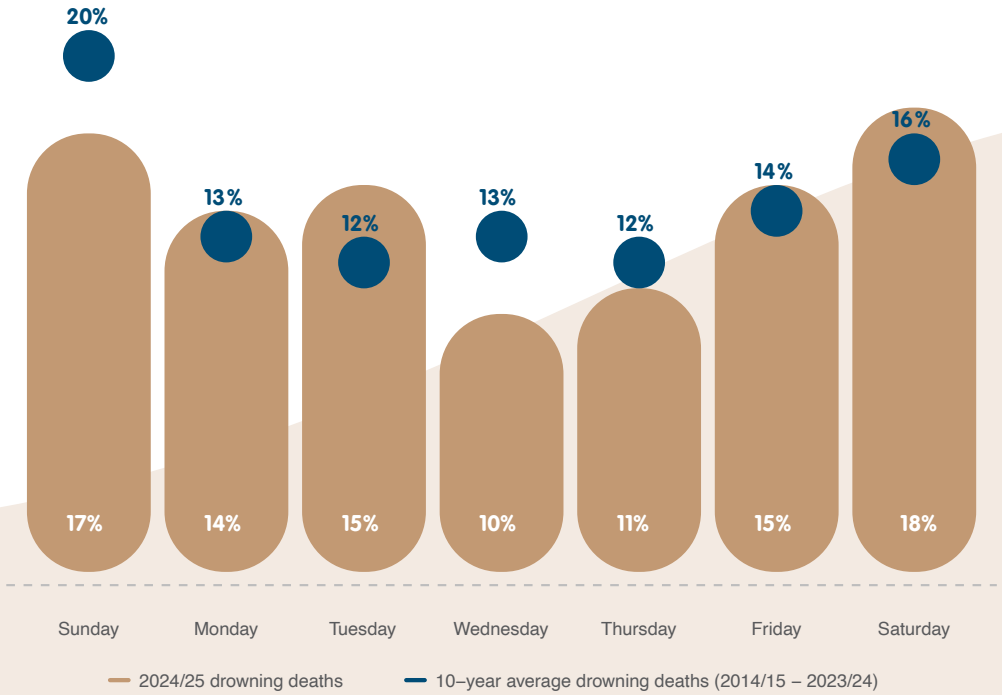
MONTH

Percent of 2024/25 drowning deaths by month compared to the 10-year average



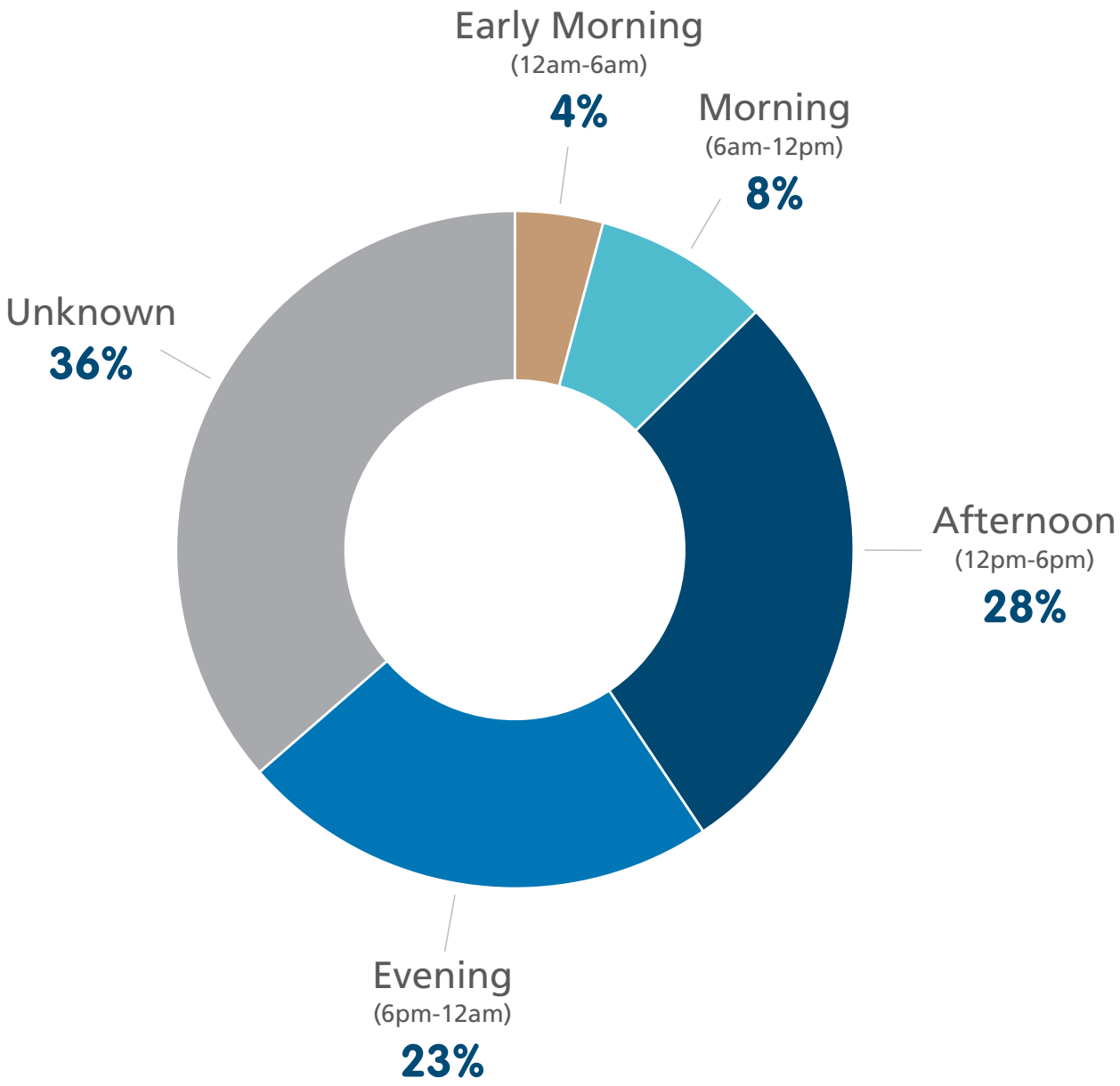
DAY OF THE WEEK

Percent of 2024/25 drowning deaths by day of the week compared to the 10-year average



TIME OF THE DAY

2024/25 drowning deaths by time of day



DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED MOST FREQUENTLY IN THE **AFTERNOON** (12PM TO 6PM), SIMILAR TO PREVIOUS YEARS.

Consistent with previous years, swimming and recreating was the leading activity prior to drowning (24%) in 2024/25 for all age groups except for children age 0-4 years.

Swimming and water safety skills have been emphasised in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 mid-point review as a national imperative for reducing drowning across all ages. Swimming and water safety skills are an essential measure to preventing drowning, however, ensuring the accessibility of swimming and water safety education programs for all communities is a continued challenge.

Young people and adults need to consider their ability and skills when participating in aquatic activities, and need to be aware of the environments that they are swimming in. Refreshing skills in a pool environment before heading to the open water may be one way to increase awareness of current skills.

Falls into water were the second leading activity prior to drowning (10%), followed by boating (9%). Children 0-10 years accounted for over a a third (35%) of all fall-related drowning deaths in 2024/25. Children 0-4 years accounted for 23%, followed by children aged 5-9 years (12%). This reinforces the importance of active supervision around water, especially as young children become more mobile, and barriers preventing access to water, such as compliant pool fencing. Of concern is people aged 65 years and over (65+ years), who made up 25% of people who drowned from an unintentional fall into water, which may be linked to medical conditions and limited mobility as people age.

Boating was the third leading activity associated with 9% of drowning deaths, a 31% decrease from the 10-year average. People aged 65+ years accounted for 55% of boating-related deaths, with half aged 75 years and older. This emphasises the importance of wearing a lifejacket, checking the condition and having correct and working safety equipment, and going with others, when planning a day on the water.

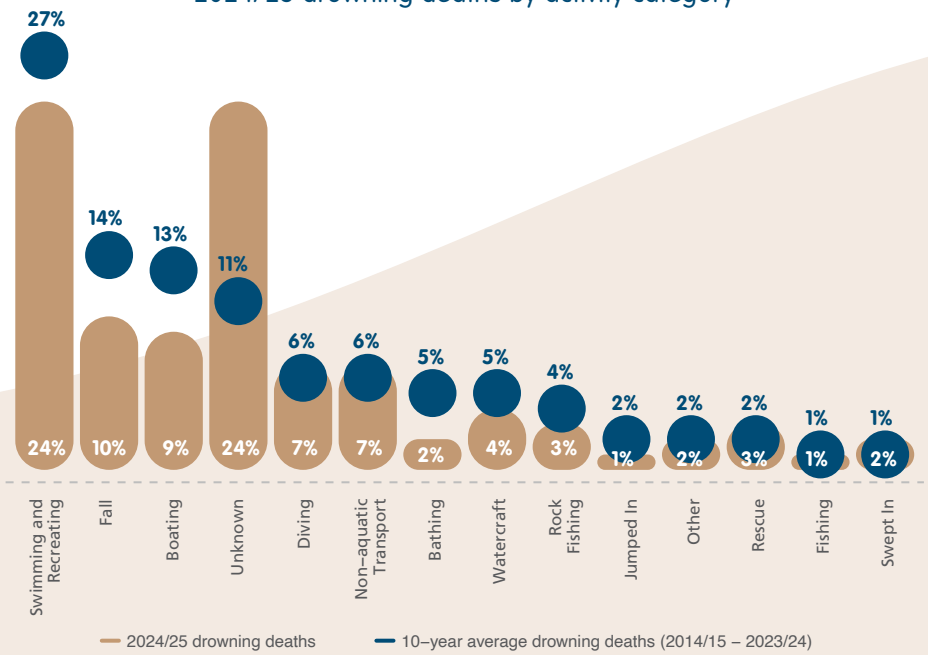
Drowning deaths that occurred while **swimming and recreating increased by 14%** compared to the 10-year average. Young adults aged 20-24 years accounted for 11% of all swimming and recreating drowning deaths.

35%

of drowning deaths related to a fall were among children 0-9 years and 18% of were of adults aged 75+ years.

Boating-related drowning deaths were down by 31% on the 10-year average, and most commonly occurred among adults 65+ years.

2024/25 drowning deaths by activity category



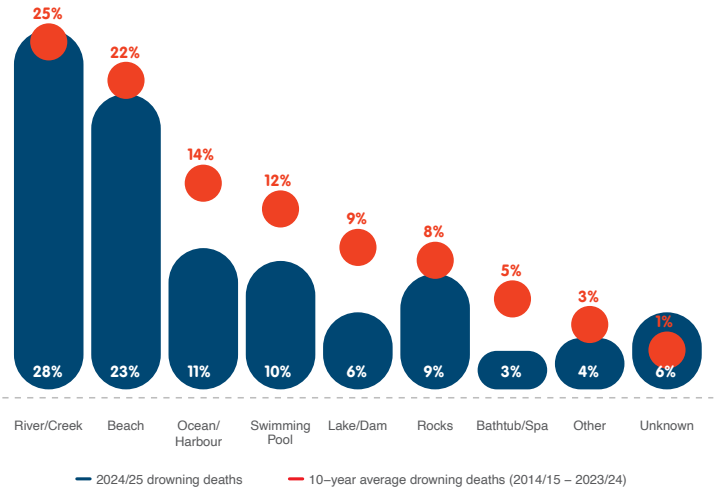
SECTION THREE: Where do people drown?

Understanding where drowning events happen, and who drowns at those locations, is critical for prevention efforts. The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 underscores the need to prioritise high-risk drowning locations and identify specific water safety strategies tailored to each location.

Drowning numbers were higher in all locations this year, except for bathtubs/spa baths (14% below the 10-year average) and lakes/dams (15% below the 10-year average) and ocean/harbour locations (5% below the 10-year average). The highest number of drowning deaths in 2024/25 occurred at river/creek (28%), an increase from the 10-year average of 25% of the total proportion of drowning deaths. Beaches followed with 23% of cases, a 5% increase from the 10-year average of 22% of drowning deaths.

One in ten (10%) of drowning deaths occurred in swimming pools, a 6% increase from the 10-year average. The majority of these deaths occurred in home swimming pools (68%).

Percent of 2024/25 drowning deaths by location compared to the 10-year average



KEY 2024/25 COASTAL DROWNING INSIGHTS

87%
OF COASTAL DROWNING DEATHS WERE MALE

25%
WERE ADULTS AGED 60-69 YEARS

41%
OCCURRED DURING SUMMER

60%
Regional/ Remote areas

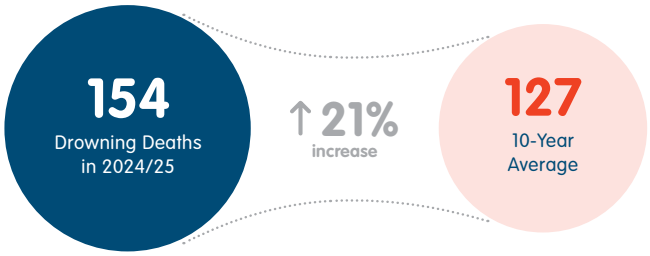
21%
Rip current -related

73%
>1km from SLS service

COASTAL LOCATIONS

*Includes beaches, ocean/harbour, rocks, and coastal rock pools

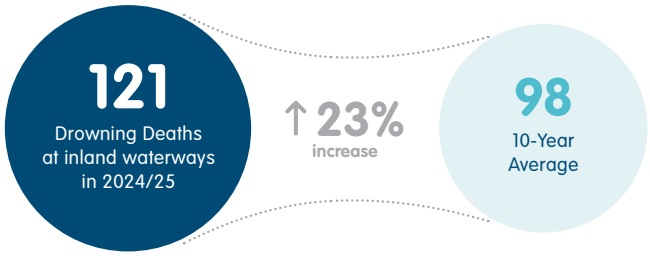
43% of 2024/25 Drowning Deaths



INLAND WATERWAYS

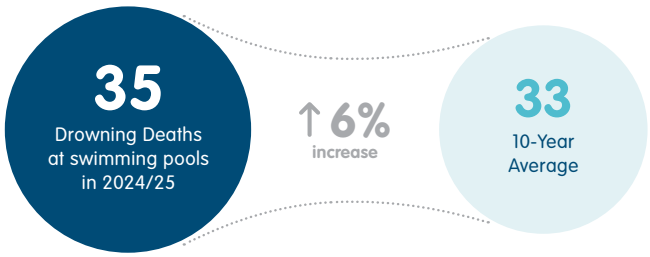
*Includes rivers/creeks and lakes/dams

34% of 2024/25 Drowning Deaths



SWIMMING POOLS

10% of 2024/25 Drowning Deaths



KEY 2024/25 INLAND DROWNING INSIGHTS

80%
OF INLAND DROWNING DEATHS WERE MALE

19%
WERE ADULTS AGED 20-29 YEARS

37%
OCCURRED DURING SUMMER

21%
<10km drive from home

33%
reside in the most disadvantaged areas

30%
in the afternoon (12pm-6pm)

23%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED AT BEACHES

82
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ **30%** increase

63
10-Year Average

Beaches recorded 82 drowning deaths, a 1% decrease from last year and a 30% increase from the 10-year average. 85% were males, and 35% were aged 65+ years.

Where country of birth was known, people born overseas represented 30% of beach drowning deaths. December reported the highest number for beach drowning (18%), an increase on the December average of 15% of beach drowning deaths.

Beach drowning deaths most frequently occurred in a major city (43%) and over a 100km drive from home (27%), indicating that people are travelling further to beaches and to highly populated areas. Over half (58%) of beach drowning deaths occurred in the afternoon (12pm to 6pm).

This year, those who drowned at beaches were evenly distributed across all areas of socio-economic advantage/disadvantage.

85%
Male

46%
Summer

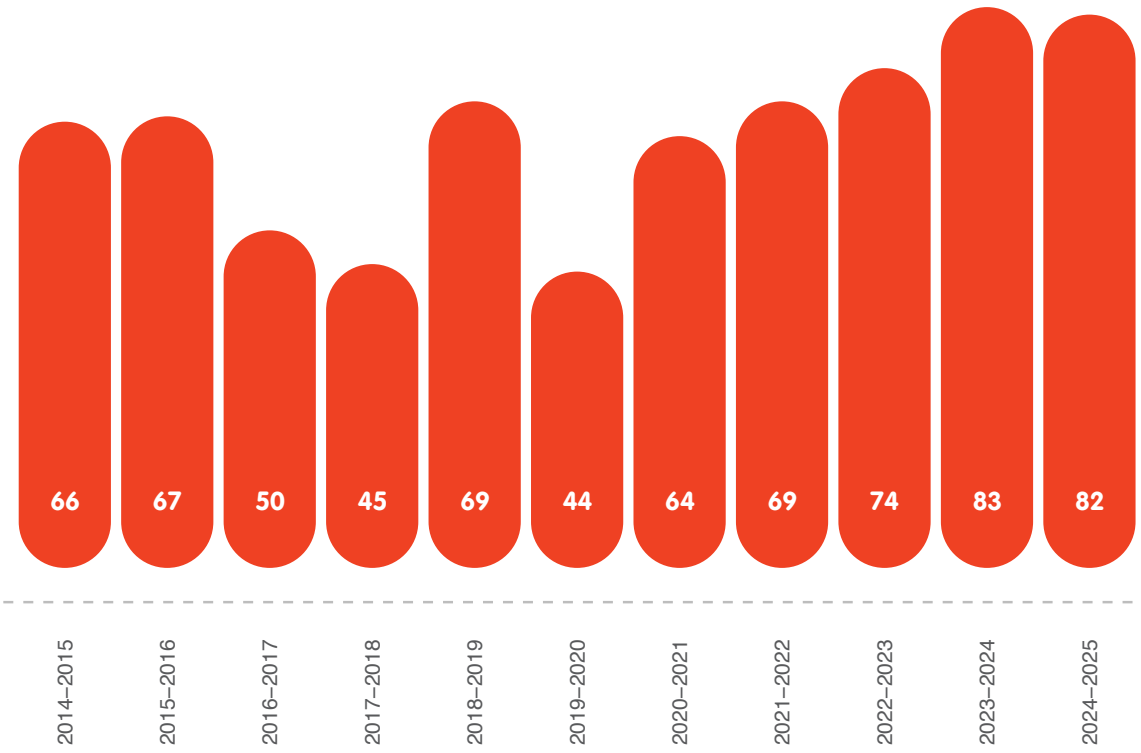
30%
Born overseas

6%
Alcohol & drugs

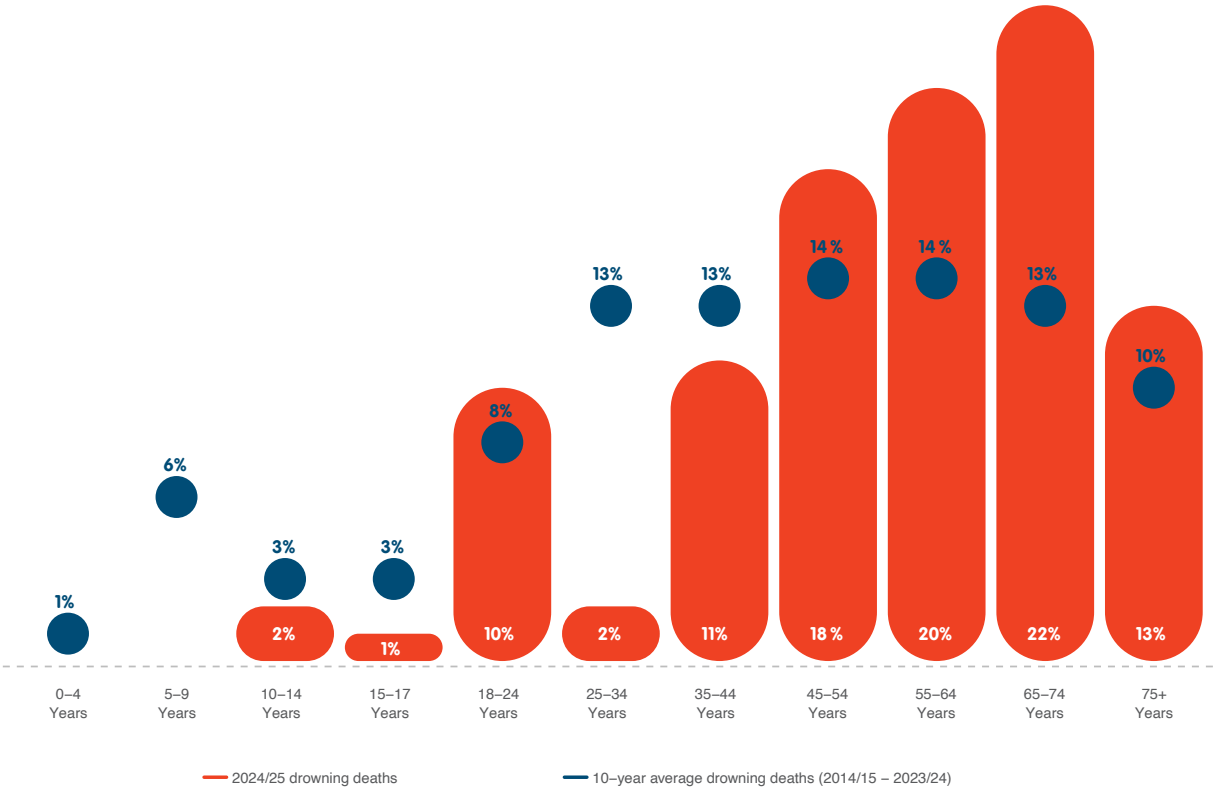
63%
>1km from SLS service

37%
Rip current -related

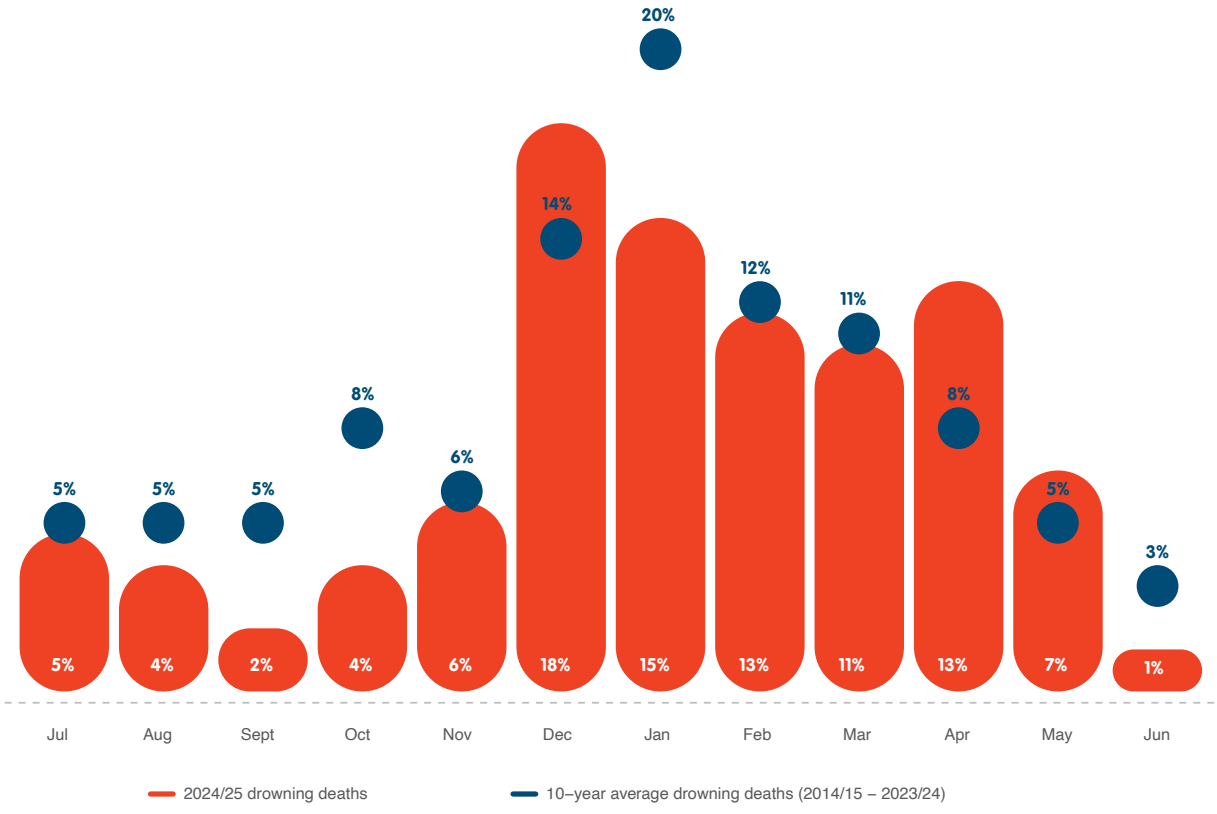
Drowning deaths at beaches by financial year



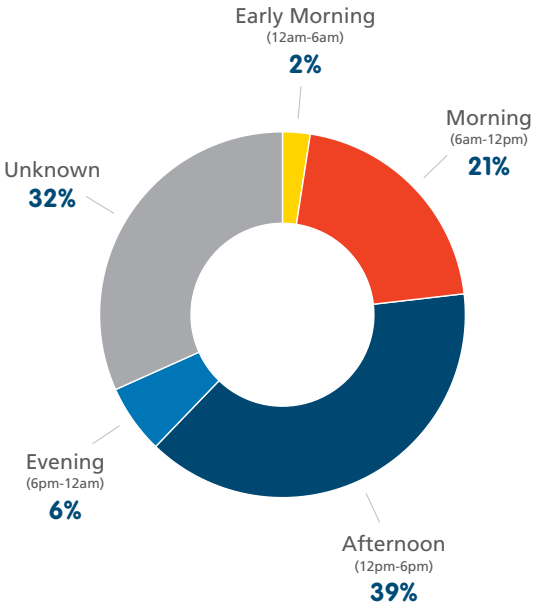
Drowning deaths at beaches by age group, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at beaches by month, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at beaches by time of day, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at beaches by activity (top 5), 2024/25

60% Swimming and recreating

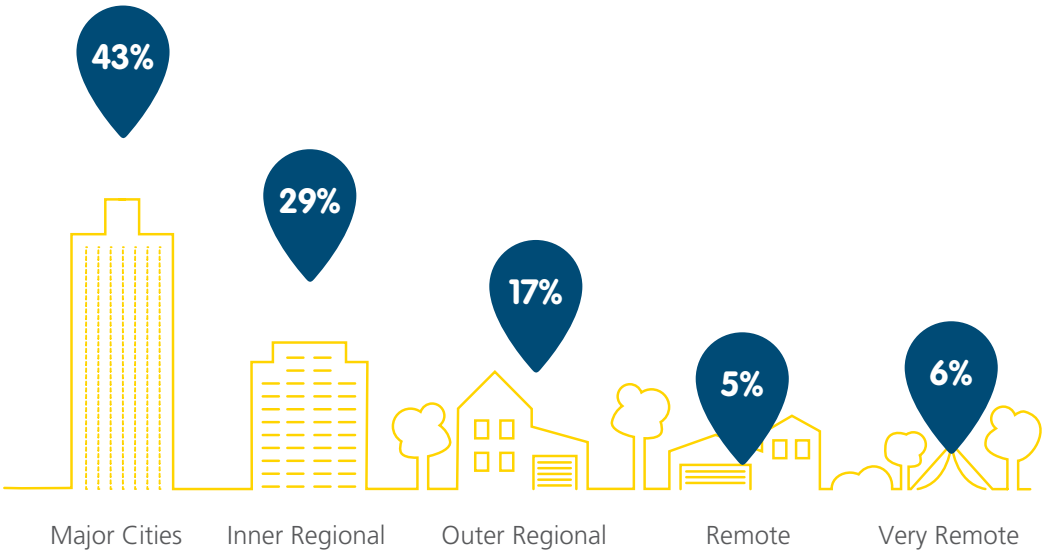
13% Diving/snorkelling

9% Attempted rescue

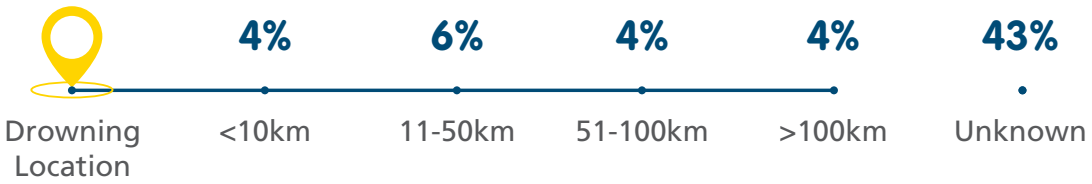
7% Watercraft

9% Unknown

Remoteness classification of beach drowning locations, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and beach drowning location, 2024/25



> OCEAN/HARBOUR

11%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT OCEAN/HARBOUR

38
Drowning Deaths
in 2024/25

↓ **5%**
decrease

40
10-Year
Average

Ocean and harbour locations encompass various coastal waterways including bays, offshore water, ports, marinas and jetties. Each enable a variety of recreation options and carry their own unique risk and prevention profiles.

There were 38 drowning deaths that occurred at ocean/harbour, a 15% decrease from last year, and 5% decrease from the 10-year average. The leading activity prior to drowning was boating (45%) followed by diving (24%). Over half of all drowning deaths in ocean/harbour locations were of people aged 65+ years (53%).

The drowning deaths that occurred in ocean/harbour category were most frequently offshore (58%), during the summer (39%) and occurred in the afternoon (12pm to 6pm). The number of ocean/harbour drowning deaths was highest in the month of January (n=8, 21%, 110% increase from the ten-year January average).

Those who drowned at ocean/harbour locations tended to come from disadvantaged areas: 29% of ocean/harbour related drowning cases involved people who resided in locations with IRSAD Decile scores 1 or 2, compared to 5% of people who resided in areas with IRSAD Decile scores 9 or 10.

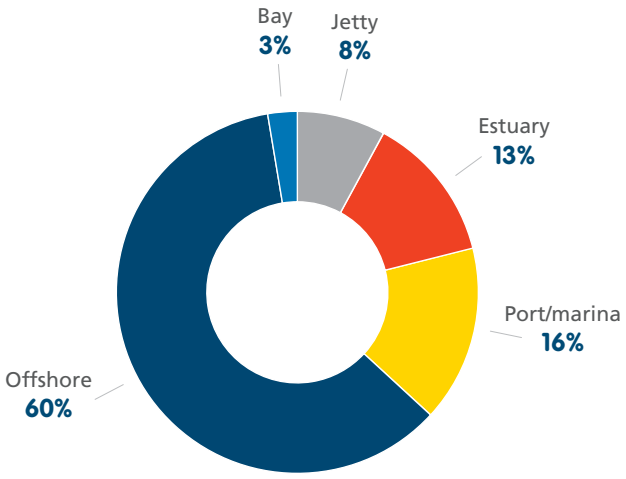
90%
Male

39%
Summer

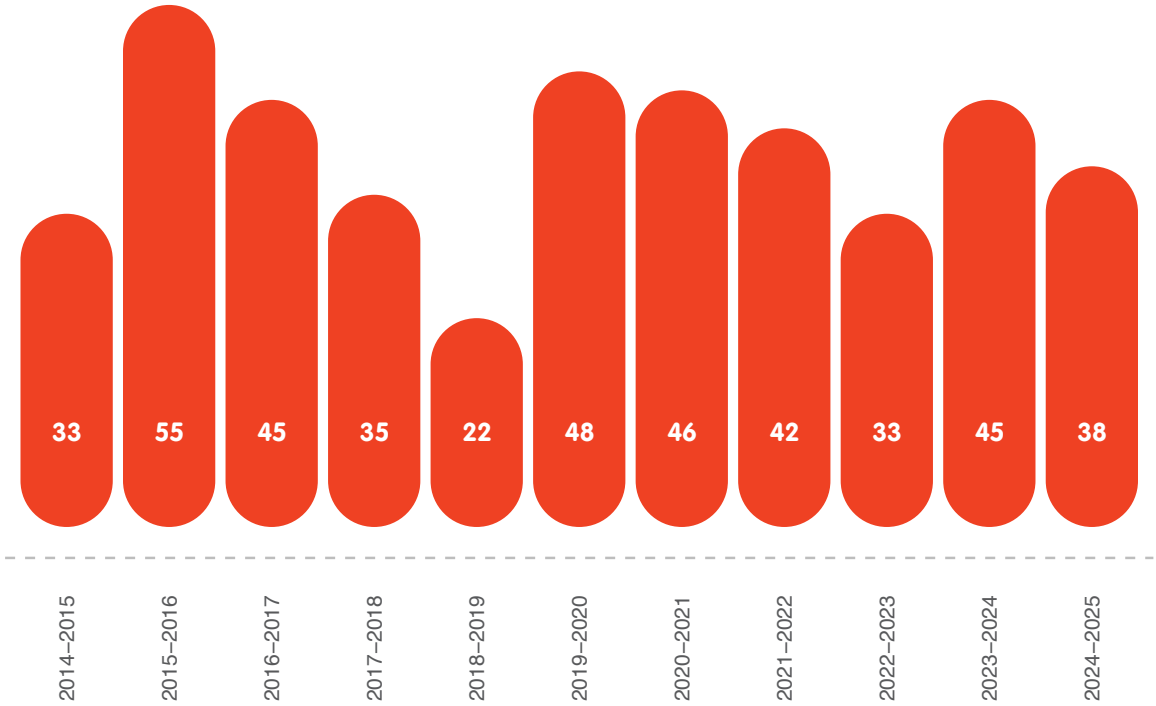
16%
Born overseas

8%
Alcohol involved

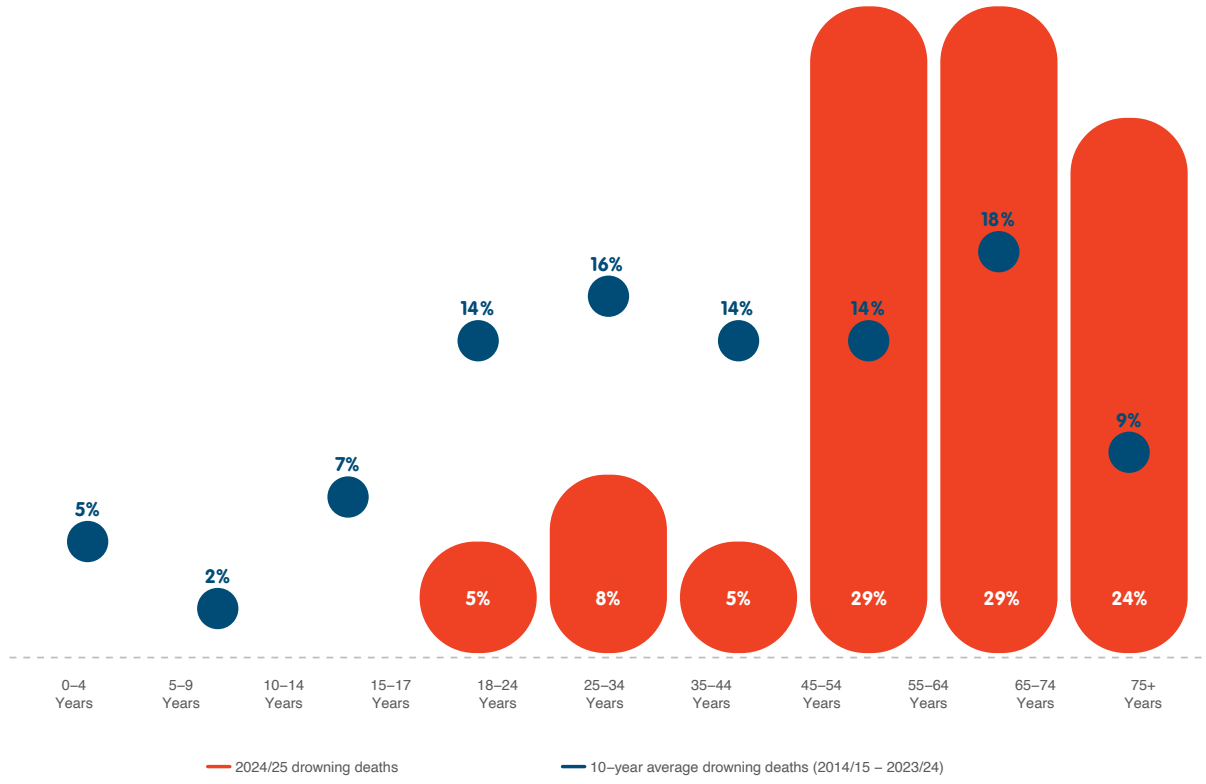
Proportion of drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations, 2024/25



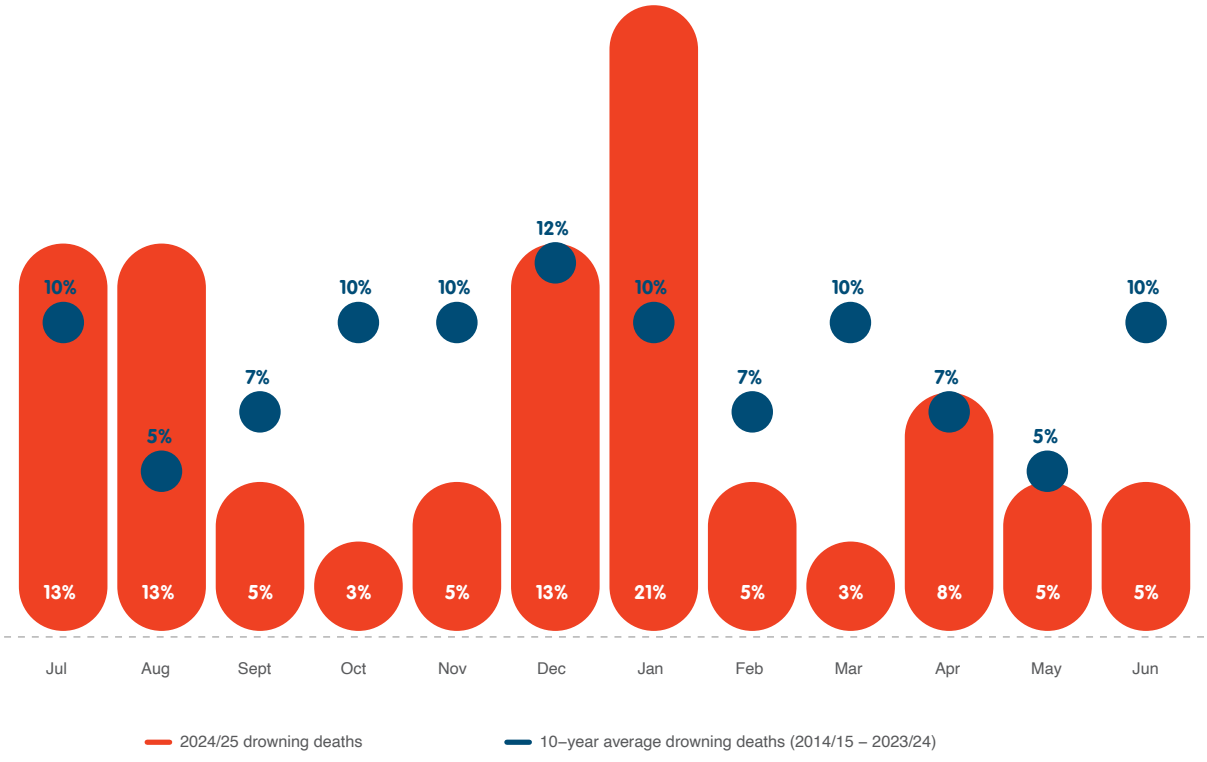
Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour by financial year



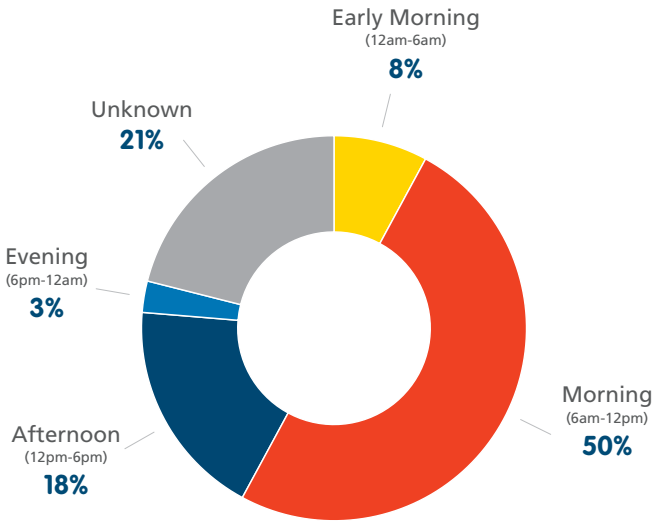
Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations by age group, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations by month, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations by time of day, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations by activity (top 5), 2024/25

45% Boating

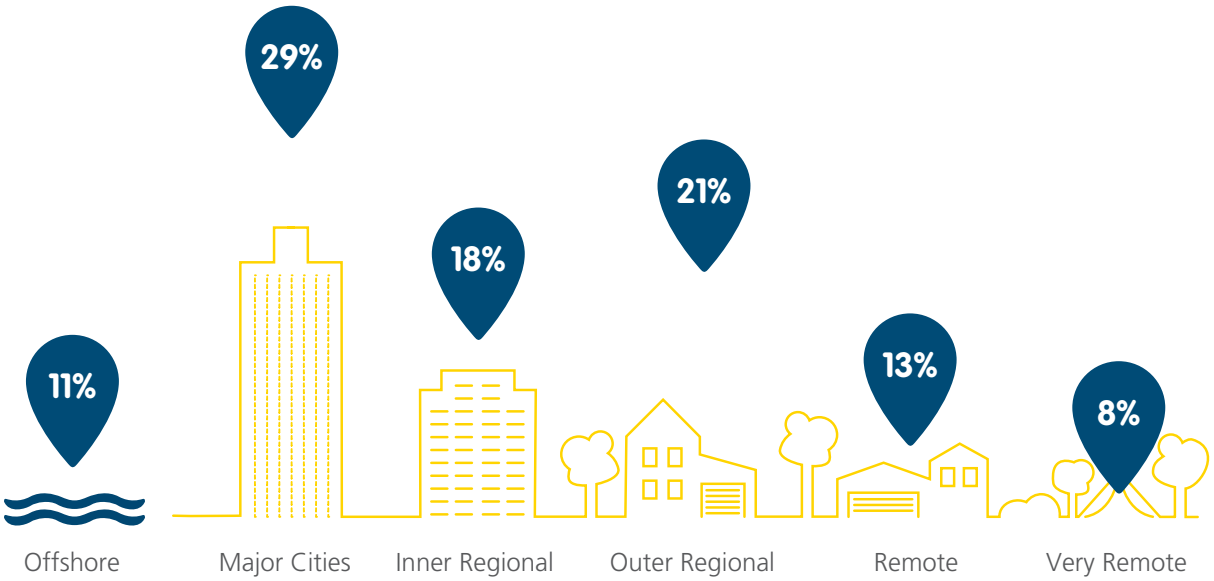
24% Diving/snorkelling

5% Unintentional fall into water

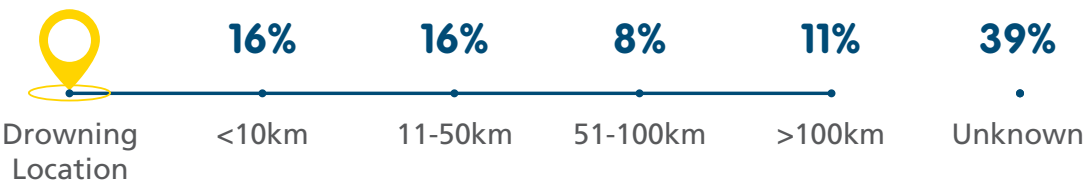
5% Non-aquatic transport

13% Unknown

Remoteness classification of ocean/harbour drowning locations, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and ocean / harbour drowning location 2024/25



9%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED AT ROCKS

31
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ **41%**
increase

22
10-Year Average

Rock locations include rocky land formations and cliffs. These locations present environmental challenges that can pose safety risks when not prepared for the conditions, or when not wearing appropriate safety equipment such as a lifejacket.

In 2024/25, drowning deaths that occurred at rock locations represented 9% of all drowning deaths, a 72% increase from last year, and a 41% increase from the 10-year average. This year recorded the highest number and proportion to drown at rock locations in the past decade (since 2014/15).

Rock fishing was the leading activity prior to drowning (39%) followed by being swept in (26%) by a wave overtopping the rocks. Waves contributed to at least 55% of rock drowning deaths. Unlike other locations, drowning fatalities most frequently occurred in Autumn (38%), and on a Friday (32%) and as a result of rock fishing (35%). Most drowning deaths occurred in regional areas (29%), where people would drive more than 50km from their home (42%). Those confirmed born overseas represented 34% of drowning cases at rocks.

Education and awareness approaches that lead to behaviour changes that increase lifejacket usage within these environments is important to decreasing drowning rates at these locations.

84%
Male

39%
Autumn

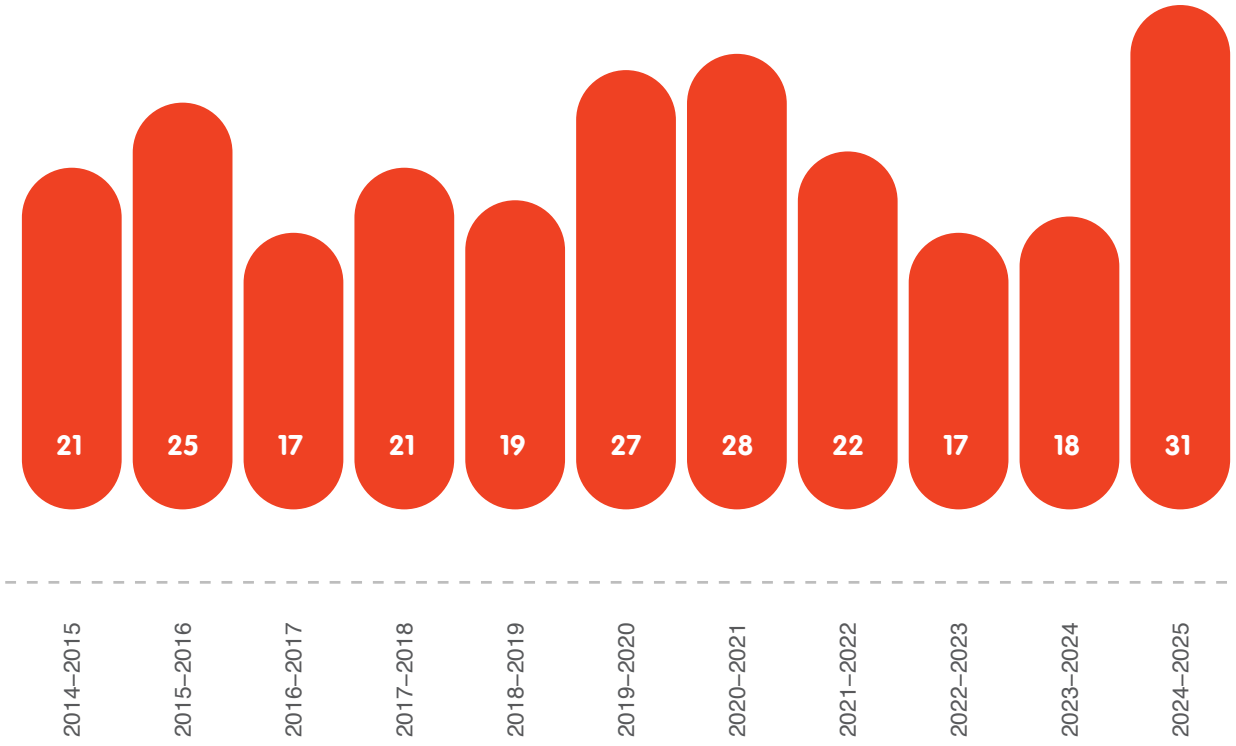
39%
Born overseas

3%
Alcohol involved

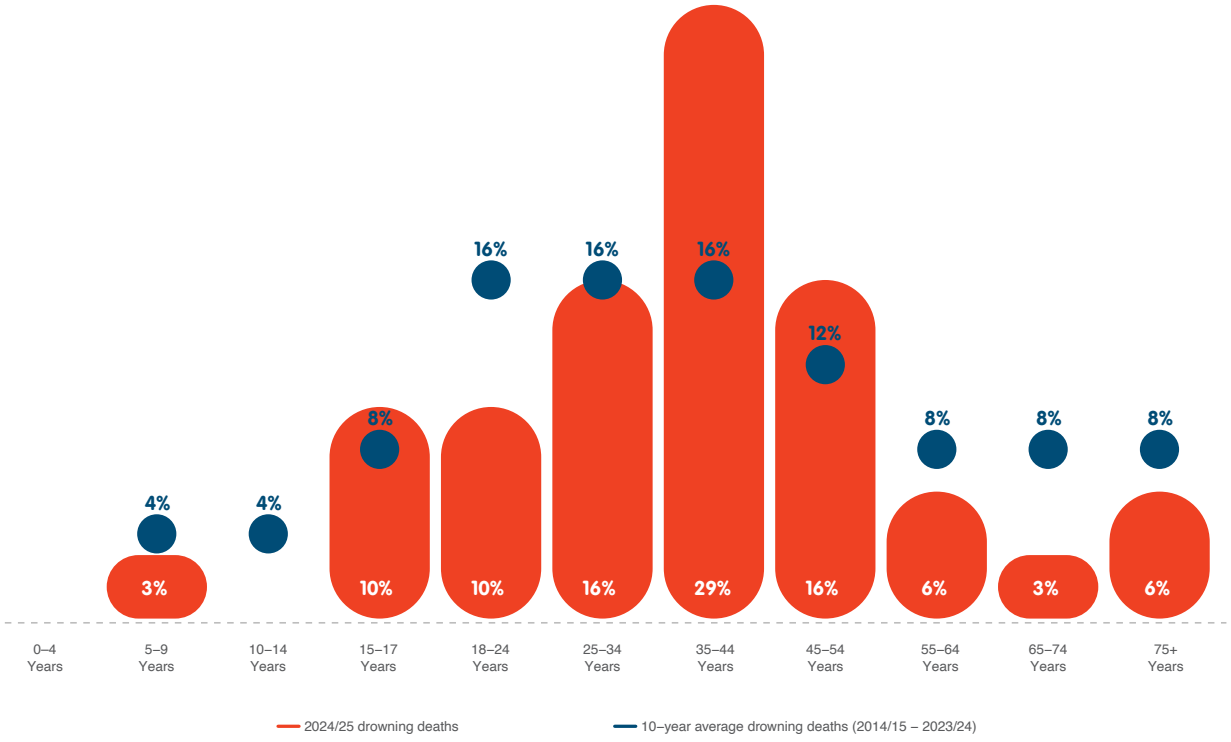
10%
No Lifejacket

55%
washed in by waves

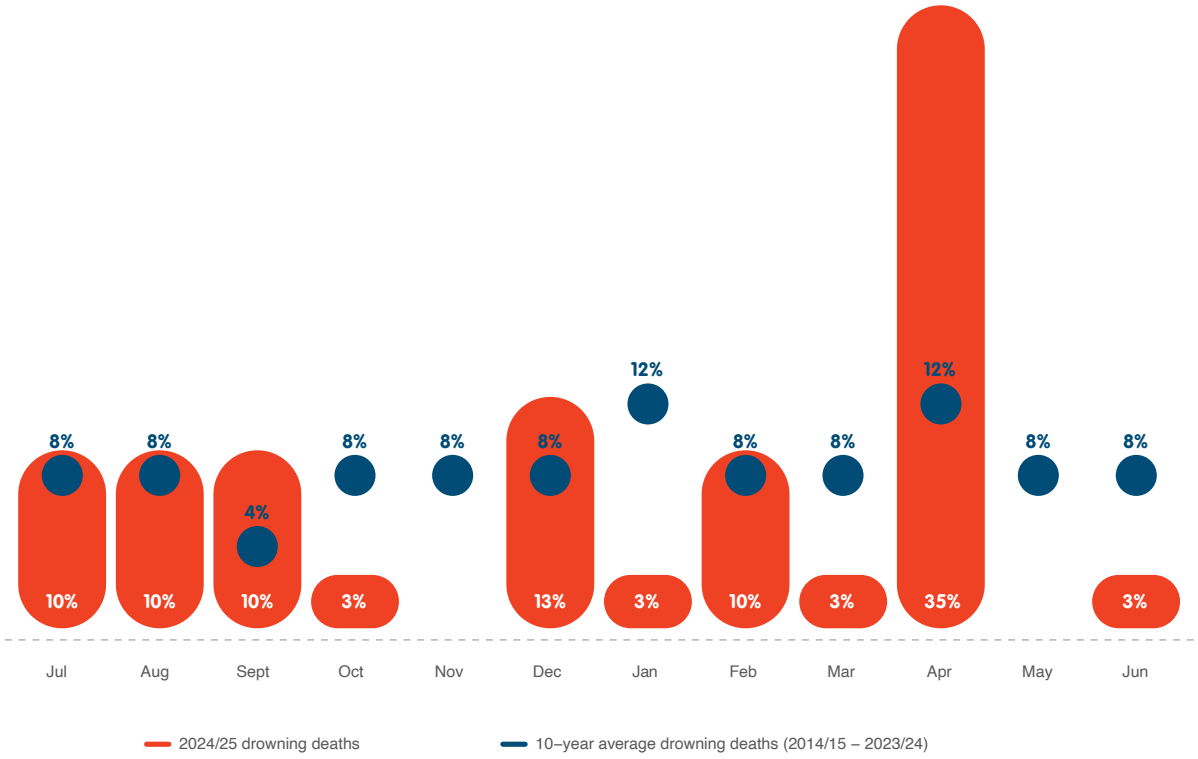
Drowning deaths at rocks by financial year



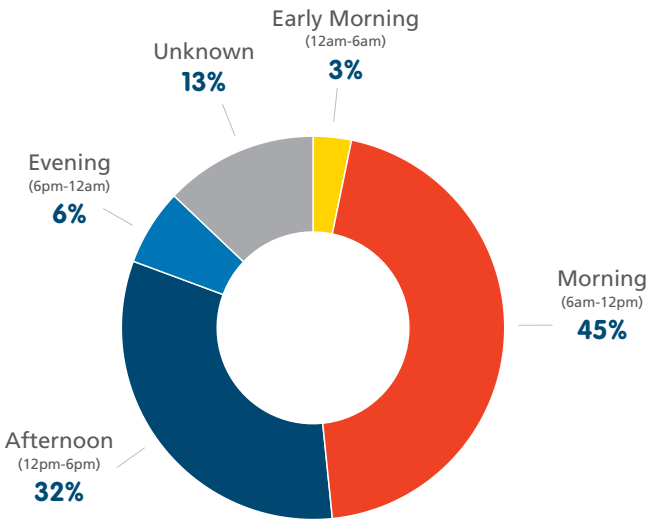
Drowning deaths at rocks by age group, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at rocks by month, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at rocks by time of day, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at rocks by activity (top 5), 2024/25

39% Rock fishing

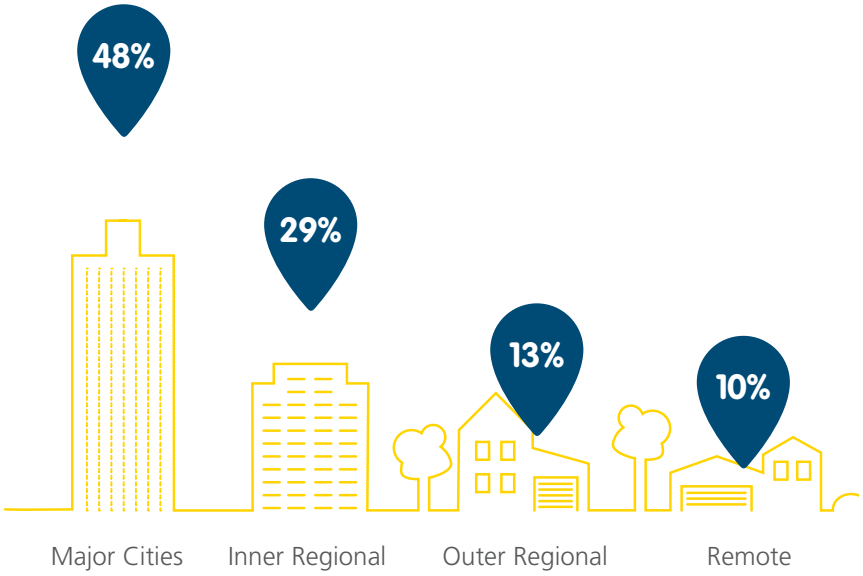
26% Swept In

13% Diving/snorkelling

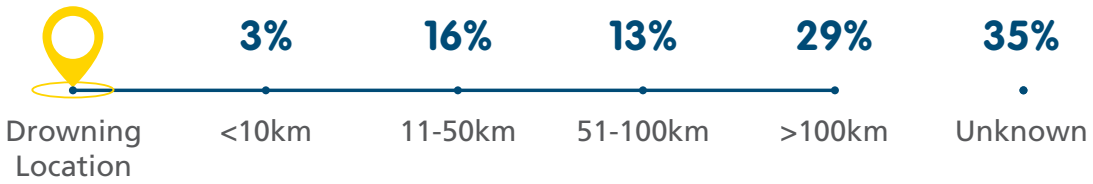
13% Unintentional fall into water

10% Unknown

Remoteness classification of rocks drowning locations, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and rocks drowning location 2024/25



Research Highlight:
5-Year Coastal Drowning Snapshot

695

PEOPLE DROWNED IN AUSTRALIAN COASTAL WATERS BETWEEN 2020/21 TO 2024/25

Since July 2020, 695 people have fatally drowned in Australian coastal waters (44% of the national drowning burden), equating to an average of 139 drowning deaths per year and a drowning rate of 0.53/100,000 pop. Males continue to be overrepresented, accounting for 87% of coastal drowning deaths over this time. Australians aged 55+ years are an emergent high-risk demographic, comprising 46% of coastal drowning deaths.

Coastal drowning is a national problem that impacts on all Australians and many visitors. This is evident with two thirds of coastal drowning decedents being Australian residents (61%), and 37% born overseas. The top three countries of birth with the highest proportion of drowning deaths outside Australia were China (5%), the United Kingdom (4%) and India (3%).

87% Male

37% Born overseas

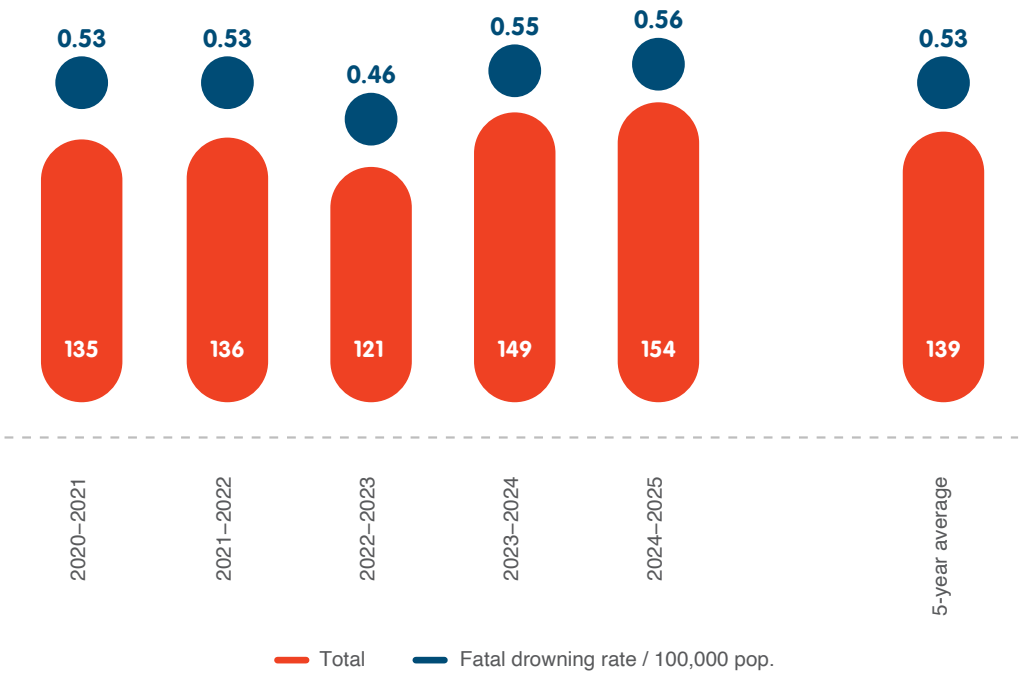
46% were aged 55+ years

61% Australian residents

22% Rip current -related

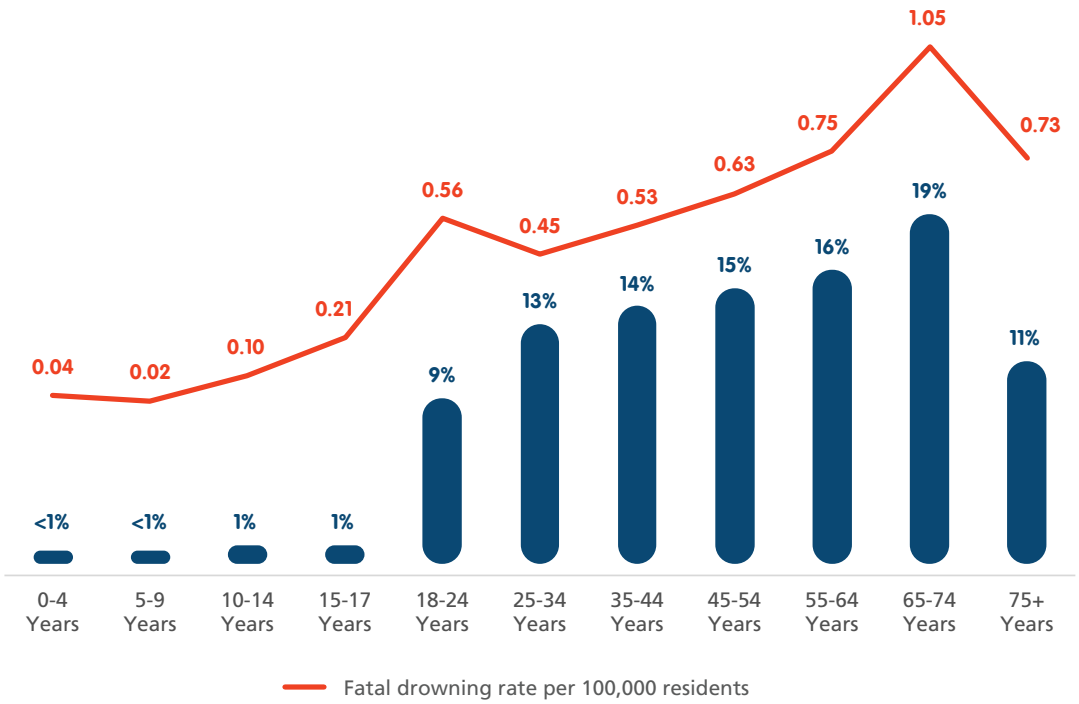
55% Regional/ remote areas

Coastal drowning by financial year

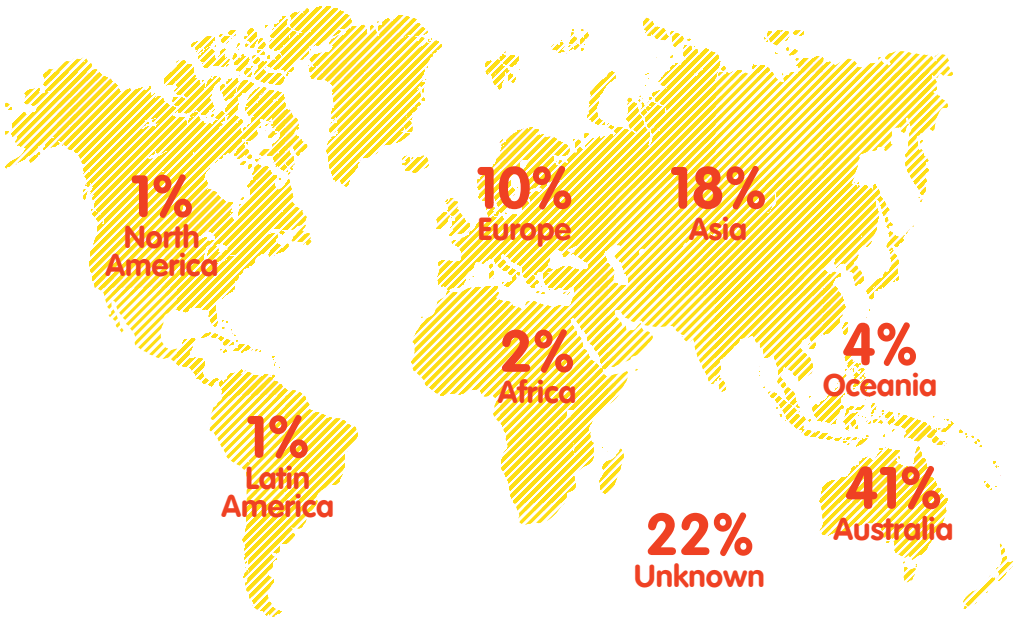


Who drowns on the coast?

Coastal drowning deaths by age group, 2020/21 to 2024/25



Coastal drowning deaths by country of birth, 2020/21 to 2024/25



Top 3 countries of birth

5% China

4% United Kingdom

3% India

Where does coastal drowning occur?

Coastal drowning numbers and rates vary across the country. Over the study period, New South Wales recorded the most coastal drowning deaths (n=254), followed by Queenland (n=146). Tasmania had the highest drowning rate at 1.16/100,000 pop., followed by WA (0.75/100,000 pop.), then NT (0.63/100,000 pop.).

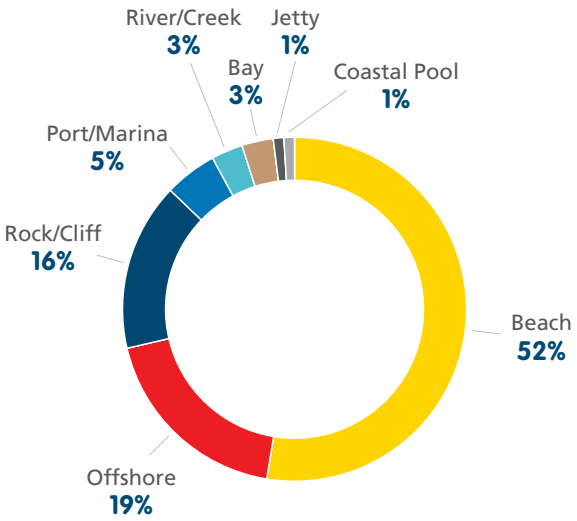
Higher coastal drowning rates tend to correlate with regional and remote areas and fewer lifesaving services. This is evident with 72% of coastal drowning deaths occurring greater than 1km from a surf lifesaving service and 55% within regional or remote areas, making emergency response times longer and often approaches more complex.

Rip currents remain the number one coastal hazard, contributing to 22% of coastal drowning deaths and one in three beach drowning deaths (37%).

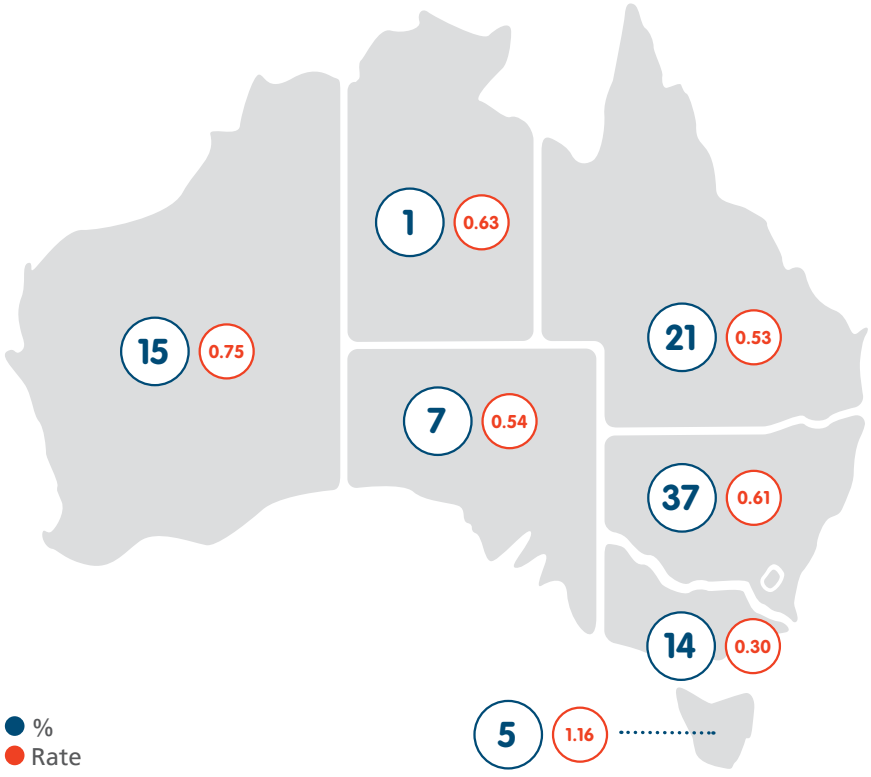
Beaches are the leading coastal drowning location, but all coastal drowning deaths occurred at unpatrolled locations, outside of patrol times, or outside of the red and yellow beach safety flags.

Coastal drowning distance to lifesaving service, 2020/21 to 2024/25

Coastal drowning distance to lifesaving service, 2020/21 to 2024/25



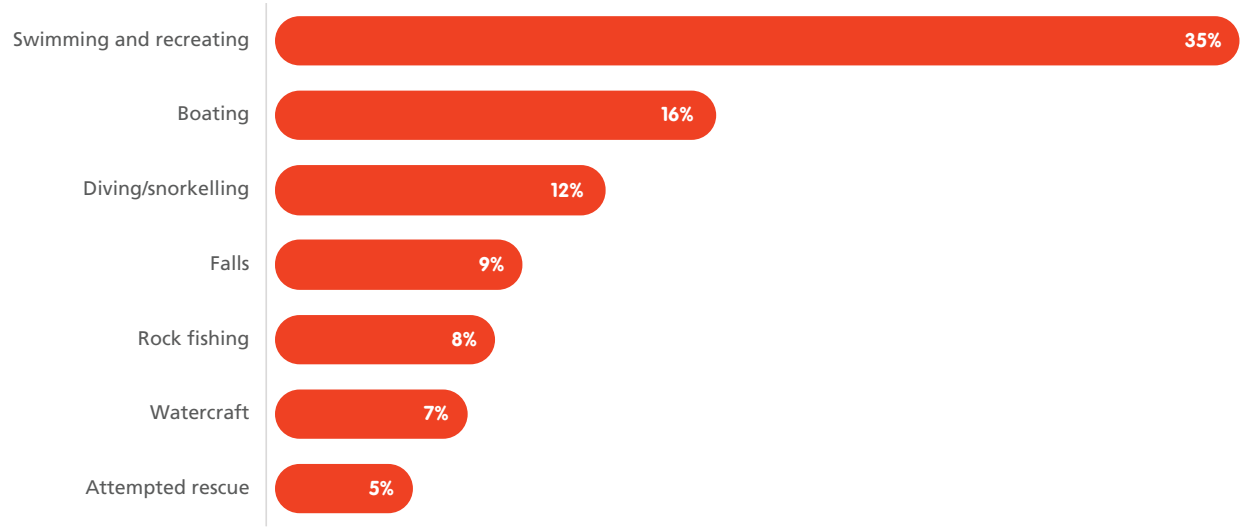
State and Territory breakdown, 2020/21 to 2024/25



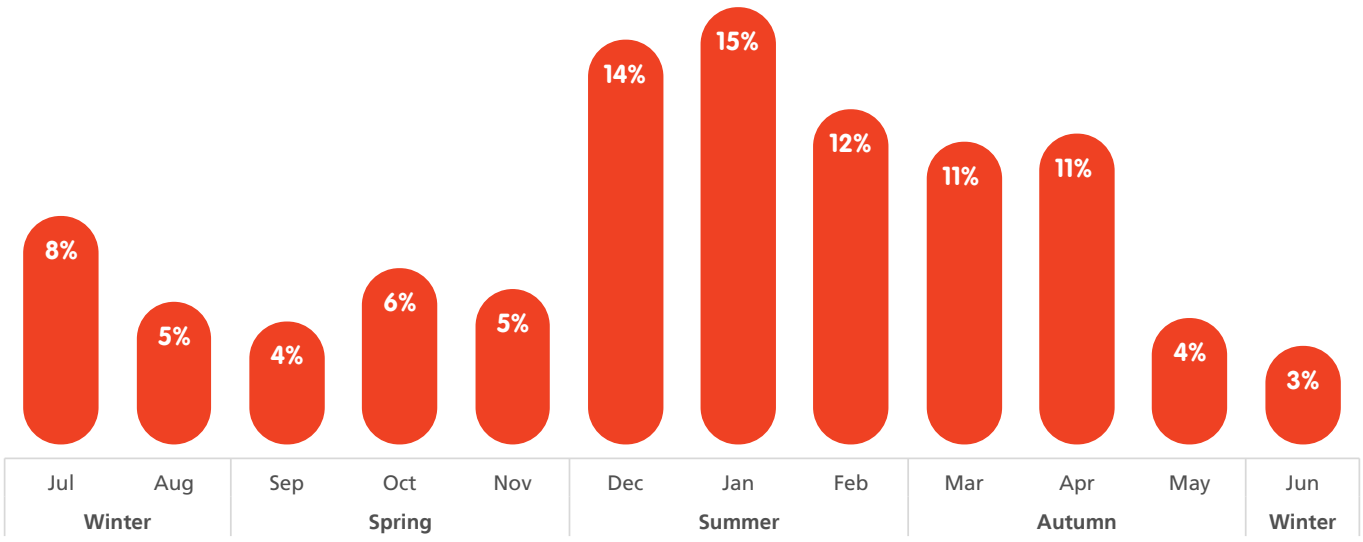
How and when does coastal drowning occur?

Coastal drowning deaths by activity, 2020/21 to 2024/25

*Note: activity due to other causes in 3% of cases, unknown in 6%



Coastal drowning deaths by month and season, 2020/21 to 2024/25



9%
Alcohol/drugs involved

23%
Medical/injury involved

48%
Afternoon (12-6pm)

RIVERS/CREEKS

28%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT RIVERS/CREEKS

Rivers/creeks were the leading drowning location this financial year (2024/25), representing 28% of drowning deaths; a 31% increase from last year and a 39% increase from the 10-year average. Men continue to account for the majority of drowning deaths at rivers/creeks, 79% this financial year.

Drowning deaths were the highest in the 25–34 year age group (17%) followed by 55-64 years (14%) and 18-24 years (14%). Most (49%) rivers/creeks drowning deaths occurred in regional or remote locations, and in 25% of deaths, the person travelled more than 50km from their home residence. However, 20% occurred less than 10km from their home.

Over one third of drowning deaths at rivers/creeks occurred in the summer (37%) and on the weekend (41%), the highest month of drowning at rivers/creeks was in the month of January (16%).

Compared to other bodies of water, those who drowned at rivers/creeks tended to come from disadvantaged areas: 31% of people who drowned in a rivers/creeks related drowning cases resided in IRSAD Decile 1-2 locations, compared to 11% of people who lived in Decile 9 -10 locations.

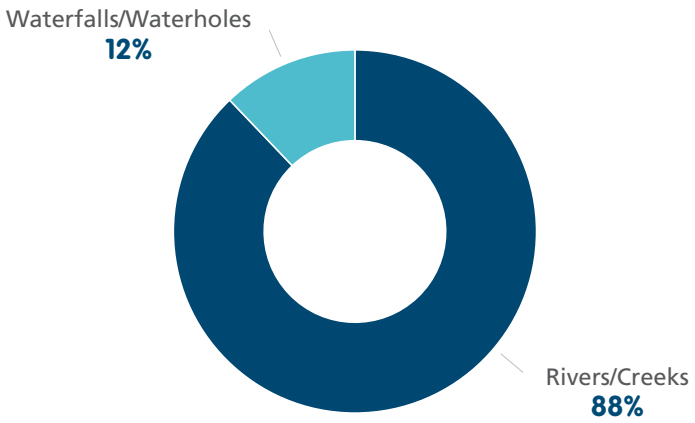
79% Male

37% Summer

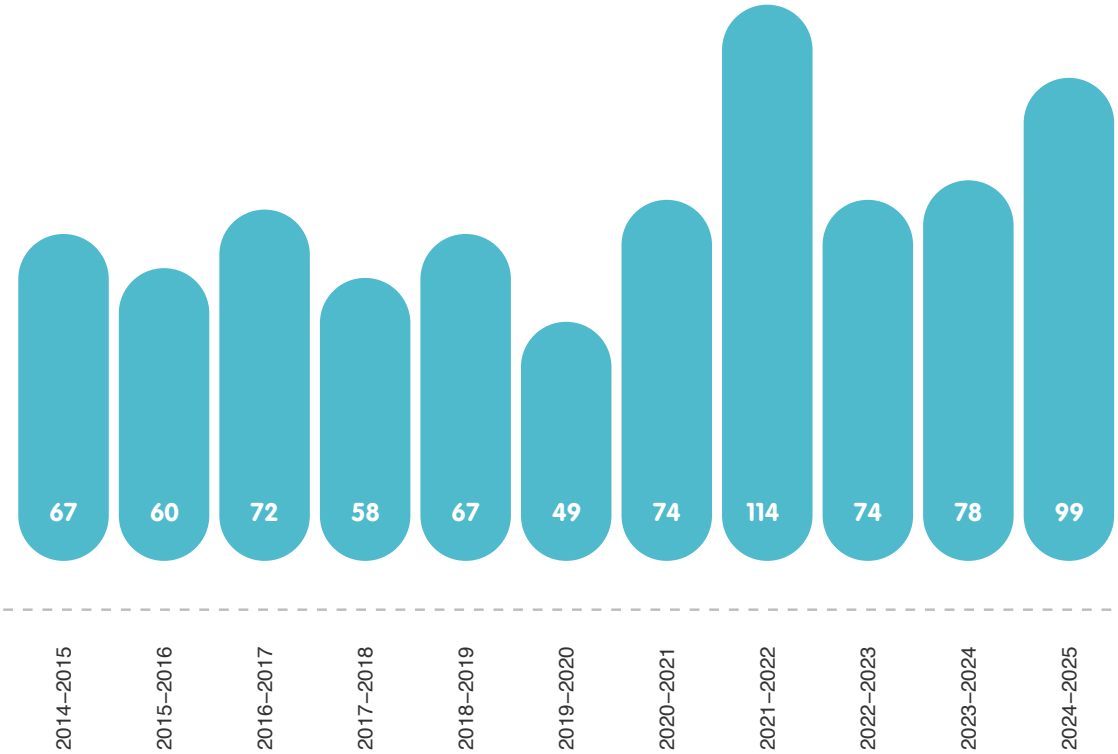
22% Born overseas

10% Alcohol involved

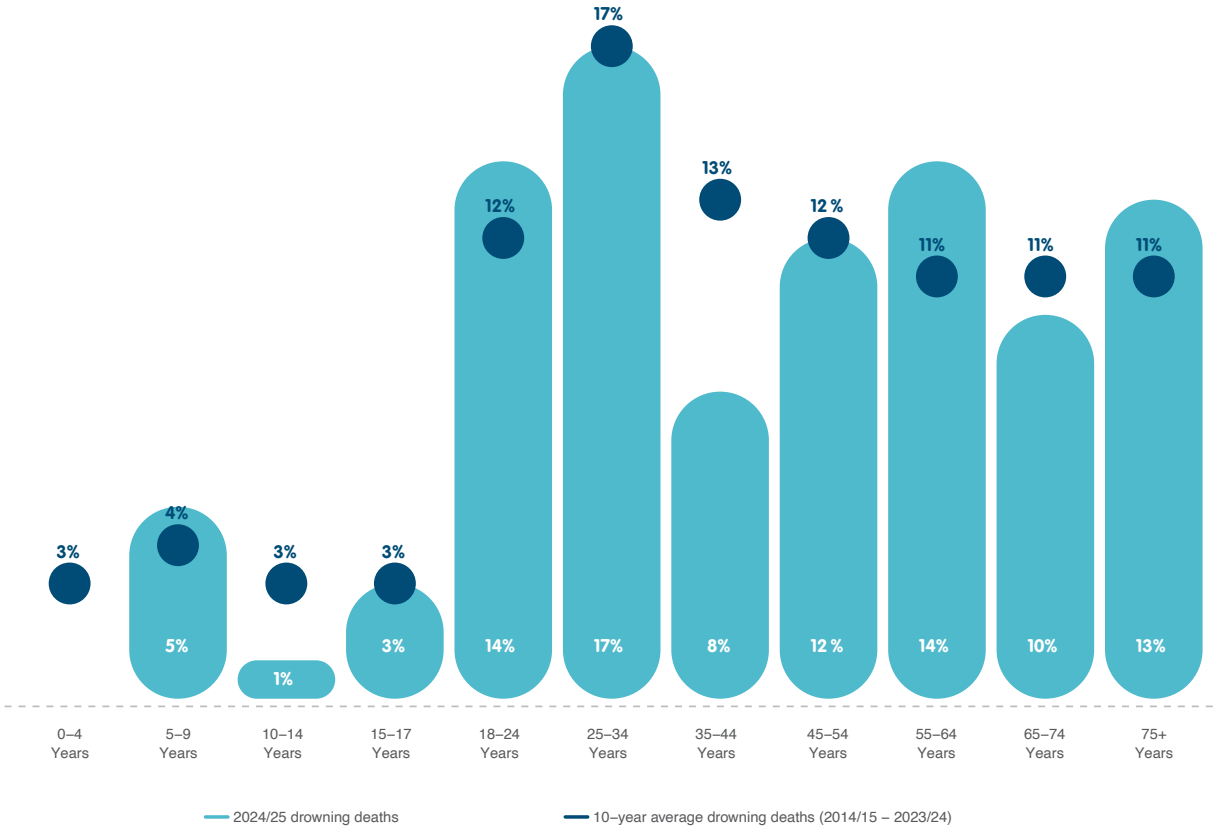
Proportion of drowning deaths at rivers/creeks locations, 2024/25



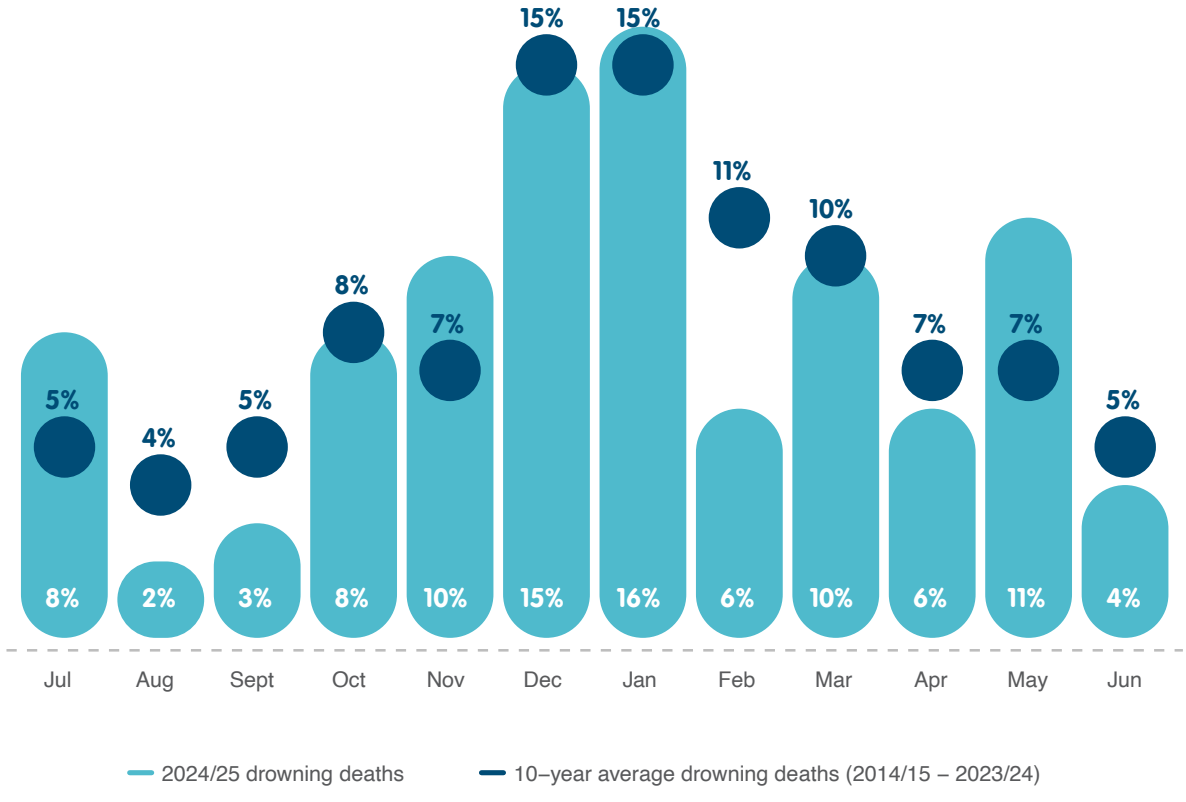
Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by financial year



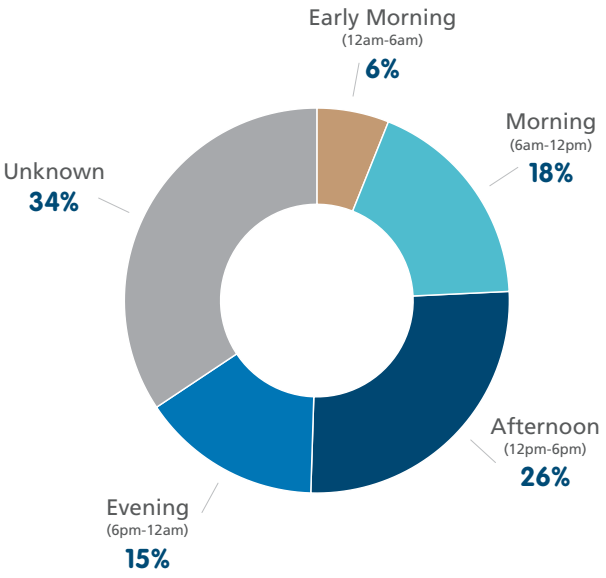
Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by age group, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by month, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by time of day, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by activity (top 5), 2024/25

20% Non-aquatic transport

15% Swimming and recreating

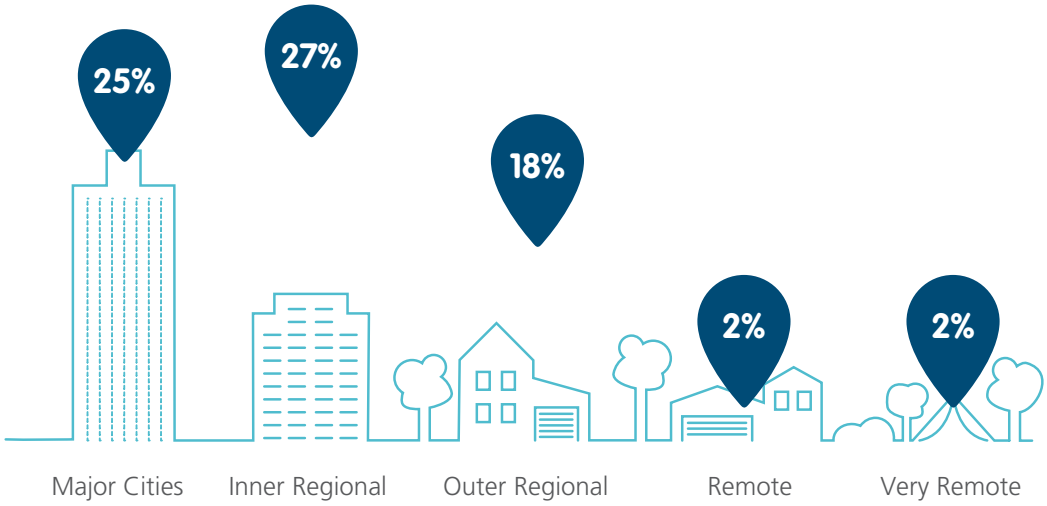
12% Unintentional fall into water

8% Boating

7% Watercraft

Remoteness classification of rivers/creeks drowning locations, 2024/25

Unknown remoteness of drowning river / creek drowning location: 3%



Drive distance between residence and rivers/creeks drowning location, 2024/25

6%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED AT LAKES/DAMS

22
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↓15%
decrease

26
10-Year Average

Lakes/dams represented 6% of drowning deaths this financial year (2024/25); a 24% decrease from last year, and a 15% decrease from the 10-year average. Most drowning deaths at lakes/dams occurred among three age groups: children aged 0-4 years (18%), 55-64 years (18%) and 75 years+ (18%).

The leading activity prior to drowning at lakes/dams was boating (18%) followed by an unintentional fall into water (14%). The highest number of deaths occurred in the summer (36%), occurring in the month of January (27%), followed by March (18%).

Twenty-seven percent of drowning deaths at lakes/dams occurred close to home (0-5km from home), although 20% travelled 50km or further from their home to the lakes/dams location; 37% of drowning deaths occurred in regional areas.

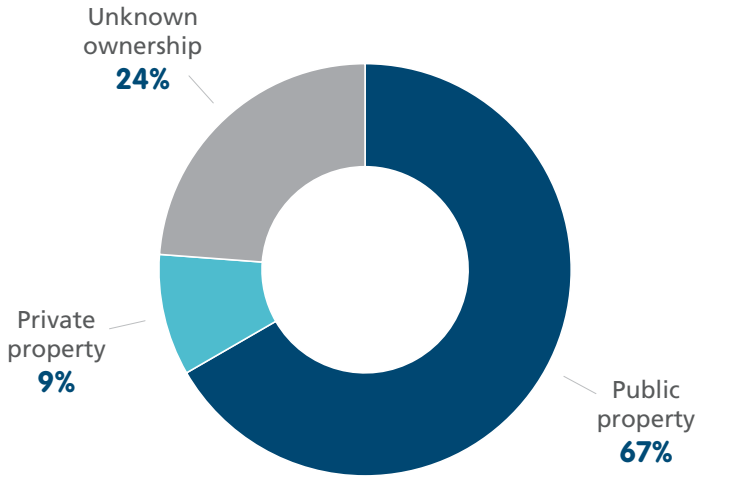
77%
Male

36%
Summer

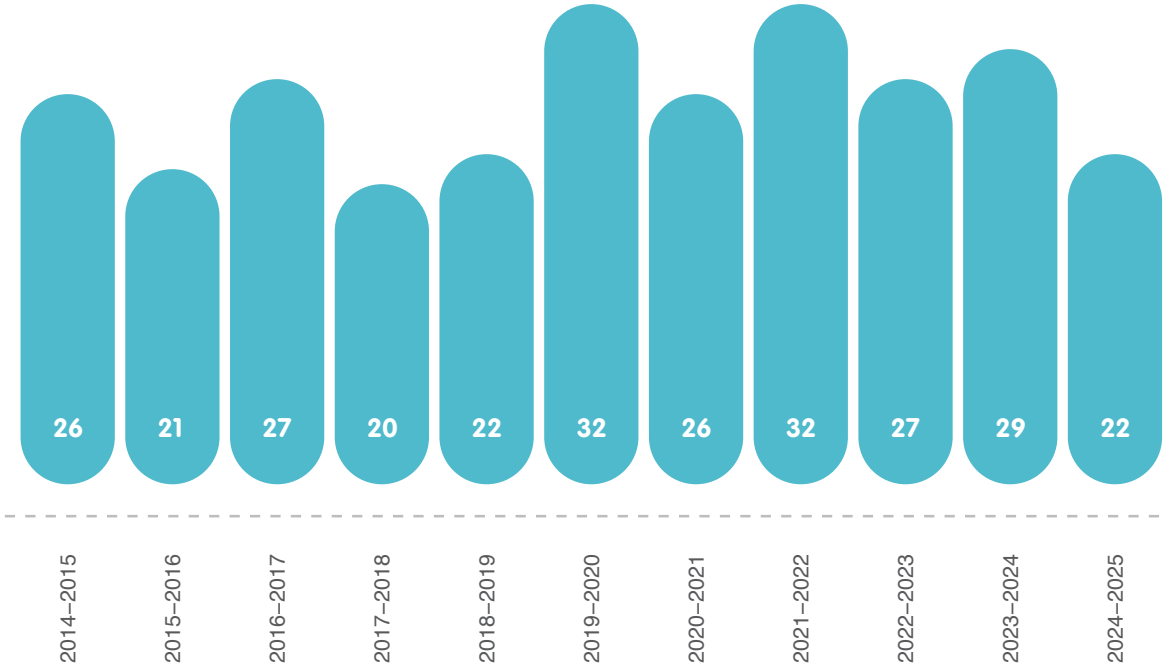
10%
Born overseas

*Presence of alcohol and drugs was unknown at the time of publication

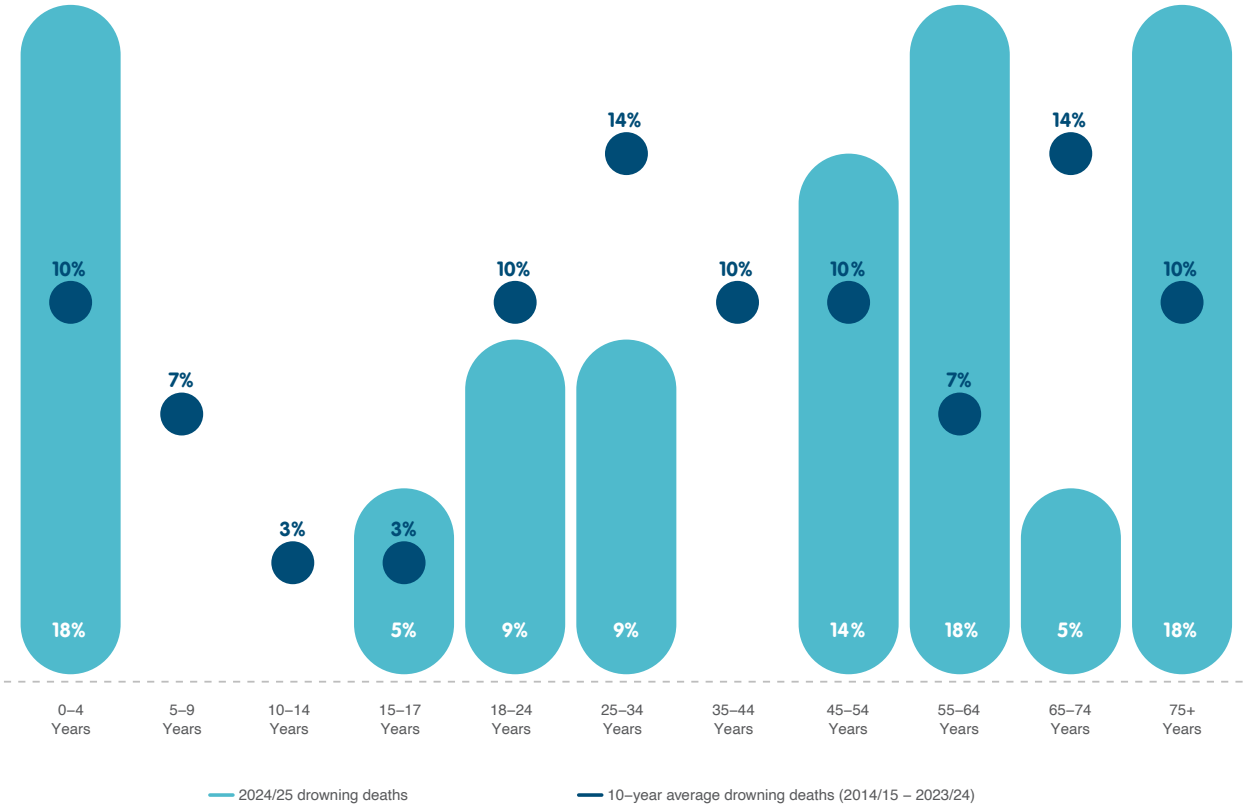
Proportion of drowning deaths at lakes/dams locations, 2024/25



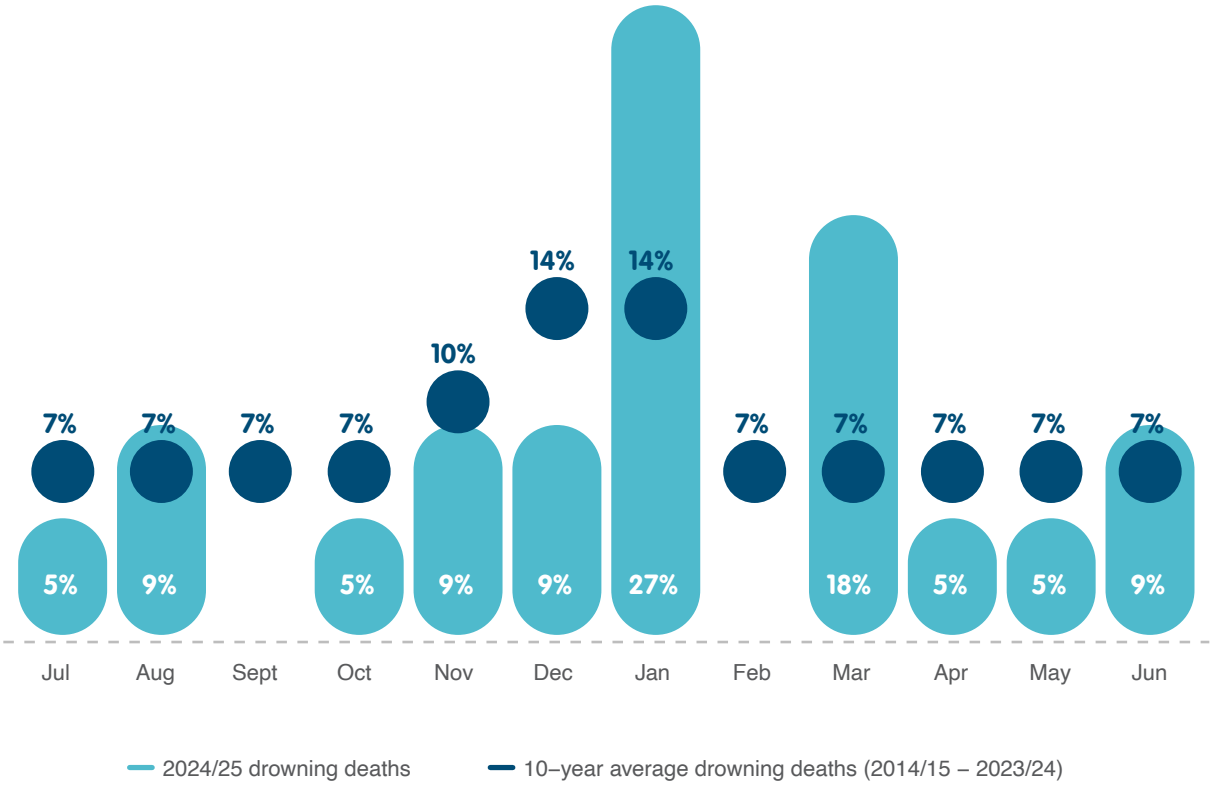
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by financial year



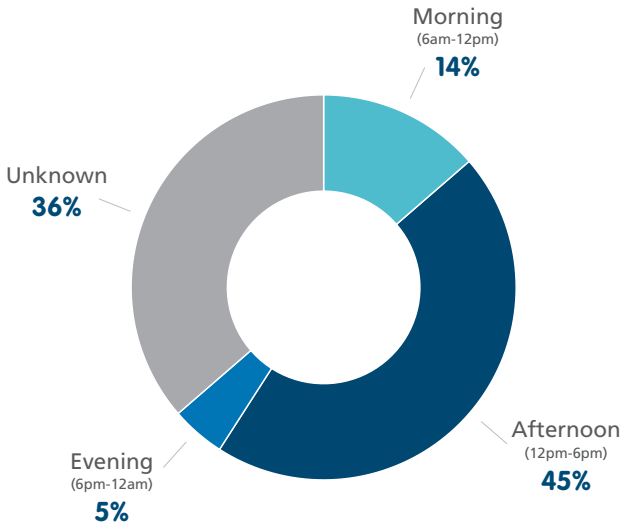
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by age group, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by month, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by time of day, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by activity (top 5), 2024/25

18% Boating

14% Unintentional fall into water

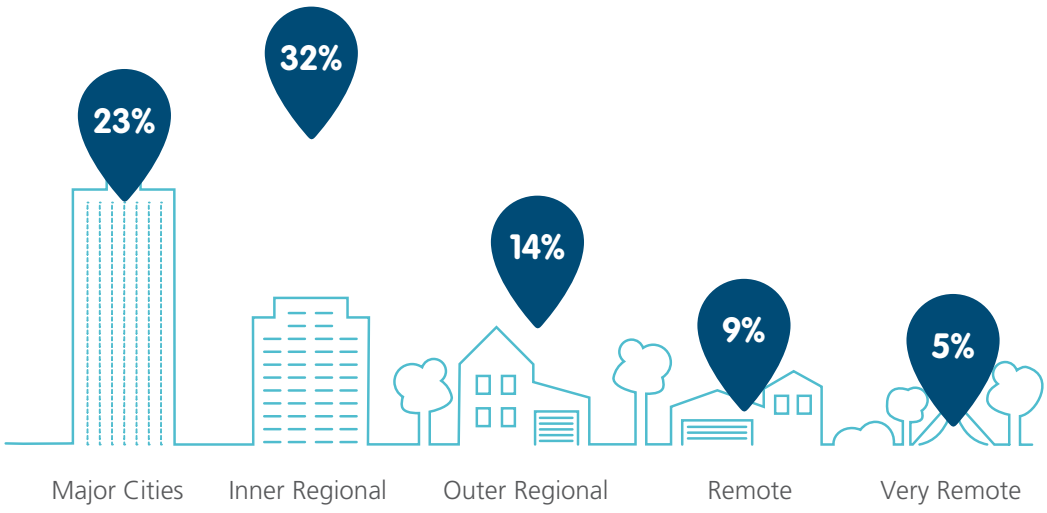
9% Swimming and recreating

9% Non-aquatic transport

9% Watercraft

5% Jumped In

Remoteness classification of lakes/dams drowning locations, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and lakes/dams drowning location, 2024/25

SWIMMING POOLS

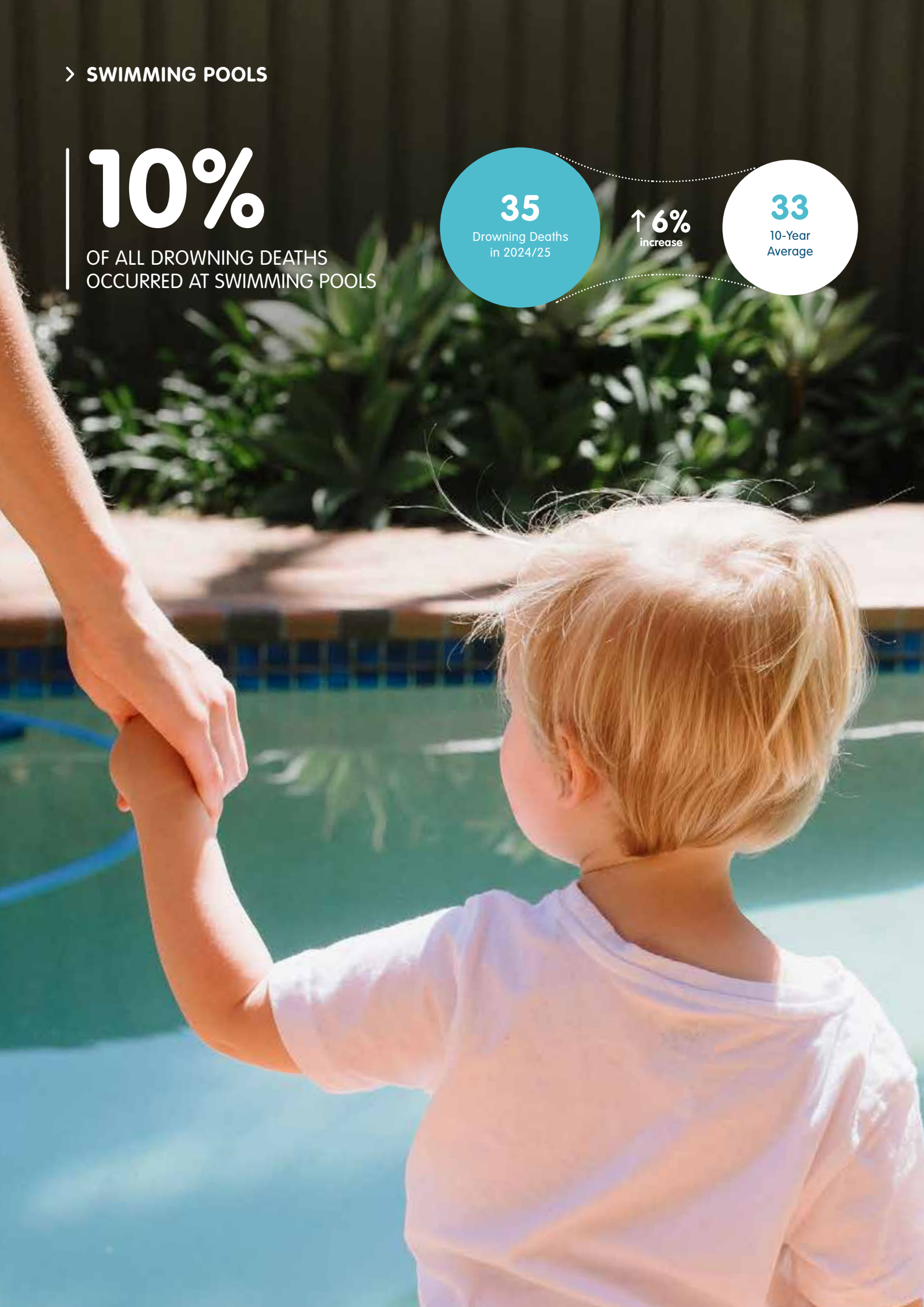
10%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT SWIMMING POOLS

35
Drowning Deaths
in 2024/25

↑ 6%
increase

33
10-Year
Average



Swimming pools represented 10% of drowning deaths this financial year, a 6% increase from the 10-year average. The highest age groups were 65+ year (38%) and 0–4 year (24%) age groups.

The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (54%) followed by an unintentional fall into water (29%). Almost three quarters (73%) of drowning deaths occurred in a private/home pool and during the summer (60%), in the month of January (23%) followed by December (20%).

**Note: Home pools are primarily single-dwelling domestic pools. Communal pools include hotels, motels, resorts, holiday apartment complexes, and public pools include council owned pools, school and university pools, rock pools and commercial learn to swim centres.*

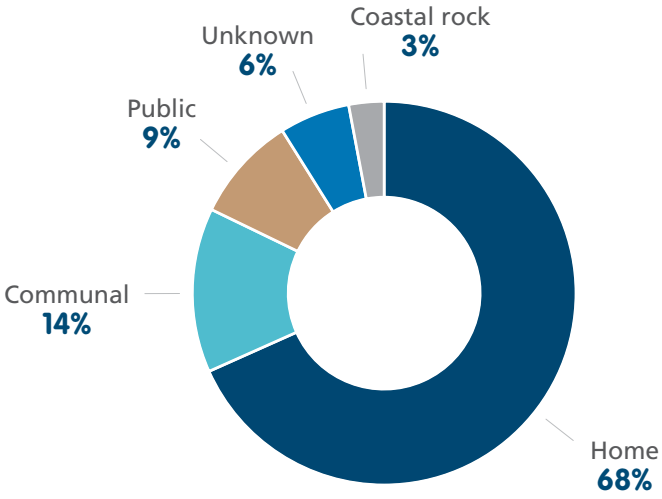
71%
Male

60%
Summer

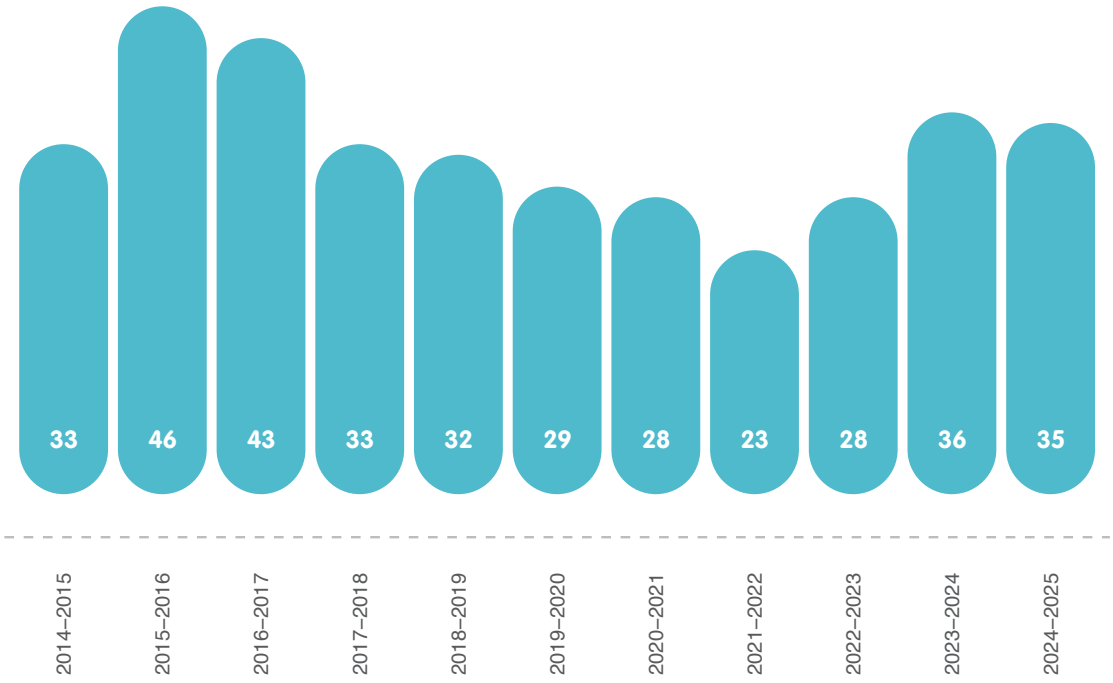
9%
Born overseas

20%
Alcohol & drugs

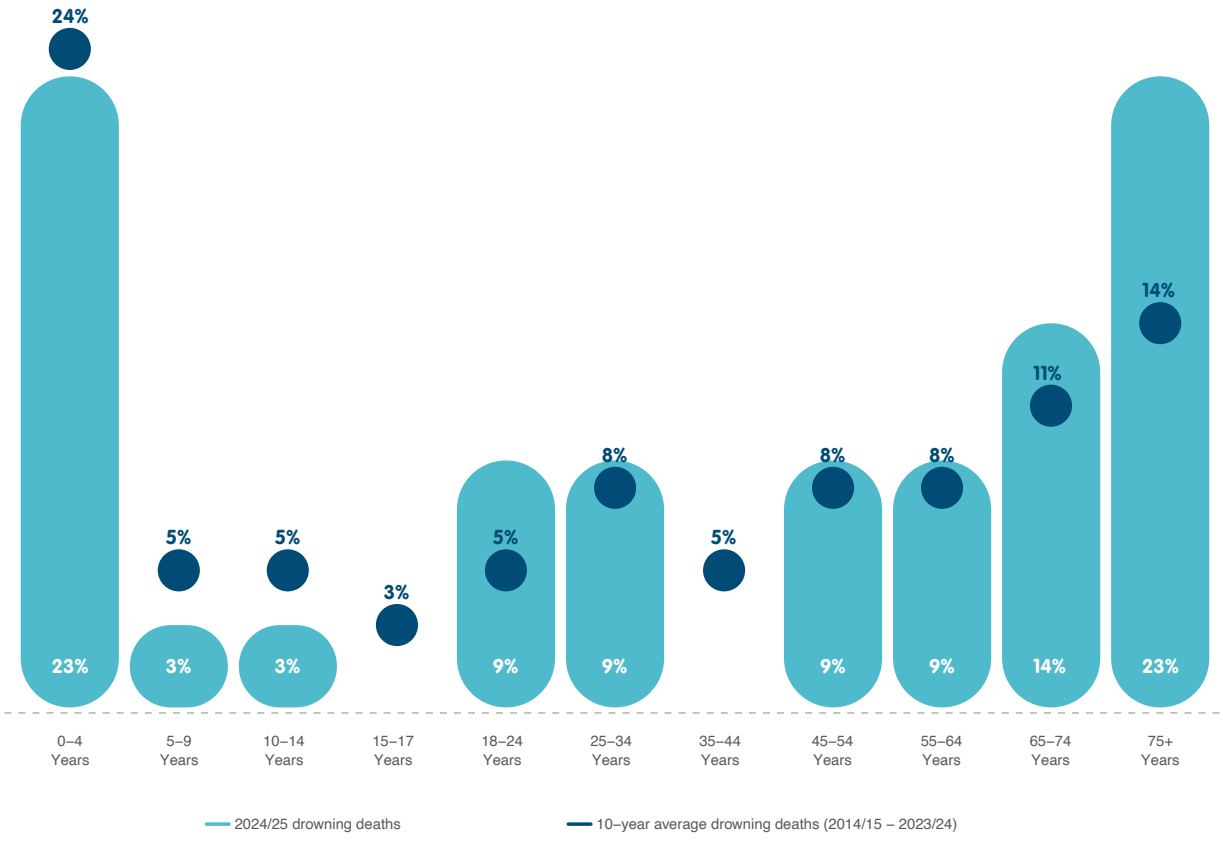
Proportion of drowning deaths at swimming pool locations, 2024/25



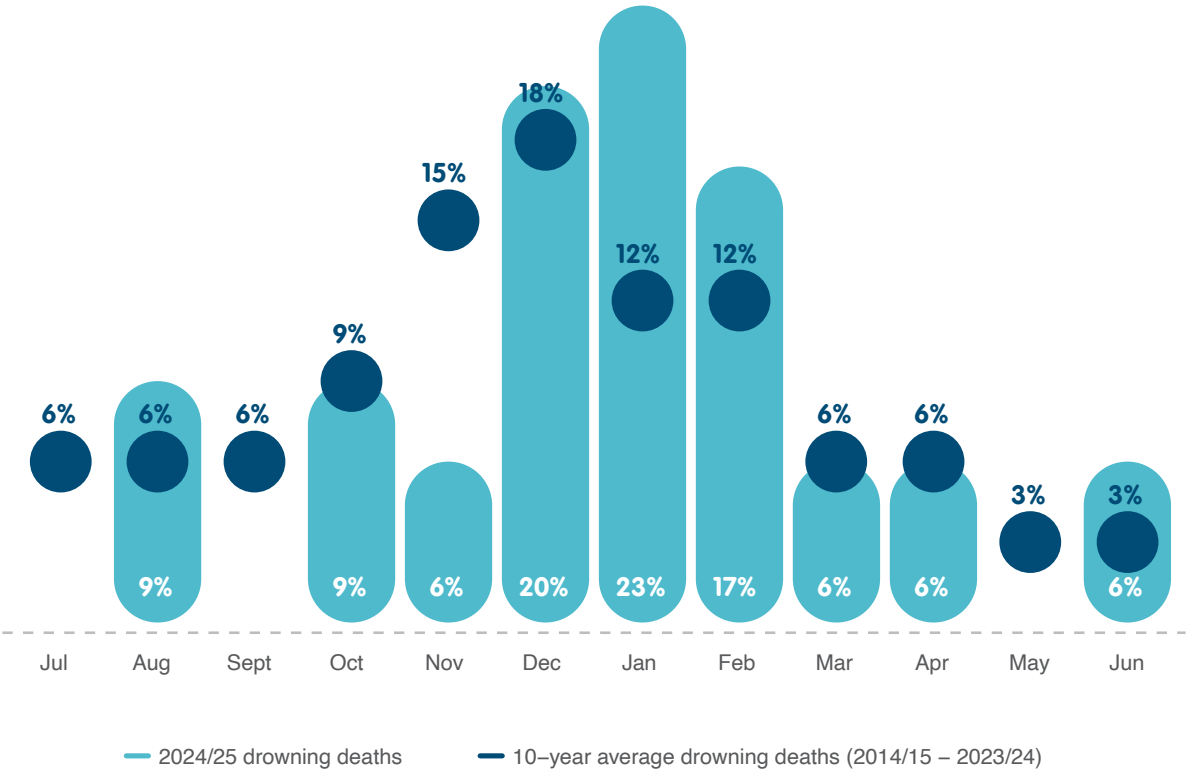
Drowning deaths at swimming pools by financial year



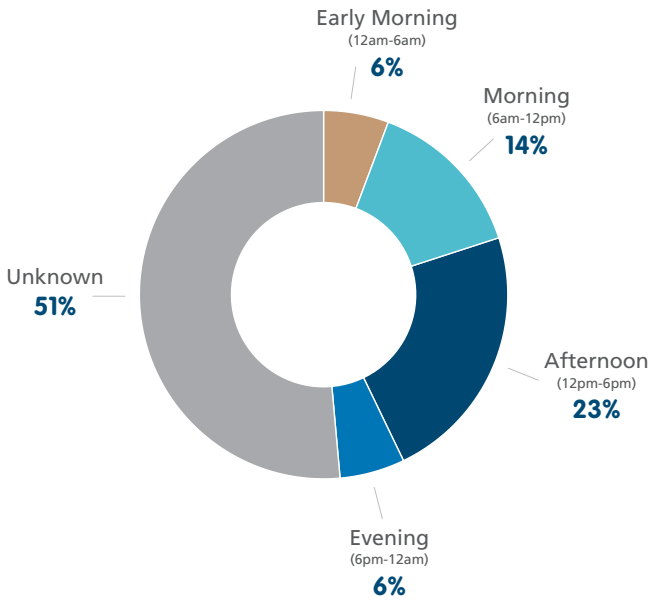
Drowning deaths at swimming pools by age group, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at swimming pools by month, 2024/25



Drowning deaths at swimming pools by time of day, 2024/25



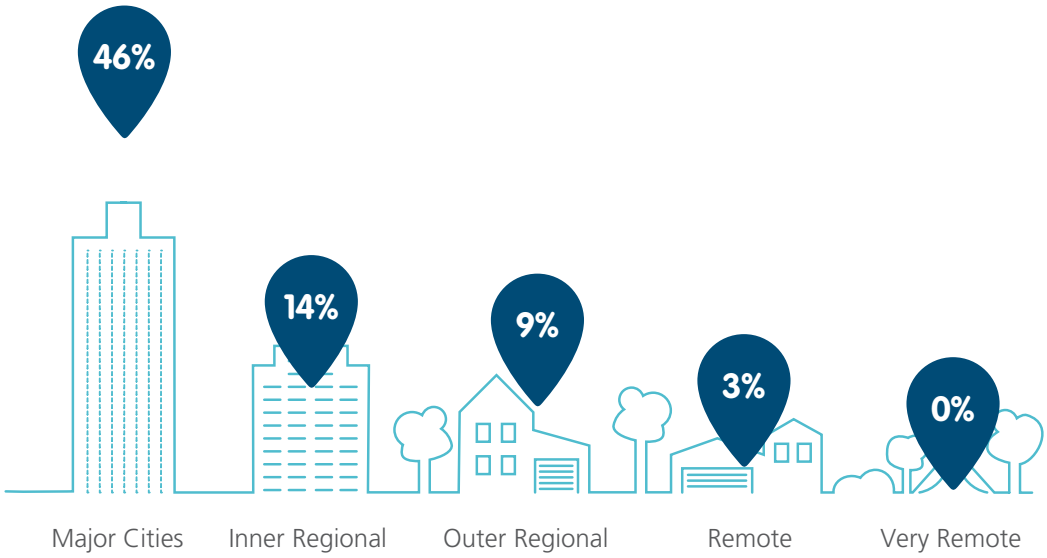
Drowning deaths at swimming pools by activity (top 3), 2024/25

54% Swimming and recreating

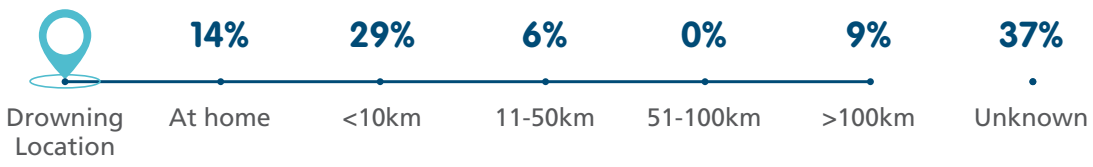
29% Unintentional fall into water

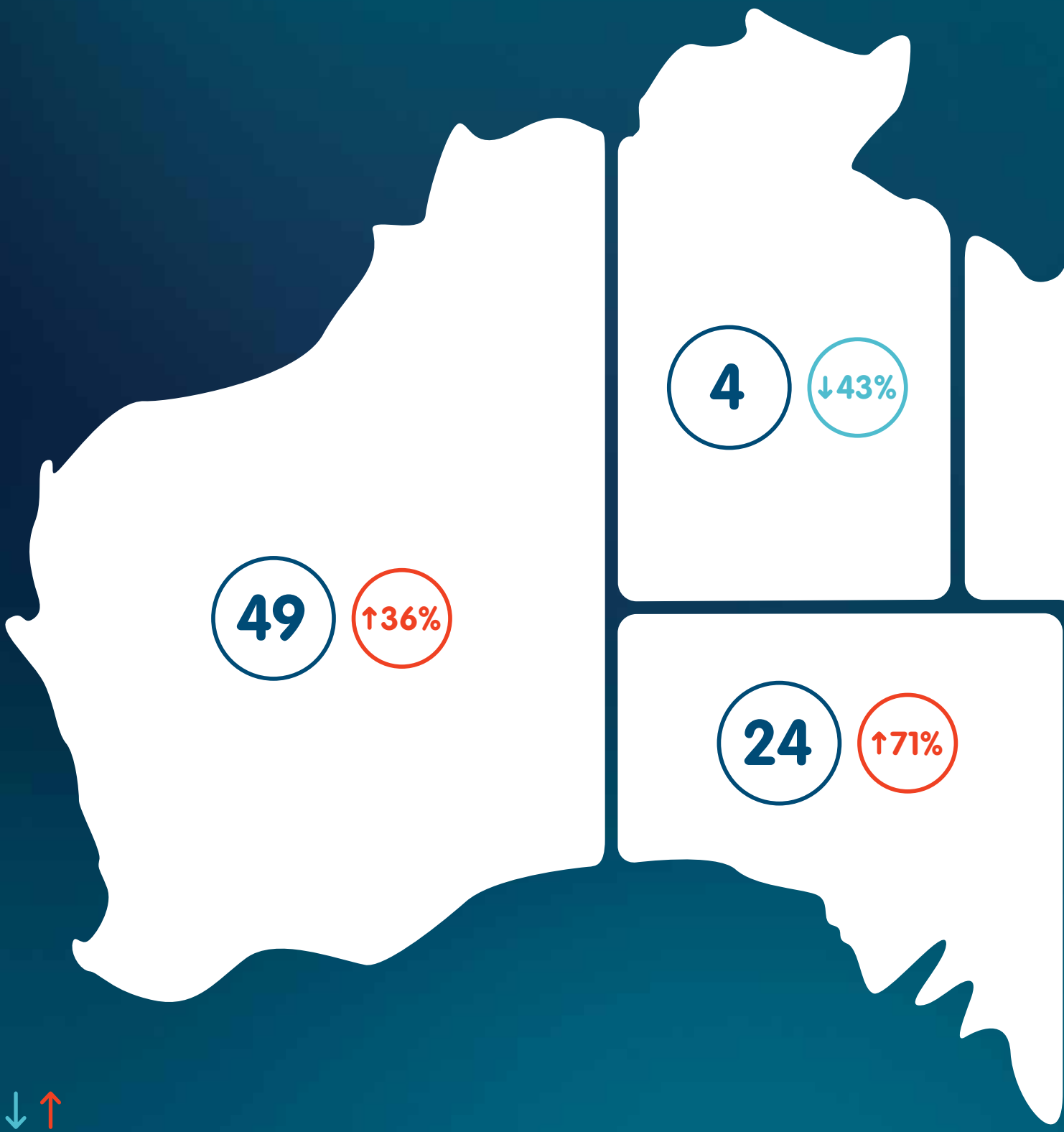
17% Unknown

Remoteness classification of swimming pool drowning locations, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and swimming pools drowning location, 2024/25





↓ ↑

Arrows reflect 2024/25 progress against the 10-year average.

New South Wales recorded the most unintentional drowning deaths (129), a 30% increase in unintentional fatal drowning from the 10-year average.

Queensland recorded the second largest number of unintentional drowning deaths (90).

All states except **Northern Territory** and **Tasmania** recorded an increase in drowning deaths in 2024/2025 compared to the 10-year average.


0%
<5
↓11%
8
↑36%
90
↑30%
129
0
↑8%
52

DROWNING RATES AMONG AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTS BY REGION, 2014/15 - 2024/25

Residential Drowning Rates

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of region in Australia. As an indicatation of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occured.

Further details are provided in the following pages with breakdowns by each state.

See the Methods Section on page 96 for additional information.

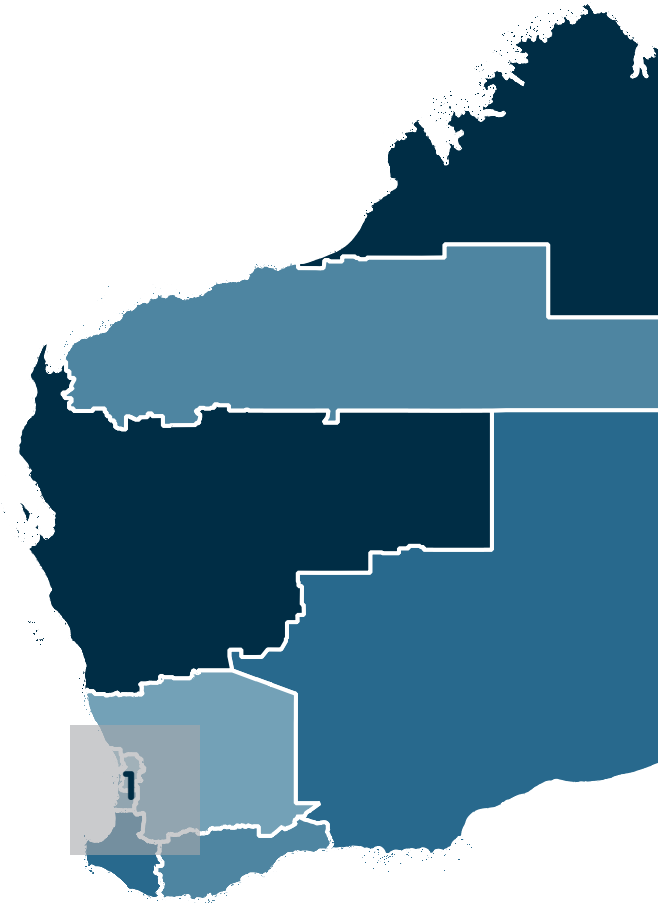
Top 10 regions with the highest drowning rates

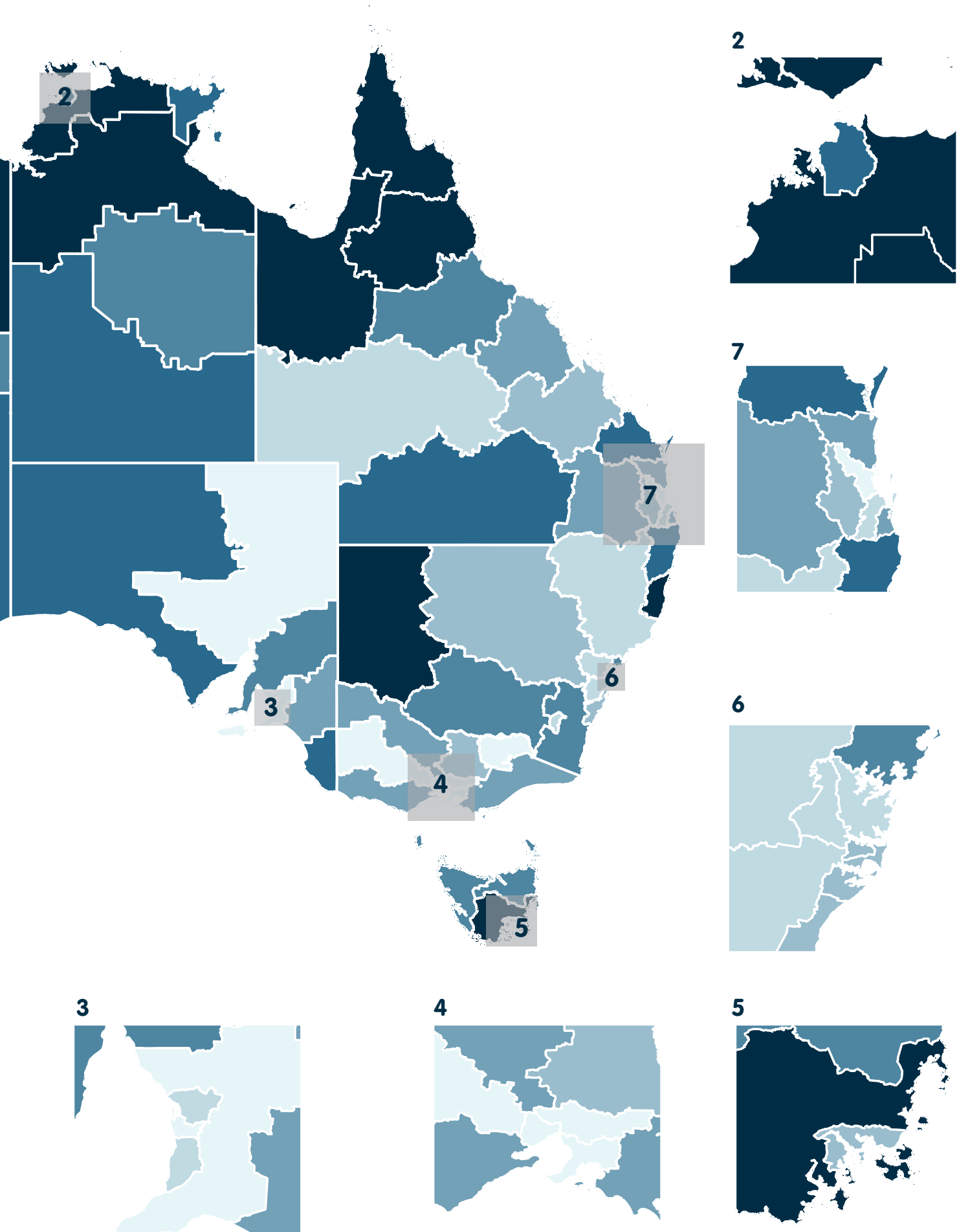
Region	State	Rate/100k
Torres and Cape	QLD	4.95
Top End*	NT	4.69
Kimberley	WA	4.49
Big Rivers*	NT	3.79
South East TAS	TAS	3.42
Midwest WA	WA	3.09
North West QLD*	QLD	2.99
Cairns and Hinterland	QLD	2.95
Mid North Coast NSW	NSW	2.66
Far West NSW*	NSW	2.51

Top 10 metro regions with the highest drowning rates

Region	State	Rate/100k
Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield	NT	2.38
Sunshine Coast	QLD	1.37
Gold Coast	QLD	1.28
South Perth	WA	1.23
Hobart	TAS	1.18
North Perth	WA	1.13
Sydney	NSW	1.13
South Eastern Sydney	NSW	1.12
East Perth	WA	1.06
West Moreton	QLD	1.05

*Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

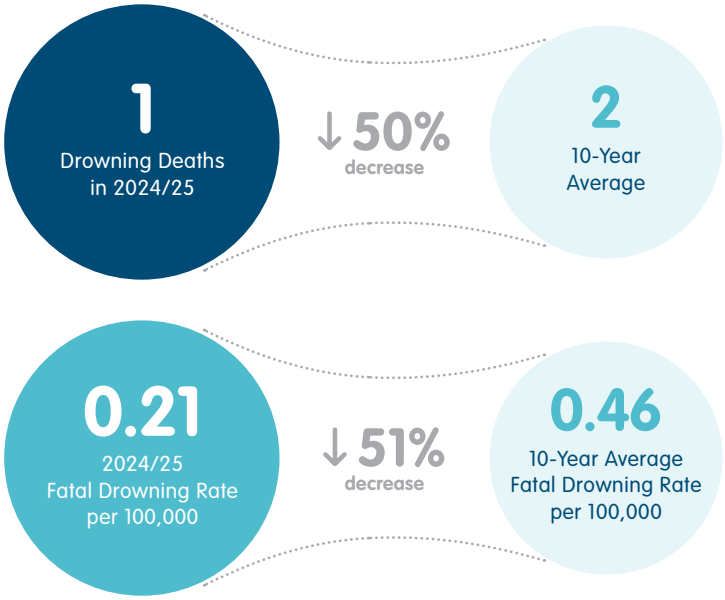



2
7
6
3
4
5
2
7
6
3
4
5

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

There was 1 unintentional drowning death in the ACT between 1st July 2024 and 30th June 2025. This is a 50% decrease to the 10-year average.

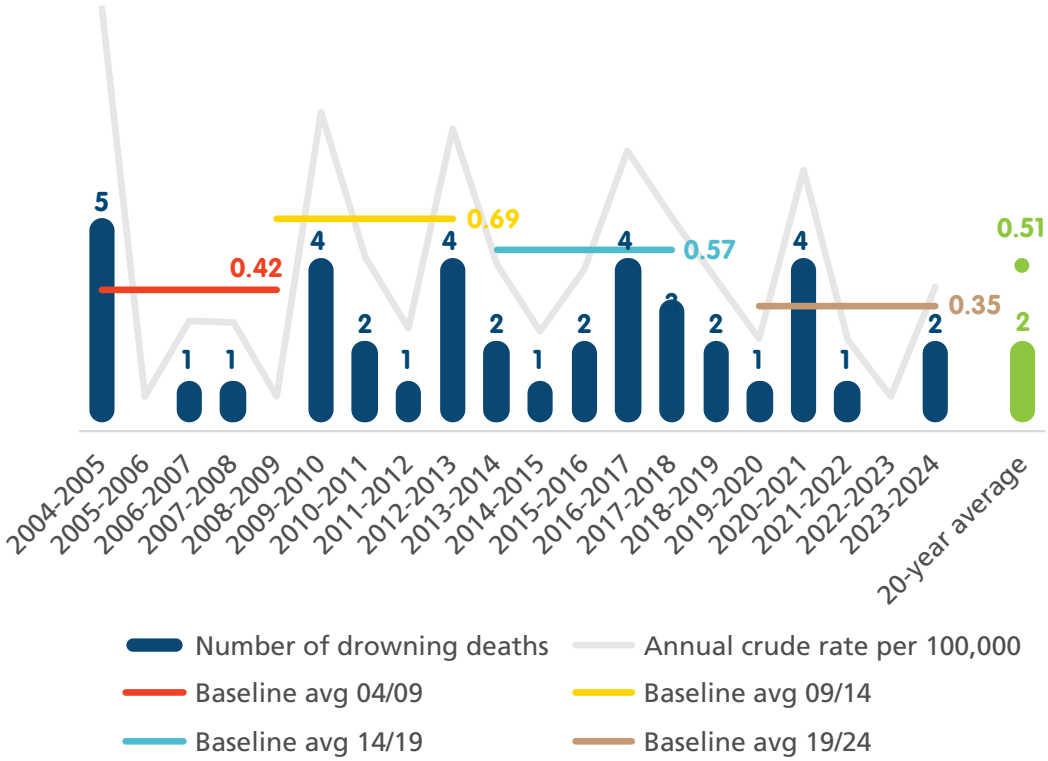
There were two drowning deaths recorded in ACT the previous year (2023/24). In the last 20 years, between July 2005 and June 2025, there have been 40 drowning deaths in the ACT with a cumulative crude drowning rate of 0.50 drowning incidents per 100,000 people.



Over the past 20-years:

- 83% were males
- Highest number of drowning deaths occurred in the 0-4 year (15%) and 18–24 year (15%) age groups
- 43% occurred in rivers/creeks
- 35% of drowning deaths occurred while swimming and recreating

ACT 20 year rate



The Inland Waterway Safety Assessment

The ACT office of Royal Life Saving provided guidance and support to the local land and asset managers at Parks ACT for their inland waterway safety management plan. The Murrumbidgee River Corridor provides visitors with access to well-maintained reserves and swimming spaces.

The Inland Waterway Safety Assessment provides land managers with a guide for balancing risk with access to these swimming locations. A major component of this assessment is the review and assessment of current water safety signage and publicly accessible rescue equipment.

Many of the waterways within the Murrumbidgee River Corridor have warning signs to let visitors know about the dangers of swimming or getting into the water. The report delivered by Royal Life Saving provided Parks ACT with a review of their reserve's signage mapped against the current best practice standards around water safety signage.

This project also delivered additional public rescue equipment along strategic locations from Cotter Bend and Kambah Pool, as highlighted within the ACT Drowning Prevention Plan.

This project was delivered with funding from the Australian Government.

NEW SOUTH WALES

There were 129 drowning deaths that occurred in NSW between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025.

The drowning rate of 1.52 per 100,000 population increased by 22% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

The highest number of drowning deaths in NSW occurred among those aged 75+ years (16%) and reported the highest crude rate for all age groups (2.86 per 100,000).

People who lived in disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 1-4) accounted for 27% of the total drowning deaths in NSW and people who lived in the most advantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 9-10) accounted for 25% of all drowning deaths.

Drowning deaths in NSW mainly occurred at rivers/creeks (35%), followed by beaches (19%), while swimming and recreating (22%).

129
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 30% increase

99
10-Year Average

1.52
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

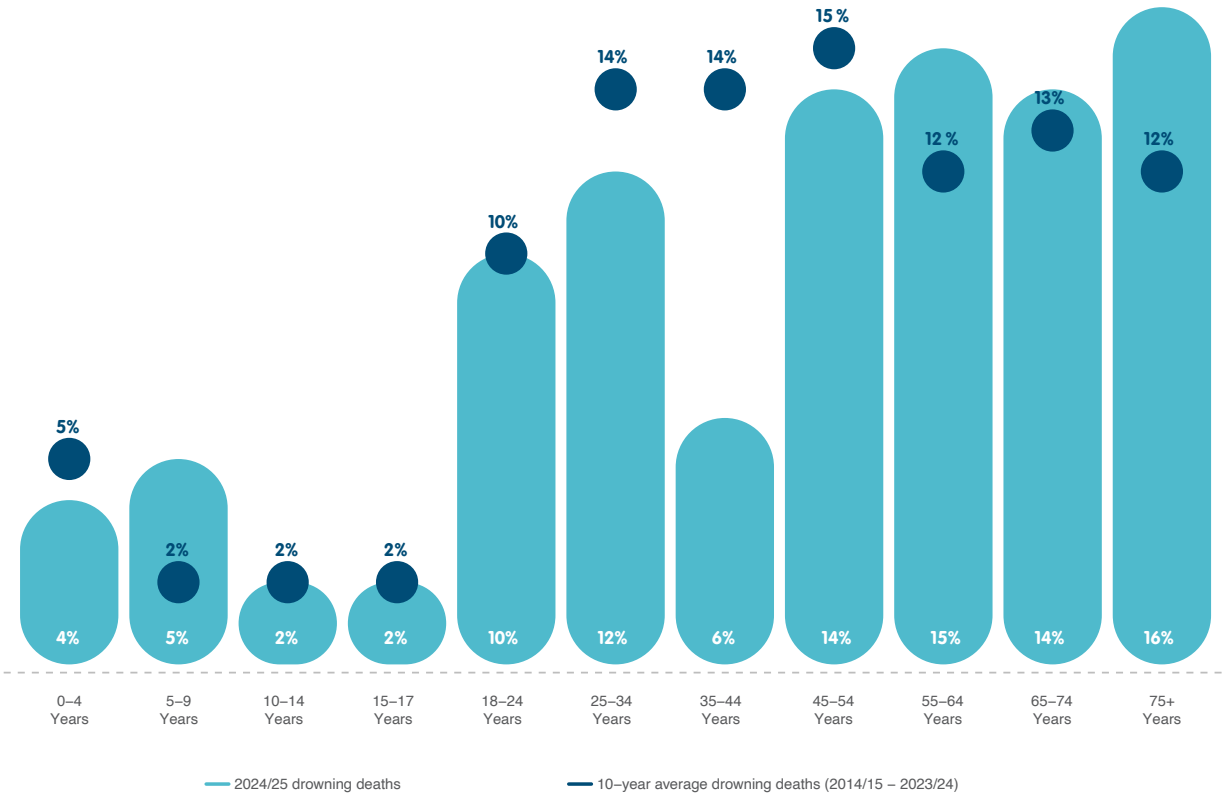
↑ 22% increase

1.25
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

85%
Male

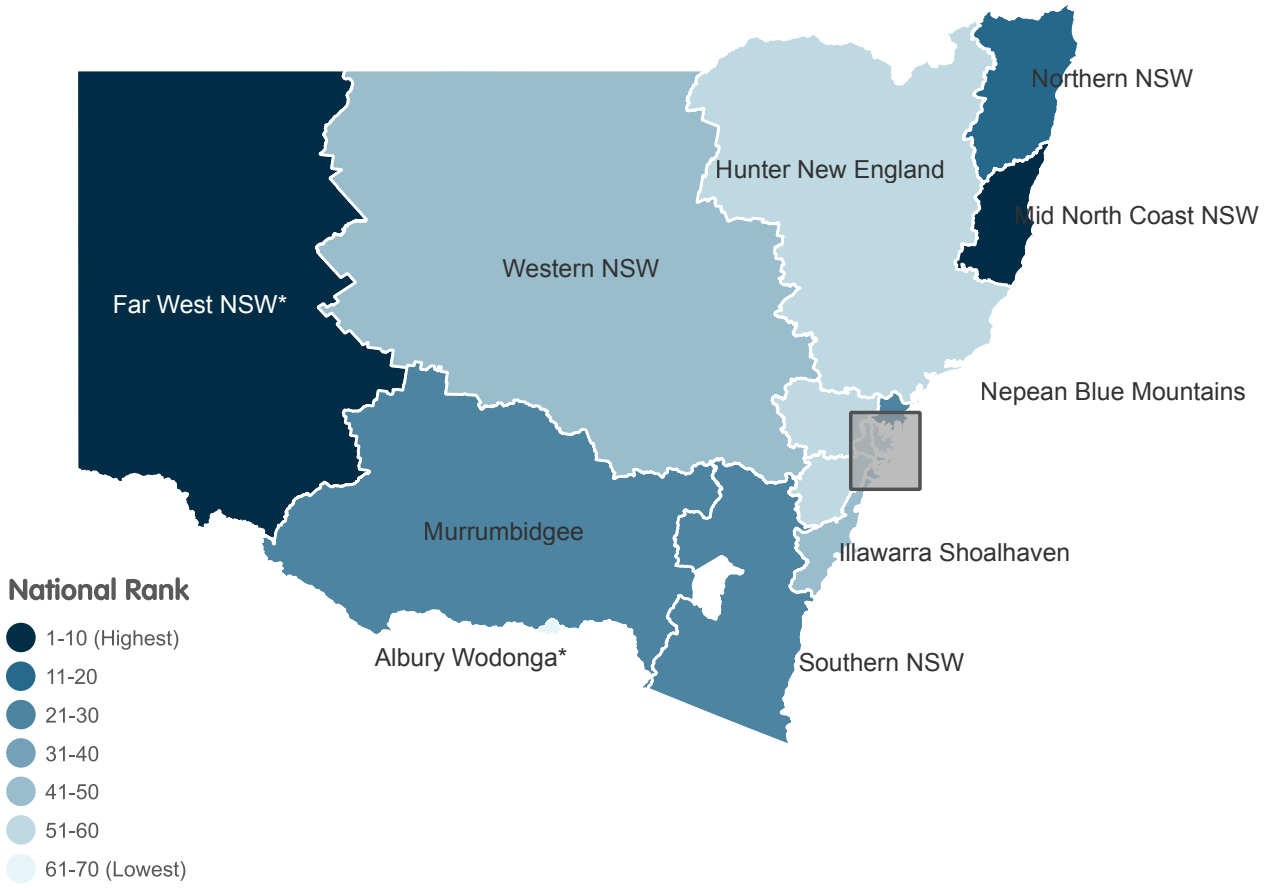
27%
Born overseas

New South Wales drowning deaths by age group, 2024/25



Residential fatal drowning rate by NSW region, 2014/15 - 2024/25

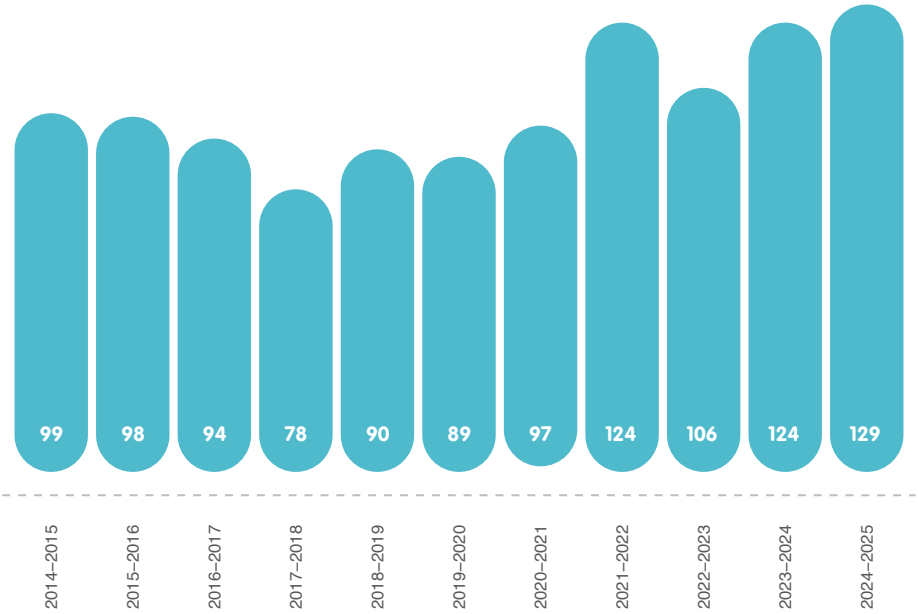
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each NSW region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



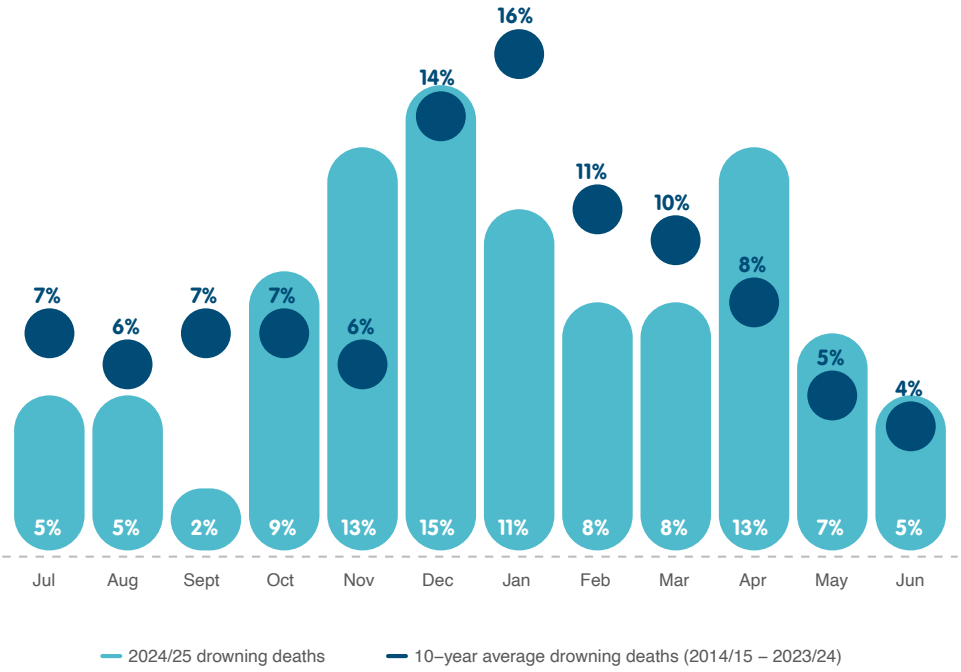
Region	Rate/100k	National Rank
Mid North Coast NSW	2.66	9
Far West NSW*	2.51	10
Northern NSW	2.3	14
Southern NSW	1.72	21
Murrumbidgee	1.68	22
Central Coast NSW	1.49	28
Western NSW	1.17	42
Illawarra Shoalhaven	1.16	43
Sydney	1.13	45
South Eastern Sydney	1.12	47
Hunter New England	1.04	51
Nepean Blue Mountains	1	53
South Western Sydney	0.94	54
Northern Sydney	0.89	57
Western Sydney	0.87	58
Albury Wodonga*	0.57	69

*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution

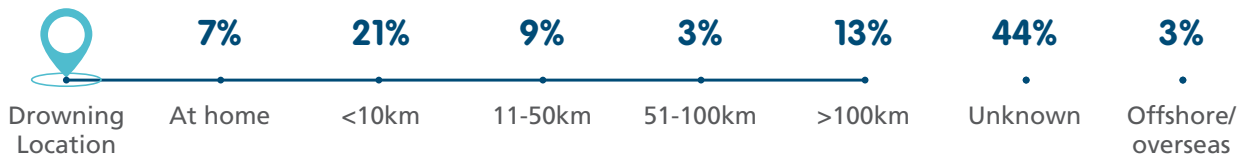
New South Wales drowning deaths by financial year, 2014/15 to 2024/25



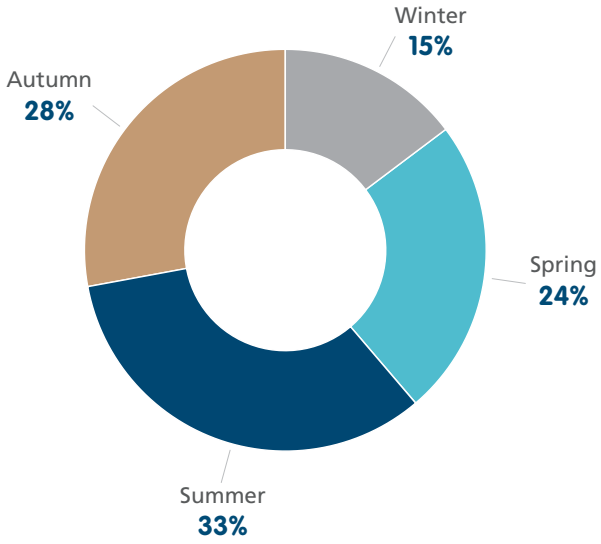
New South Wales drowning deaths by month, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and drowning location, 2024/25



New South Wales drowning deaths by season, 2024/25



New South Wales drowning deaths by activity, 2024/25

22% Swimming and recreating

10% Non-aquatic transport

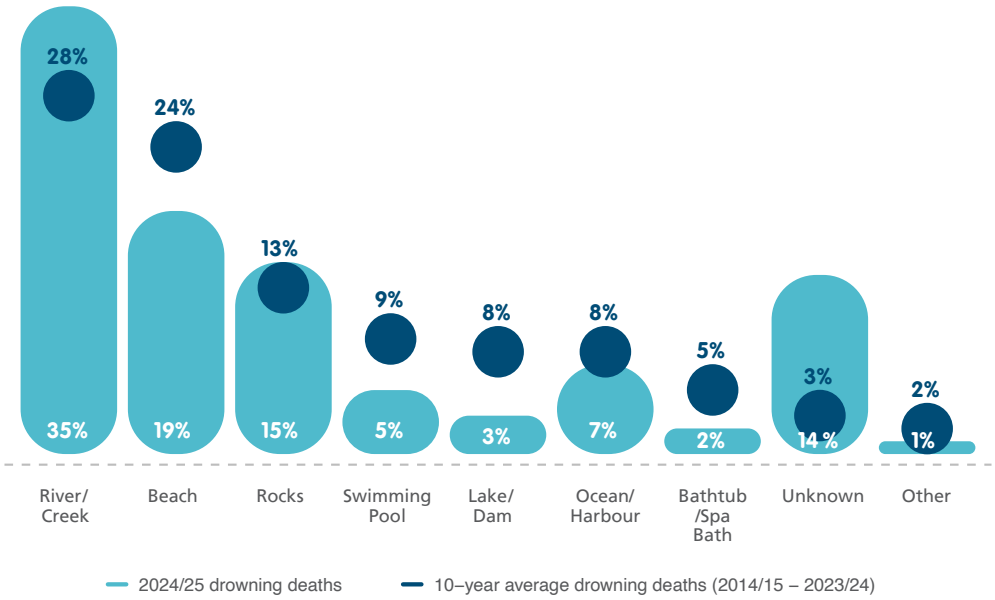
7% Rock fishing

7% Boating

7% Unintentional fall into water

3% Diving/snorkelling

New South Wales drowning deaths by location, 2024/25



Risk Factors

2%
of cases drugs were recorded

3%
of cases alcohol was recorded

NORTHERN TERRITORY

There were 4 drowning deaths that occurred in the NT between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025.

The 2024/25 fatal drowning rate of 1.53 deaths per 100,000 population decreased by 46% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

Drowning deaths in NT mainly occurred at rivers/creeks (50%), while using non-aquatic transport (50%).

4
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↓ 43% decrease

7
10-Year Average

1.53
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

↓ 46% decrease

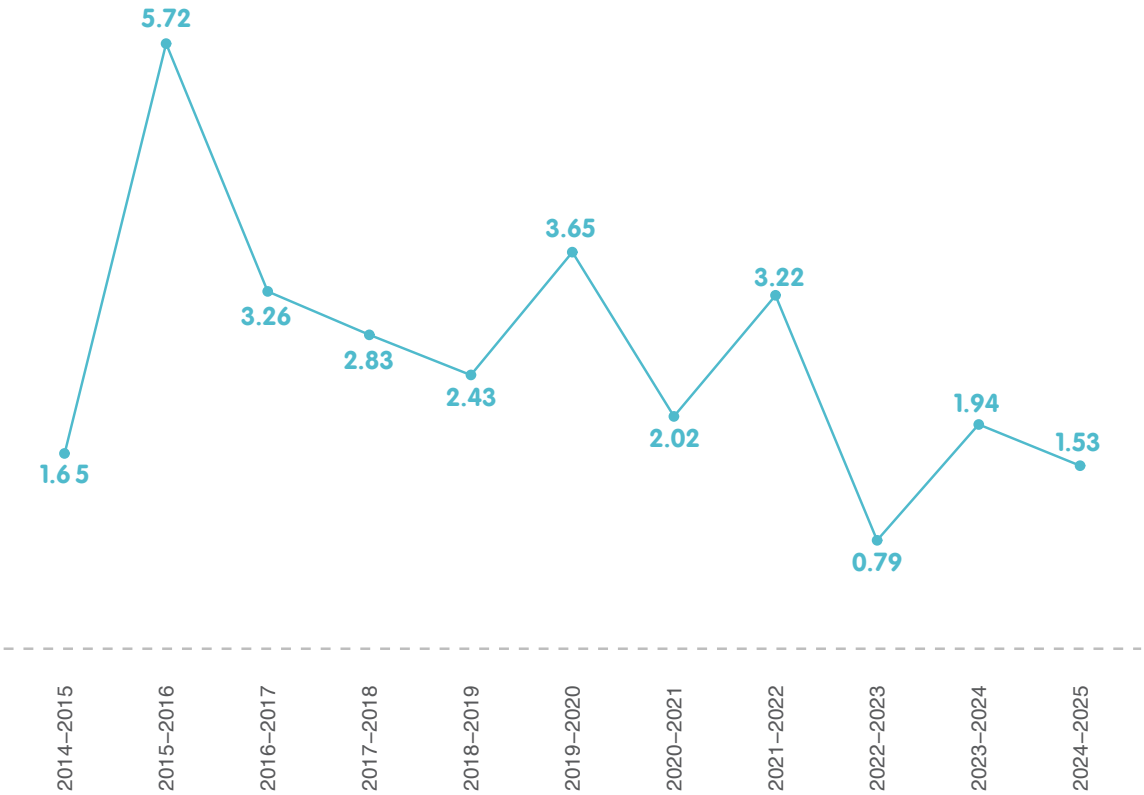
2.82
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

75%
OF DROWNING DEATHS WERE AMONG PEOPLE AGED 75+ YEARS

100%
Male

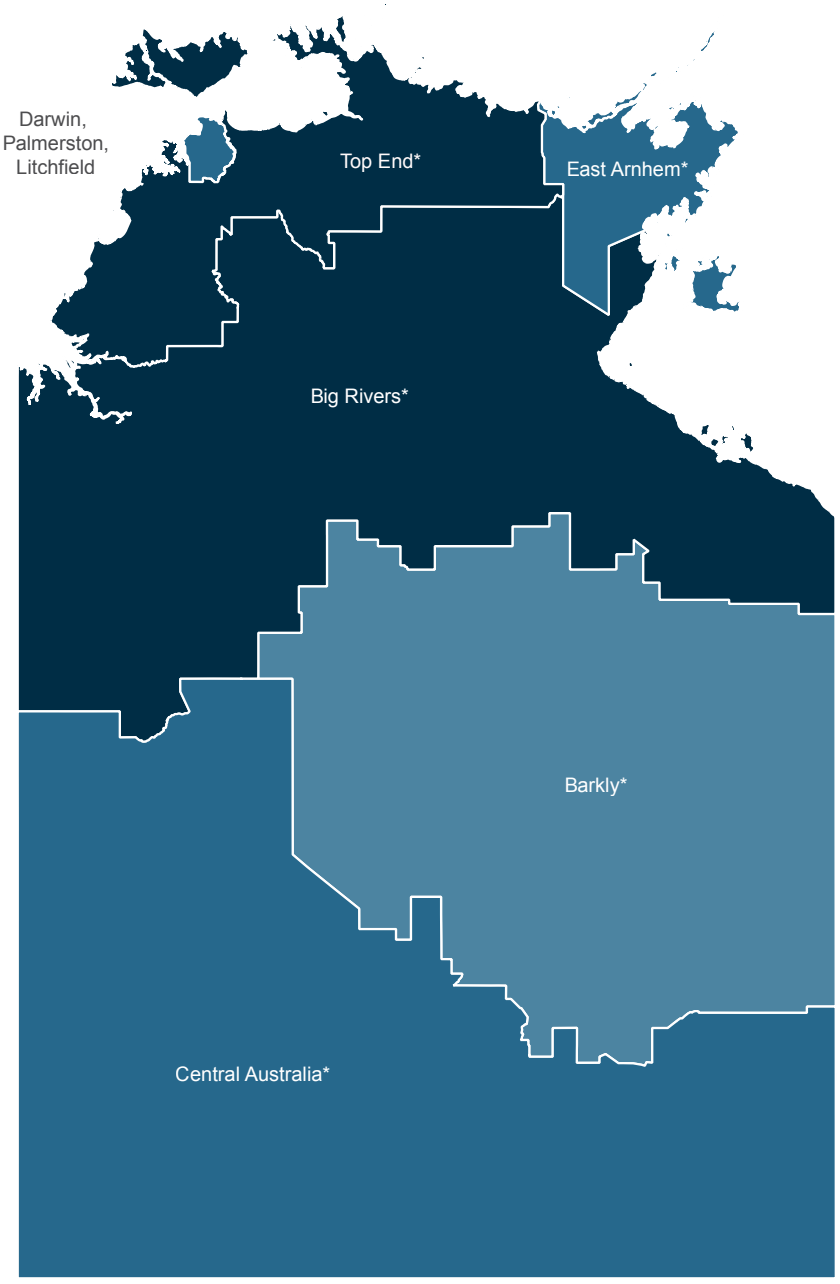
50%
Born overseas

Northern Territory drowning deaths by rates per 100,000 population 2014/15 to 2024/25



Residential fatal drowning rate by NT region, 2014/15 - 2024/25

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each NT region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



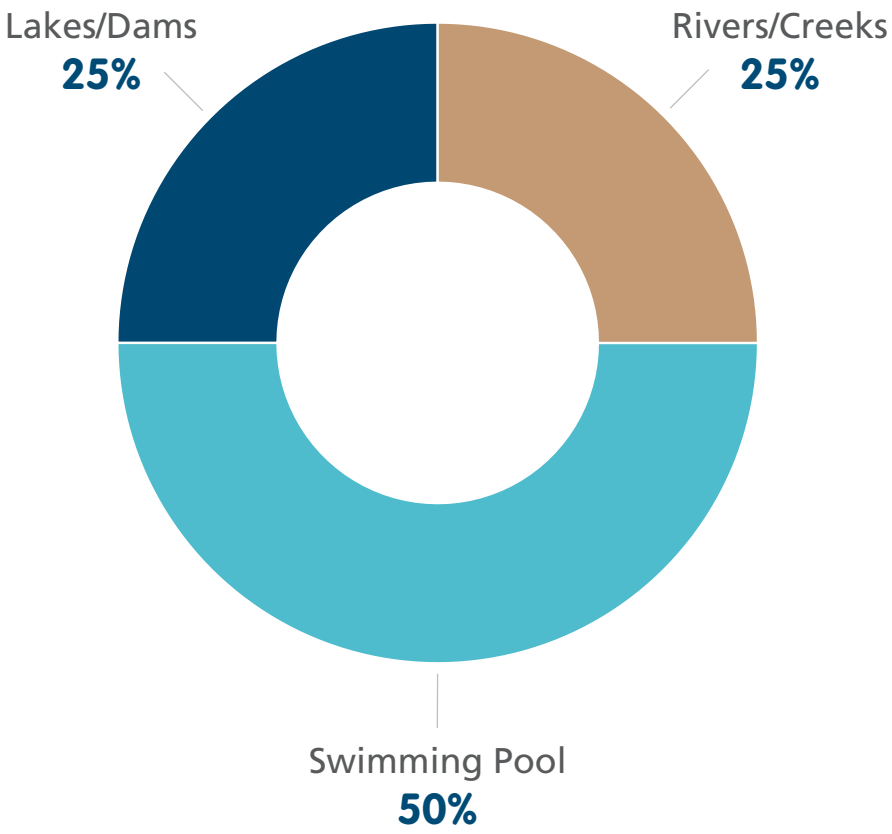
National Rank

- 1-10 (Highest)
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70 (Lowest)

Region	Rate/100k	National Rank
Top End*	4.69	2
Big Rivers*	3.79	4
East Arnhem*	2.42	11
Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield	2.38	13
Central Australia*	1.78	19
Barkly*	1.65	25

*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution

Northern Territory drowning deaths by location, 2024/25



Northern Territory Key Facts

50%
occurred in the wet season

Non-aquatic transport
was the leading activity
prior to drowning

25%
of cases alcohol was recorded

Swimming and Water Safety in Northern Territory Primary Schools commitment – Addressing NT's Drowning Risk

The Northern Territory records the highest per capita drowning rate in Australia. Research shows only 5% of NT Year 6 students meet the national benchmark for swimming and water safety, and fewer than half of NT primary schools currently provide swimming lessons. Families often bear the cost of private lessons, creating barriers to access.

In 2025, the Country Liberal Party (CLP) announced the Swimming in Schools program. This is the first compulsory swimming and water safety curriculum inclusion in the NT in 25 years. The program will be embedded in Health and Physical Education for all children in Years 1–6.

This program is endorsed by Royal Life Saving NT, Surf Life Saving NT, Swimming NT, AFANT, Triathlon NT, the Y Northern Territory, and Kidsafe NT. These organisations highlight the program's potential to save lives by improving swimming ability and water safety knowledge.

"This funding will ensure our children are equipped with the necessary skills to stay safe in and around water…We will have a generation of water-safe children in the Territory." **Randall Cook, President, Royal Life Saving NT**

Key Features

- **Funding:** $3 million annually.
- **Coverage:** Lessons, pool entry, and transport – no cost to parents.
- **Scope:** Urban and remote schools, with flexible program delivery through multiple providers.
- **Start Date:** Term 1, 2025.
- **Complementary Measures:** Remote schools can reallocate existing Remote Sports Voucher funding to other sports as swimming lessons will be fully funded.

Expected Outcomes

- NT primary school students participate in the Swim and Survive program with the goal to achieve the National competency benchmarks.
- The NT Swim & Survive partners collaborate across industry to ensure schools and children no longer miss out.
- Reduced drowning and water-related injuries among children.
- Increased water safety awareness in a region where aquatic activities are a core part of lifestyle.

QUEENSLAND

There were 90 drowning deaths that occurred in QLD between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025.

The drowning rate of 1.62 per 100,000 population increased by 24% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

The highest number of drowning deaths in Queensland occurred in people aged over 75+ years (20%) who also recorded the highest crude drowning rates: 4.16 deaths per 100,000 population. People residing in disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Deciles 1-4), accounted for 35% of total drowning deaths in Queensland. Those who lived in the most advantaged areas (IRSAD Deciles 9-10) accounted for 11% of drowning deaths in Queensland.

Drowning deaths in Queensland mainly occurred at rivers/creeks (32%), followed by beaches (23%), while swimming and recreating (30%). Of note, the number of beach-related drowning deaths were up 62% from the 10-year average, and the number of drowning deaths in July was more than double the ten-year average, 11 this year compared to a 10-year average of 4.

90
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 36% increase

66
10-Year Average

1.62
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

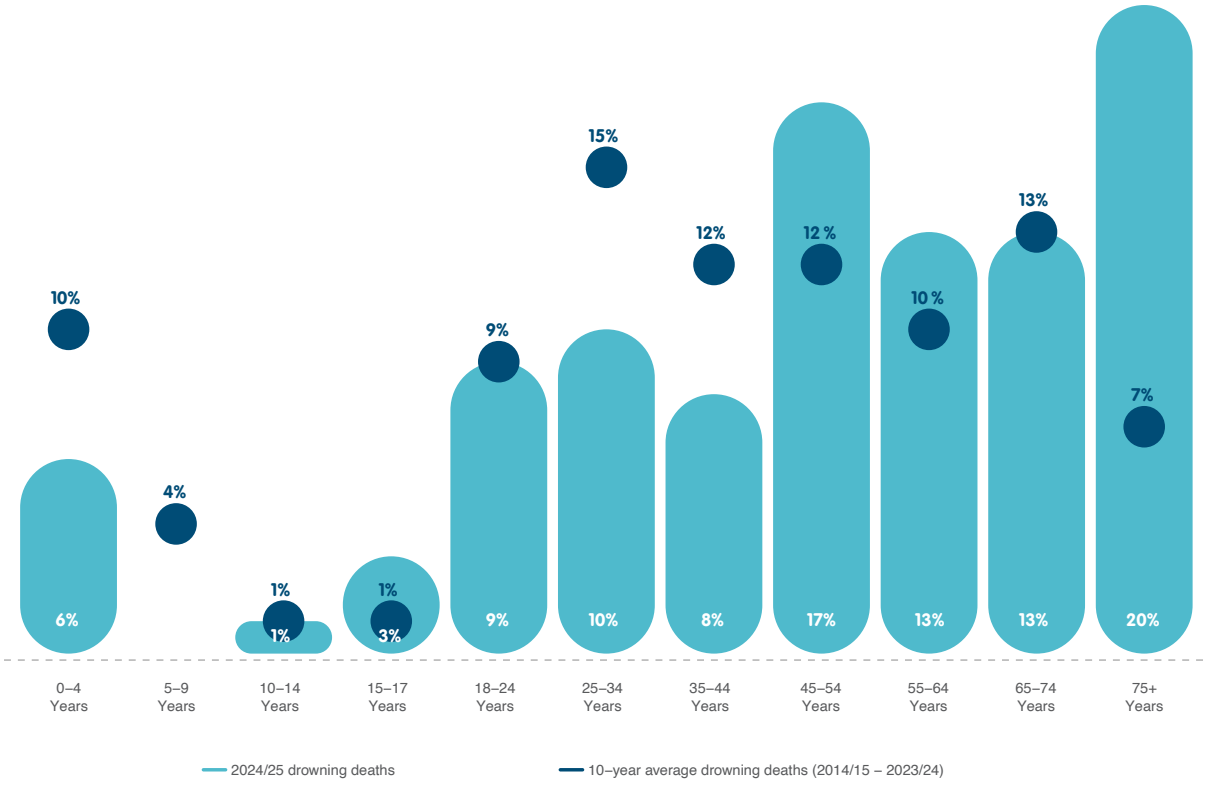
↑ 24% increase

1.31
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

77%
Male

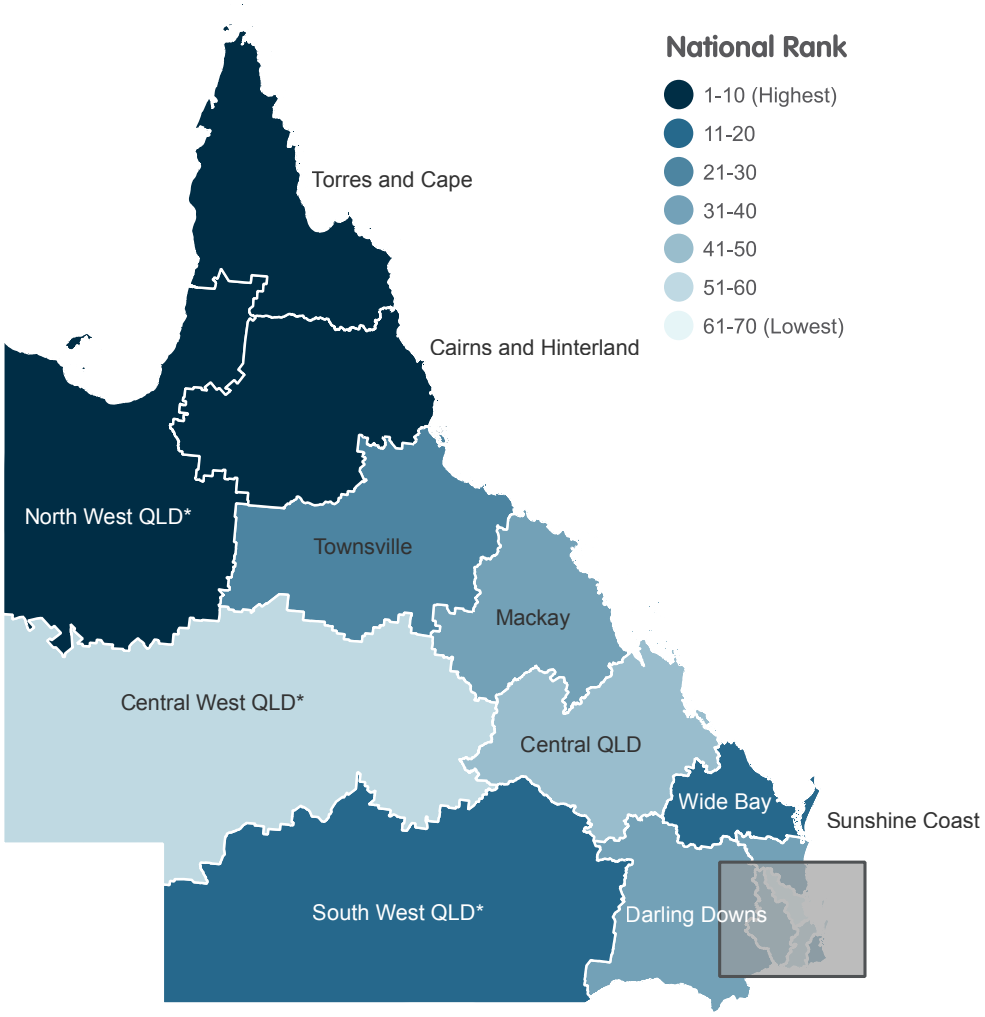
24%
Born overseas

Queensland drowning deaths by age group, 2024/25



Residential fatal drowning rate by QLD region, 2014/15 - 2024/25

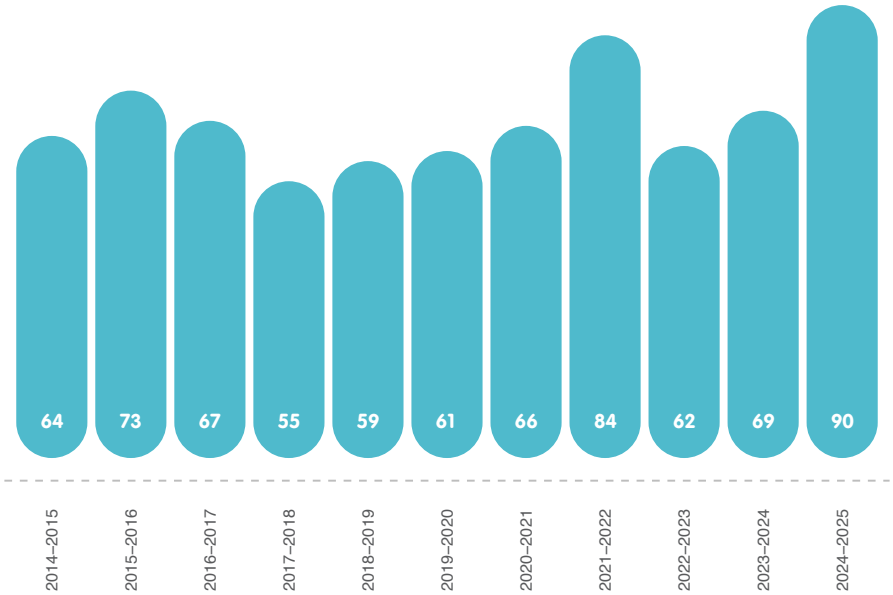
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each QLD region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



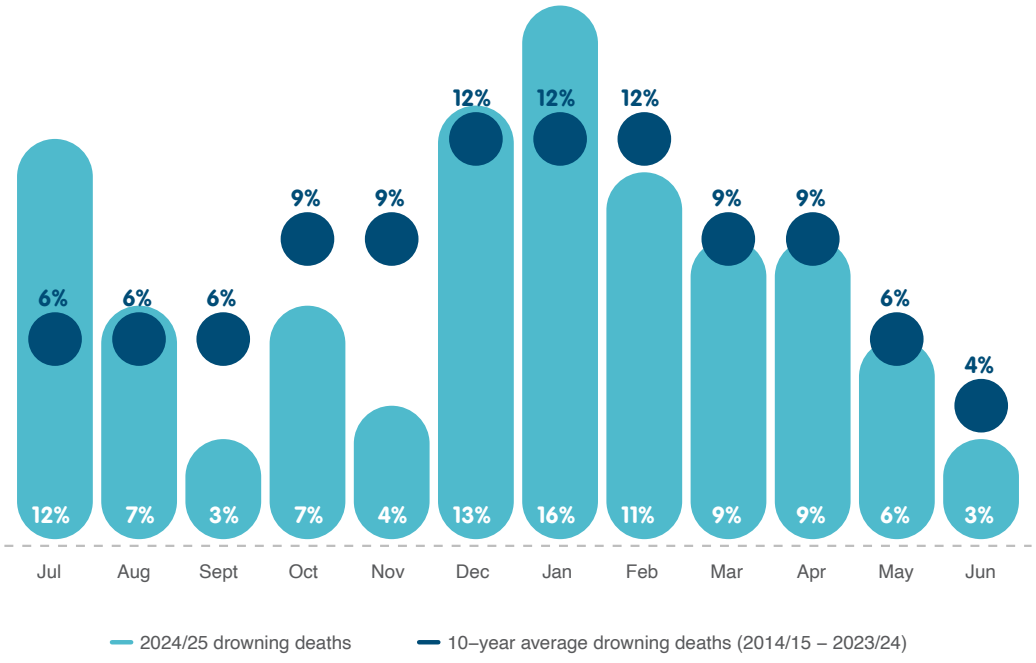
Region	Rate/100k	National Rank
Torres and Cape	4.95	1
North West QLD*	2.99	7
Cairns and Hinterland	2.95	8
Wide Bay	2.4	12
South West QLD*	2.21	15
Townsville	1.5	27
Sunshine Coast	1.37	33
Gold Coast	1.28	37
Mackay	1.23	38
Darling Downs	1.22	40
Central QLD	1.15	44
West Moreton	1.05	50
Central West QLD*	1.01	52
QLD Metro South	0.87	58
QLD Metro North	0.75	62

*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution

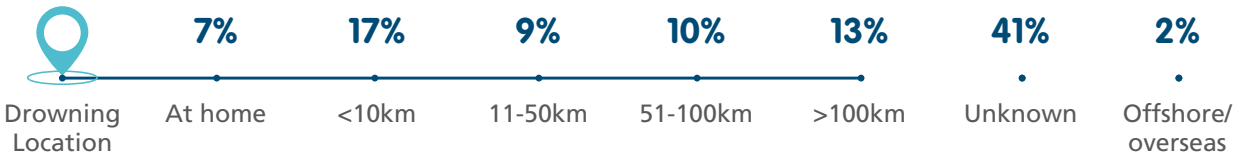
Queensland drowning deaths by financial year, 2014/15 to 2024/25



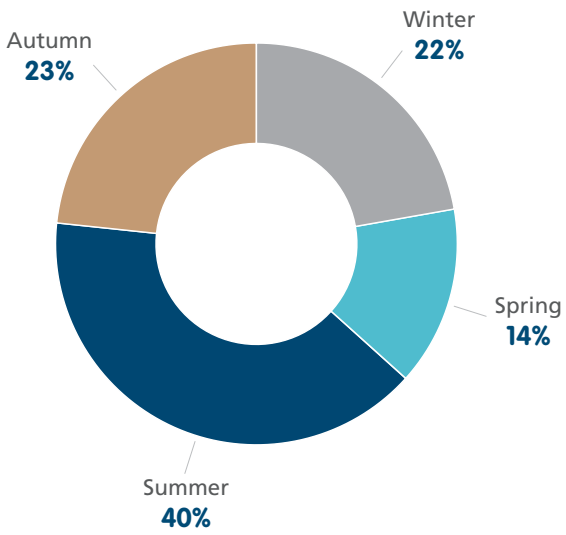
Queensland drowning deaths by month, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and Queensland drowning location 2023/24



Queensland drowning deaths by season, 2024/25



Queensland drowning deaths by activity, 2024/25

30% Swimming and recreating

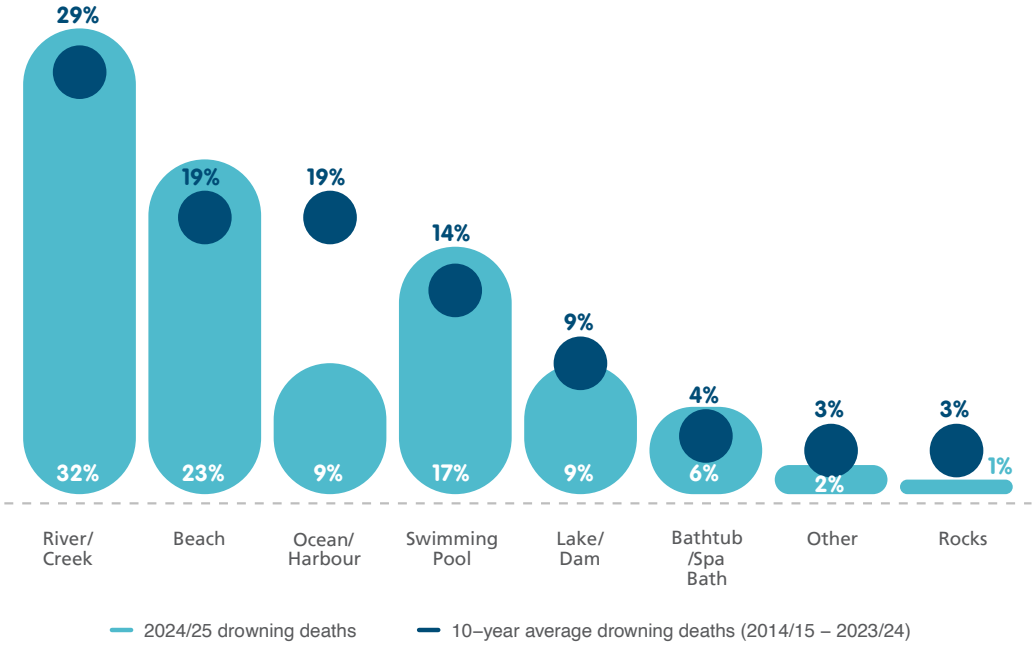
13% Unintentional fall into water

13% Boating

10% Diving/snorkelling

6% Watercraft

Queensland drowning deaths by location, 2024/25



Risk Factors

16%
of cases drugs were recorded

4%
of cases alcohol was recorded

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

There were 24 drowning deaths that occurred in SA between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025, the highest number in the past 10 years.

The drowning rate of 1.27 per 100,000 population increased by 61% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average

71% of all drowning deaths in South Australia occurred in people aged 55+ years, with the 65-74 year age group recording the highest crude rates of 5.98 per 100,000 population.

People residing in disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Deciles 1-4), accounted for 35% of total drowning deaths in South Australia, reinforcing the need for increased awareness and access to swimming and education programs for all communities.

Drowning deaths most frequently occurred at by ocean/harbour (33%) followed by beaches (29%), with the most common activity being boating (25%). Drowning deaths most frequently occurred in August (21%).

24
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 71% increase

14
10-Year Average

1.27
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

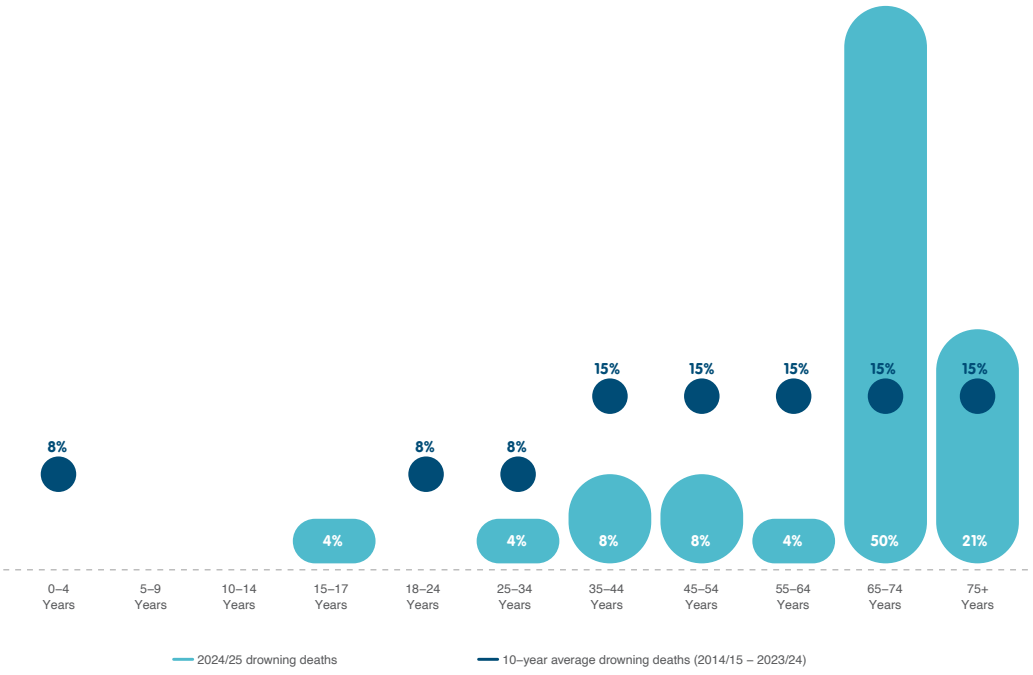
↑ 61% increase

0.79
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

79%
Male

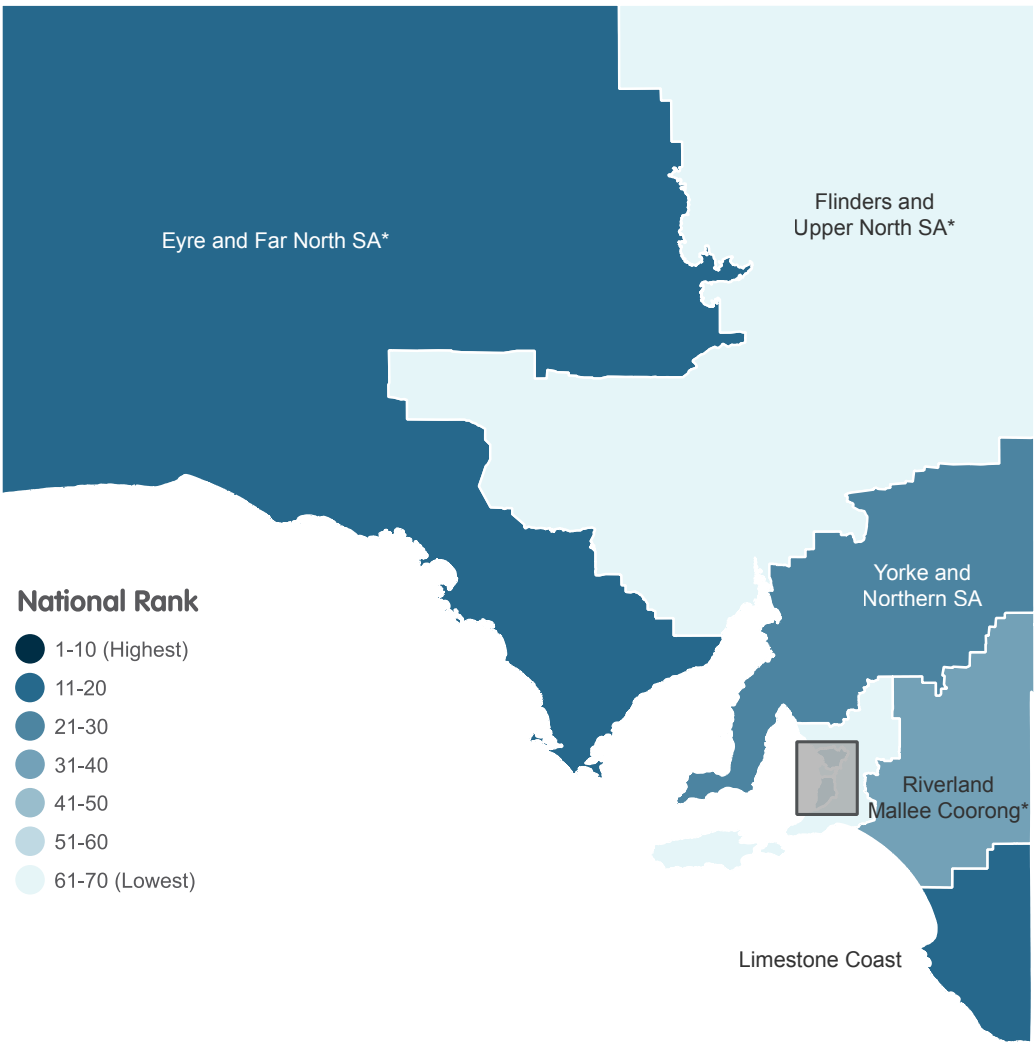
50%
aged 65-74 years

South Australia drowning deaths by age group, 2024/25



Residential fatal drowning rate by SA region, 2014/15 - 2024/25

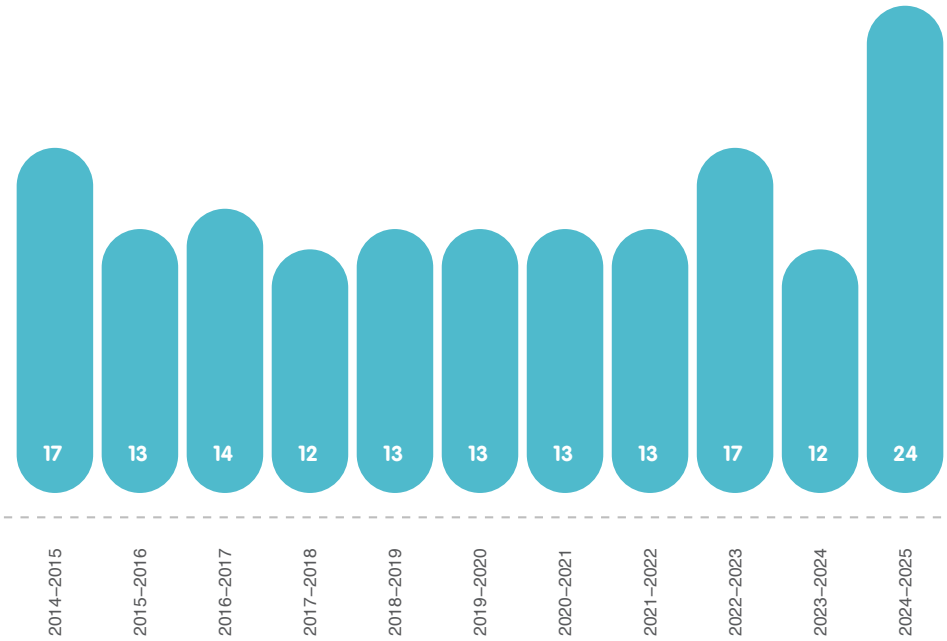
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each SA region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



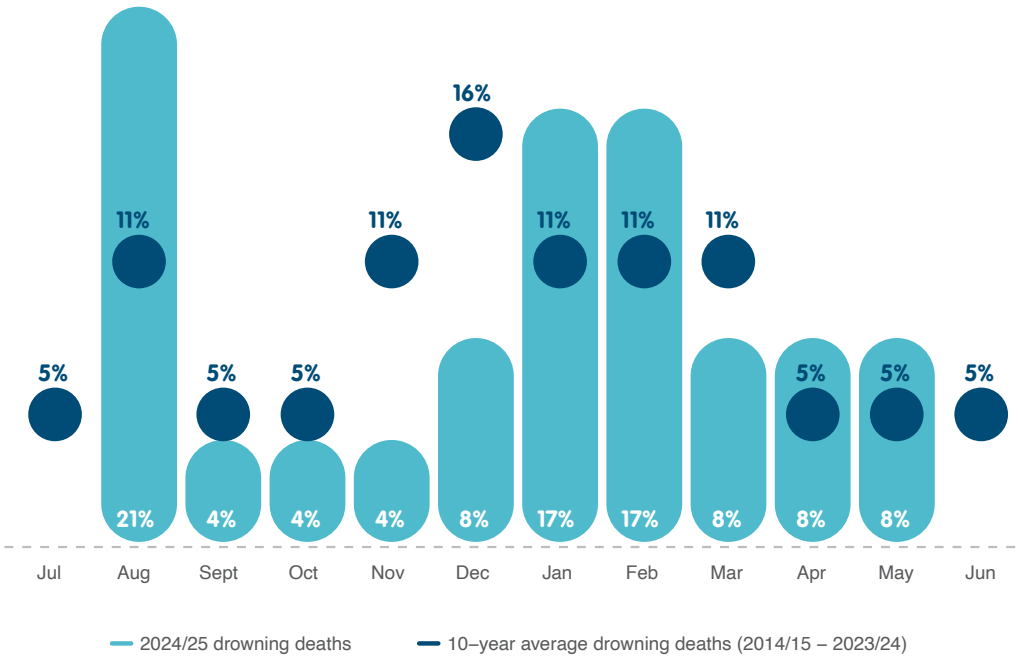
Region	Rate/100k	Rank
Eyre and Far North SA*	2.1	17
Limestone Coast	1.74	20
Yorke and Northern SA	1.41	30
Riverland Mallee Coorong*	1.38	32
Northern Adelaide	0.94	54
Southern Adelaide	0.85	60
Barossa Hills Fleurieu	0.75	62
Central Adelaide	0.58	68
Flinders and Upper North SA*	0.49	70

*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution

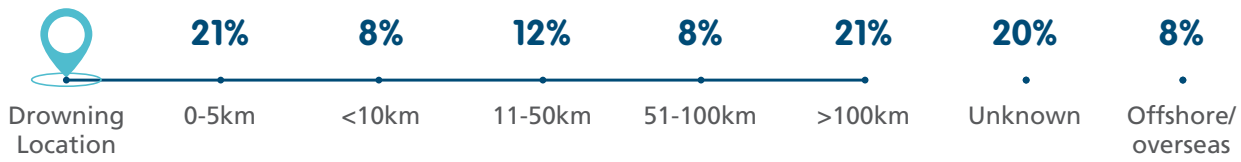
South Australia drowning deaths by financial year, 2014/15 to 2024/25



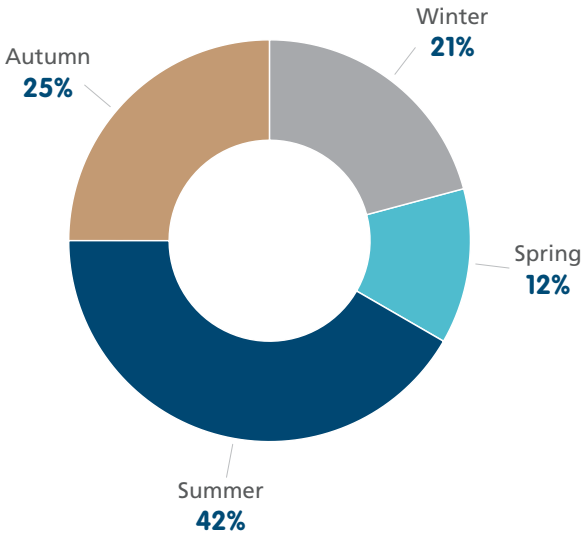
South Australia drowning deaths by month, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and South Australia drowning location 2023/24



South Australia drowning deaths by season, 2024/25



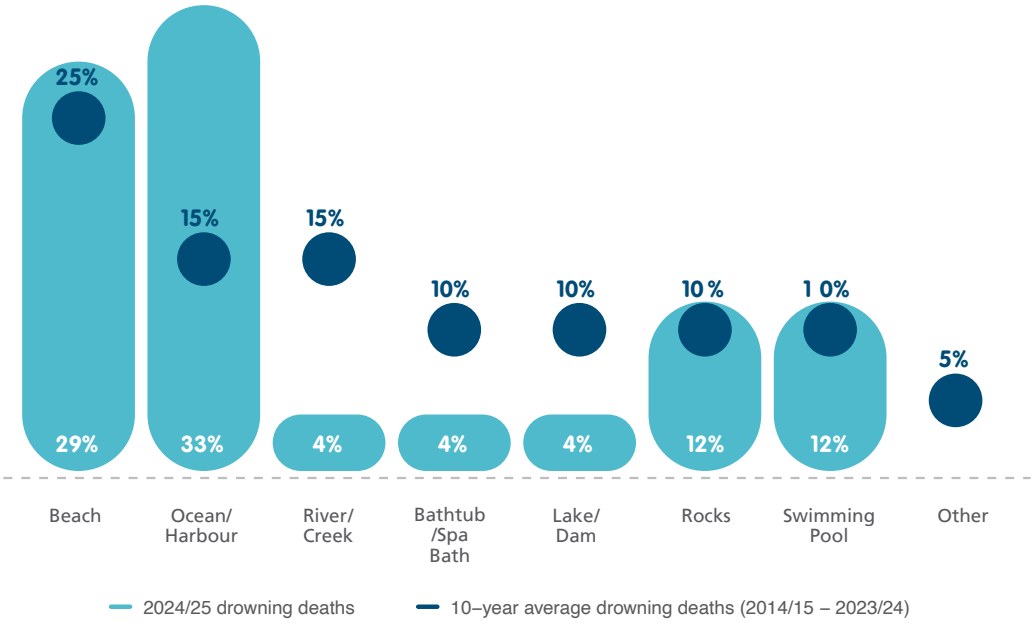
South Australia drowning deaths by activity, 2024/25

25% Boating

21% Unintentional fall into water

21% Swimming and recreating

South Australia drowning deaths by location, 2024/25



Risk Factors

17%
of cases drugs were recorded

12%
of cases alcohol was recorded

TASMANIA

There were 8 drowning deaths that occurred in Tasmania between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025.

The drowning rate of 1.39 per 100,000 population decreased by 16% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of drowning deaths in Tasmania occurred among people aged 55+ years, with the highest crude rate of 4.37 deaths per 100,000 population recorded among the 65-74 age group, closely followed by the 55–64 year age group (2.66 per 100,000 population).

Over half (54%) of the people who drown in Tasmania resided in areas with IRSAD Deciles below 4.

In 2024/25, drowning deaths in Tasmania mostly occurred at rivers/creeks (38%) followed by beaches (25%). The leading activities prior to drowning was swimming and non-aquatic transport.

8
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↓ 11% decrease

9
10-Year Average

1.39
2023/24 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

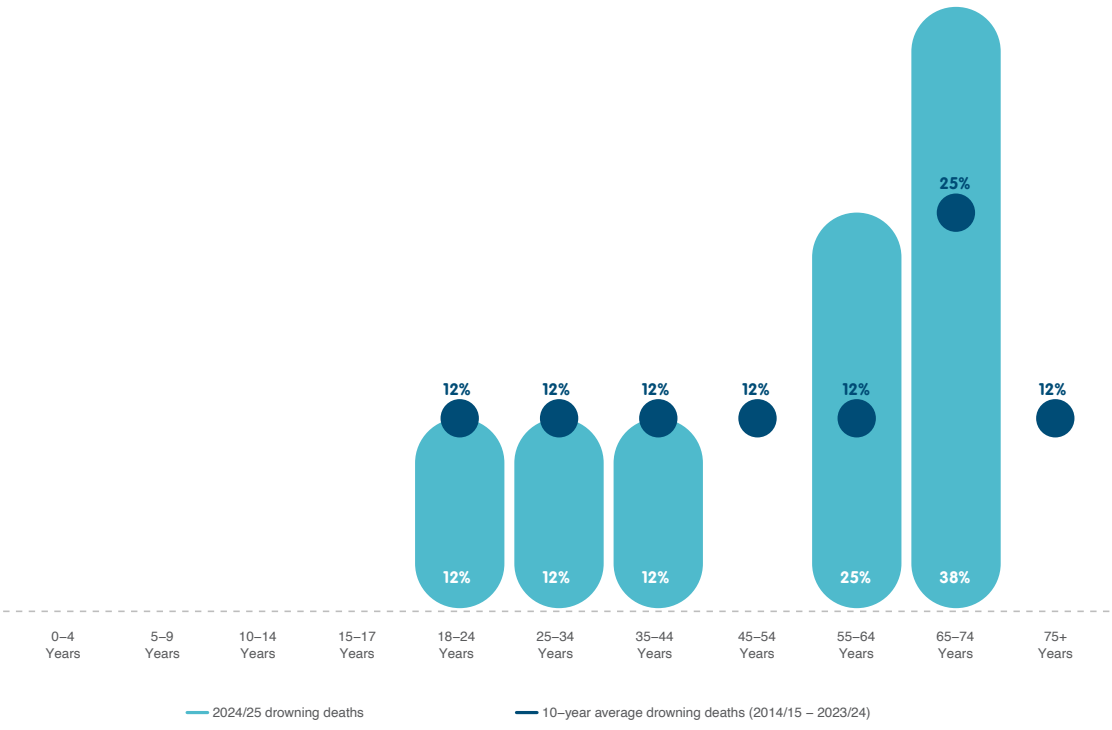
↓ 16% decrease

1.66
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

88%
Male

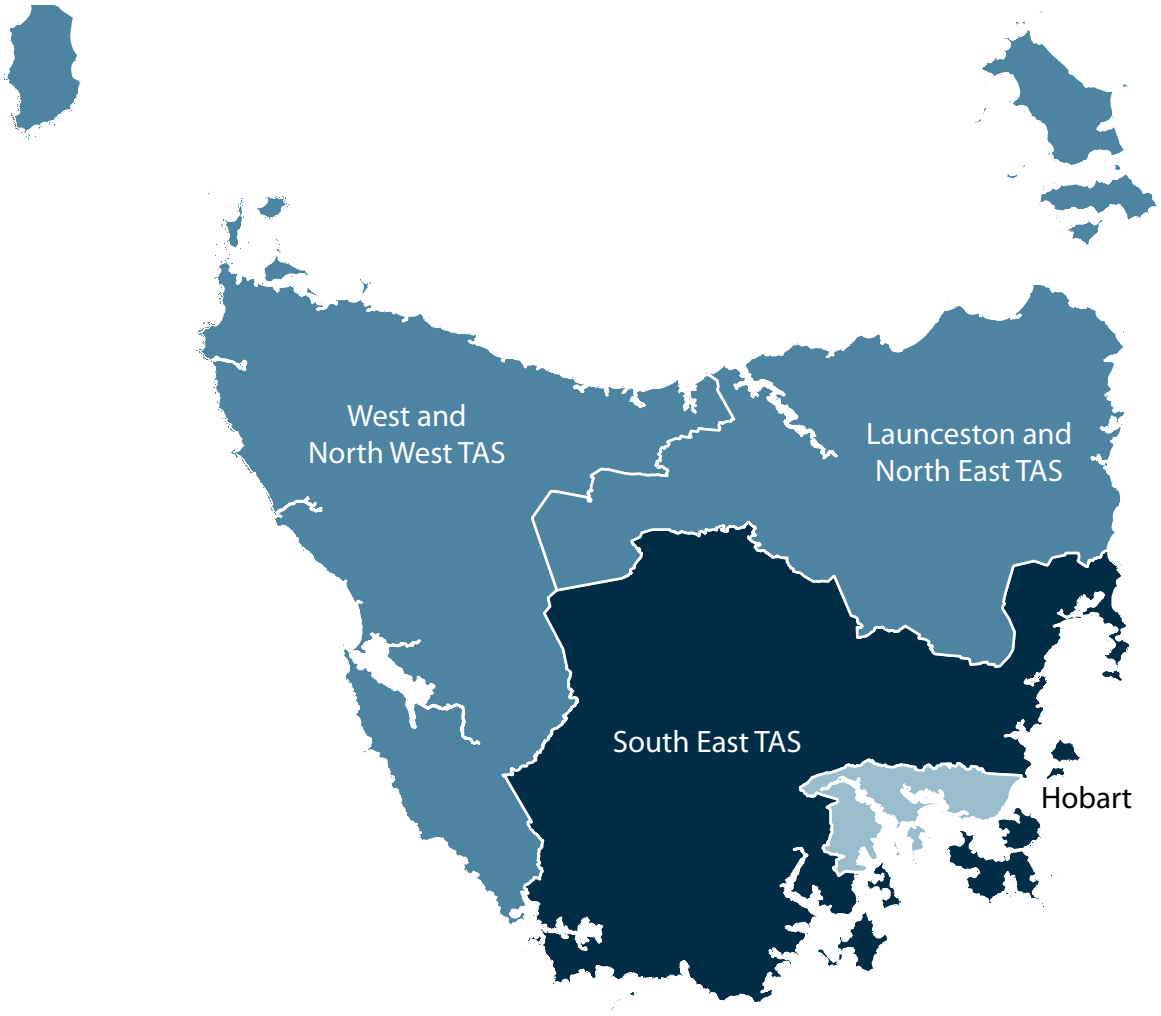
38%
Born overseas

Tasmania drowning deaths by age group, 2024/25



Residential fatal drowning rate by Tasmanian region, 2014/15 - 2023/24

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each Tasmanian region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



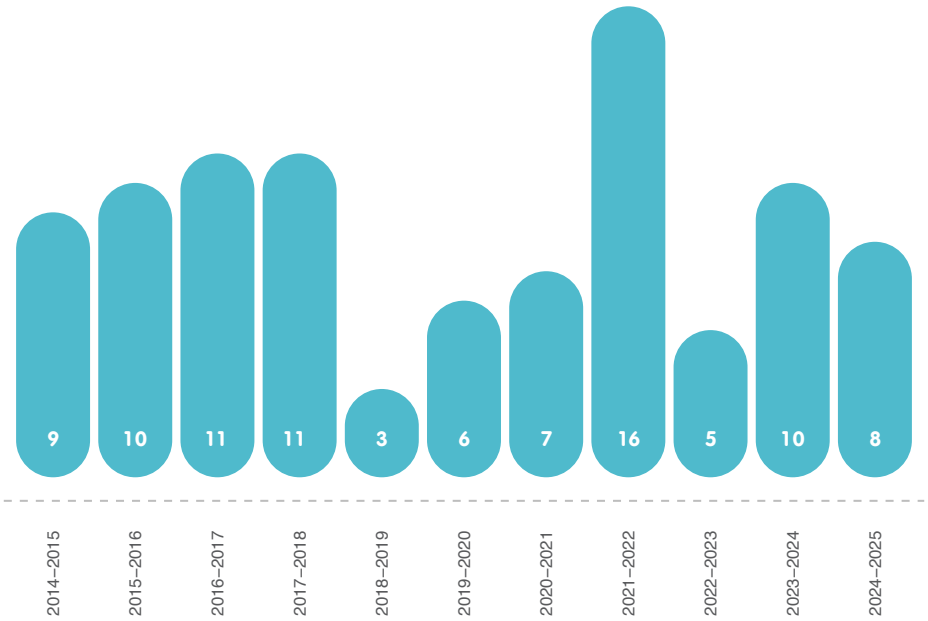
Region	Rate/100k	National Rank
South East TAS	3.42	5
West and North West TAS	1.67	23
Launceston and North East TAS	1.56	26
Hobart	1.18	41

*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution

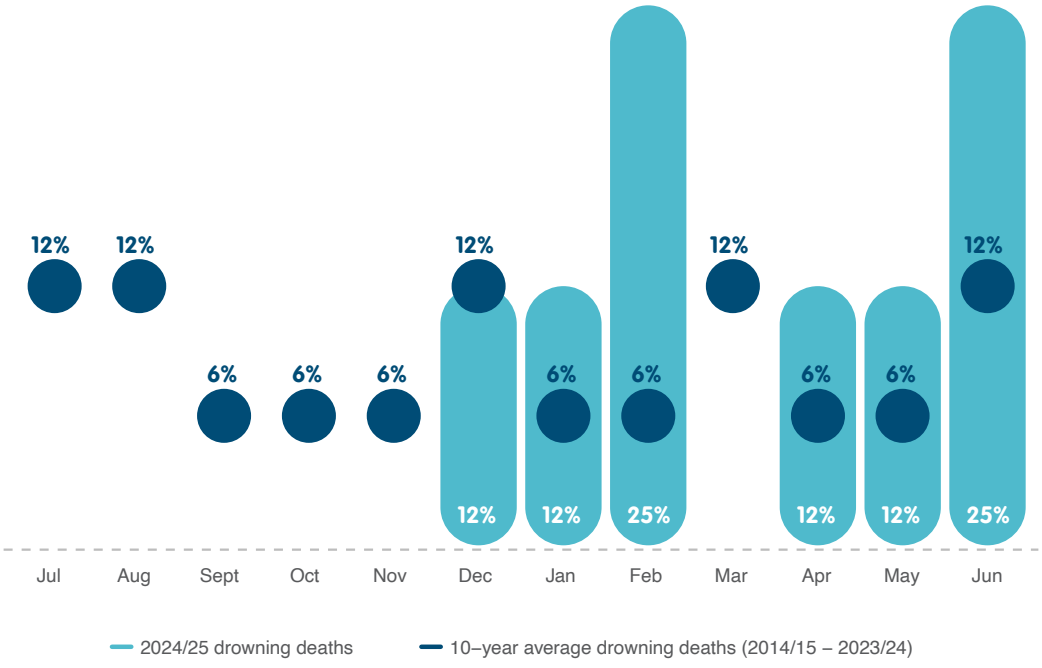
National Rank

- 1-10 (Highest)
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70 (Lowest)

Tasmania drowning deaths by financial year, 2014/15 to 2024/25

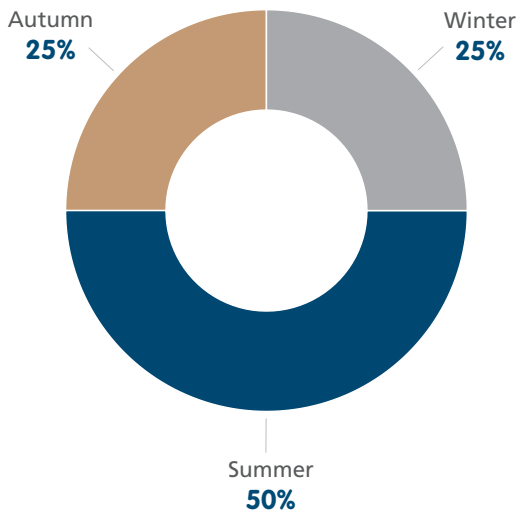


Tasmania drowning deaths by month, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and Tasmania drowning location, 2024/25

Tasmania drowning deaths by season, 2024/25



Tasmania drowning deaths by activity, 2024/25

25% Swimming and recreating

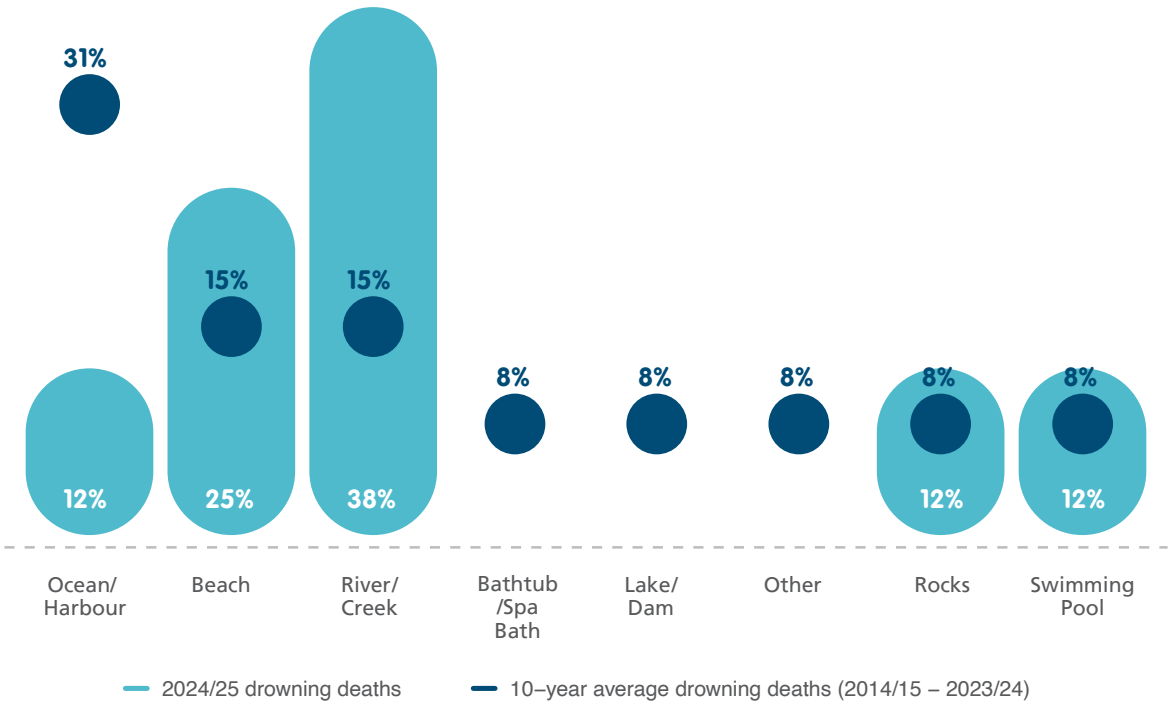
25% Non-aquatic transport

12% Boating

12% Attempted rescue

12% Diving/Ssnorkelling

Tasmania drowning deaths by location, 2024/25



Information on presence of alcohol and drugs was not available at the time of publication

VICTORIA

There were 52 drowning deaths that occurred in Victoria between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025.

The drowning rate of 0.75 per 100,000 population with a slight change this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

The 75+ year age group recorded the highest number, proportion and rate of drowning, reaching a crude rate of 1.66 per 100,000 population in this age group.

Where known, 46% of those who drowned in Victoria resided in socio-economically advantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 7-10), with 16% living in the most disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 1-4).

Drowning deaths in Victoria most frequently occurred at beaches (21%), followed by rivers/ creeks (19%). Location of drowning was unknown in 21% of cases (at the time of publication).

52
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 8% increase

48
10-Year Average

0.75
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

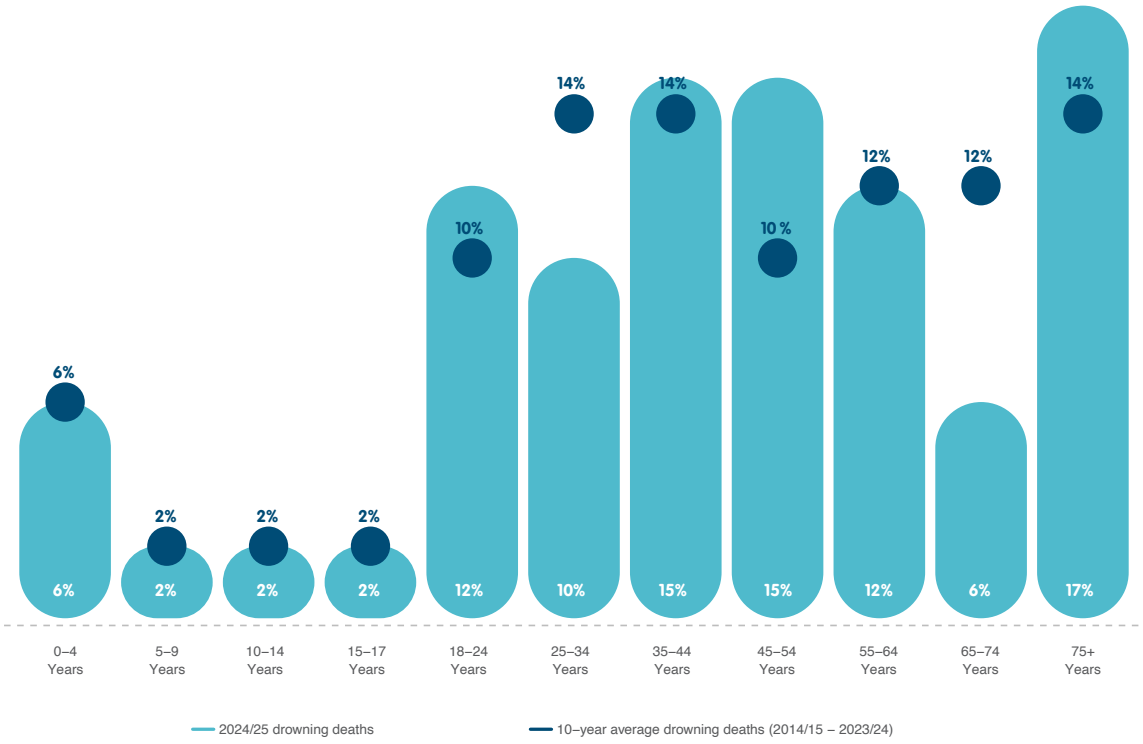
↑ 1% increase

0.74
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

71%
Male

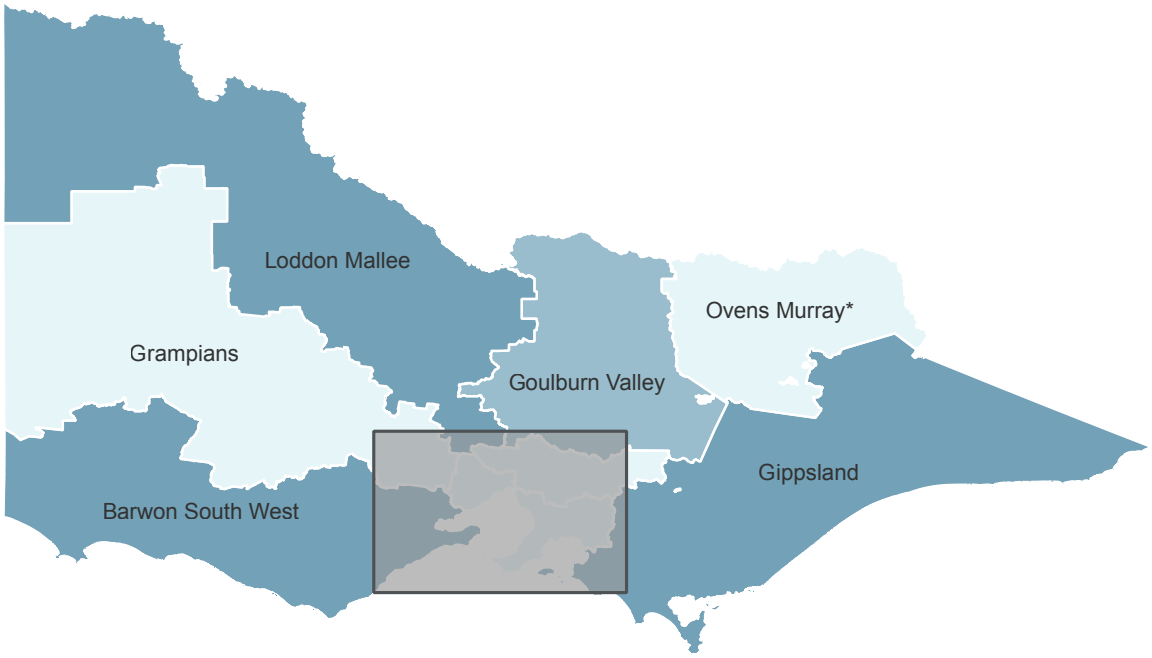
23%
Born overseas

Victoria drowning deaths by age group, 2024/25



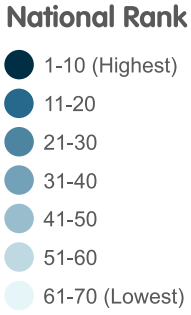
Residential fatal drowning rate by VIC region, 2014/15 - 2023/24

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each VIC region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.

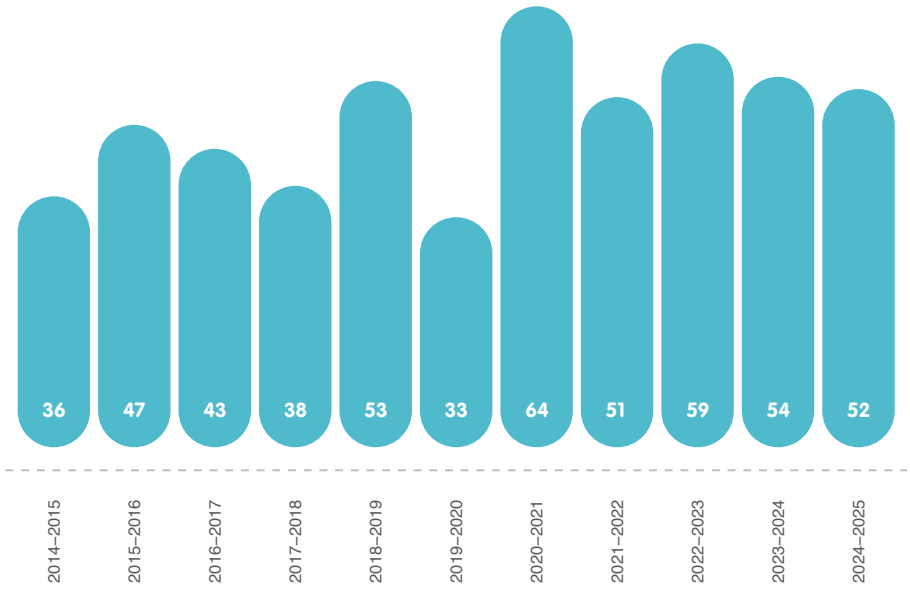


Region	Rate/100k	National Rank
Loddon Mallee	1.37	33
Barwon South West	1.33	35
Gippsland	1.29	36
Goulburn Valley	1.08	48
South East Melbourne	0.84	61
Western Melbourne	0.71	64
Ovens Murray*	0.68	65
North Eastern Melbourne	0.67	66
Grampians	0.65	67

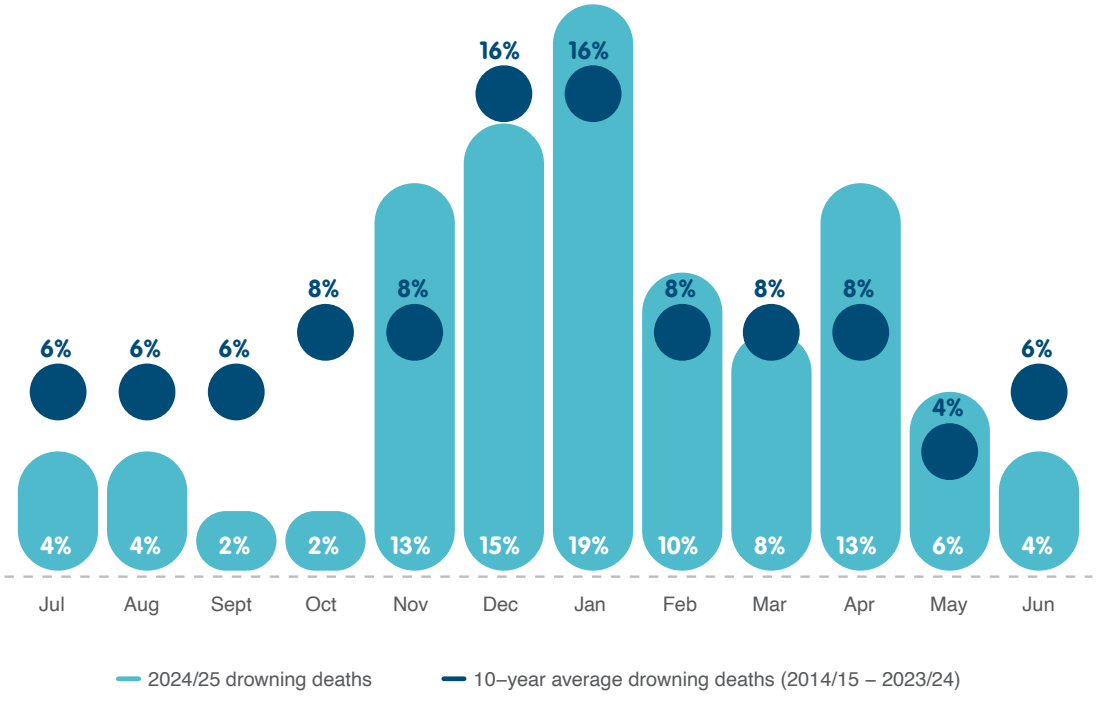
*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution



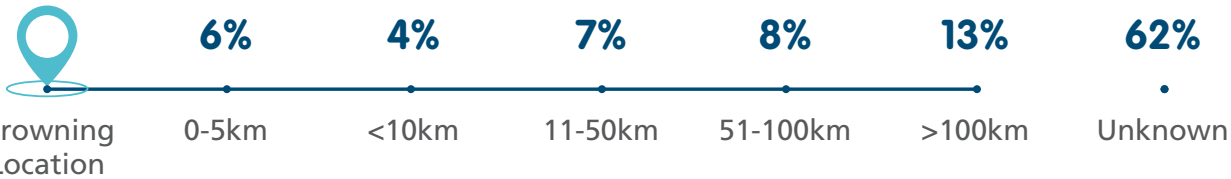
Victoria drowning deaths by financial year, 2014/15 to 2024/25



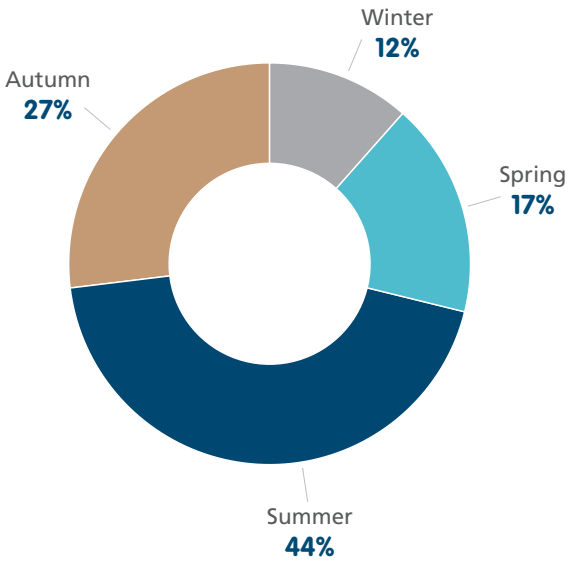
Victoria drowning deaths by month, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and Victoria drowning location 2023/24



Victoria drowning deaths by season, 2024/25



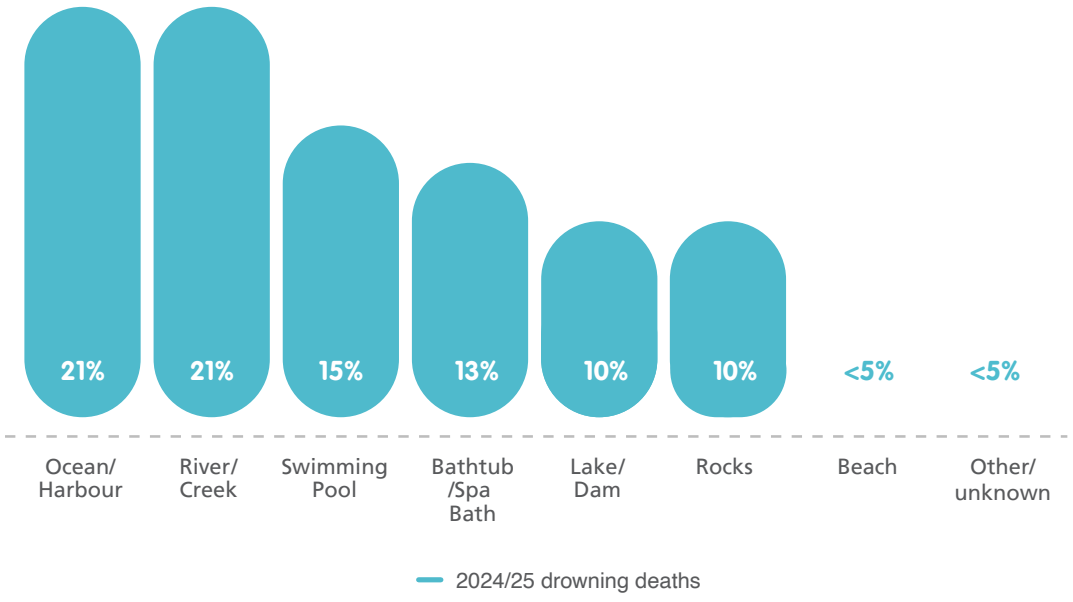
Victoria drowning deaths by activity, 2024/25

27% Swimming and recreating

8% Bathing

Victoria drowning deaths by location, 2024/25

Data was provided by Life Saving Victoria



Risk Factors

15%

of cases recorded alcohol and/or drugs

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

There were 49 drowning deaths that occurred in Western Australia between July 1st 2024 to June 30th 2025.

The drowning rate of 1.65 per 100,000 population increased by 22% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

The highest number of drowning deaths in WA occurred in the75+ year age group (20%), which also recorded the highest crude rate in the state with 4.64 drowning deaths per 100,000 population. Those aged 55-64 years recorded the second highest crude rate of 2.70 per 100,000 population and represented 18% of drowning in WA. Drowning deaths among young children 0-4 years accounted for 2% total drowning deaths, recording a crude drowning rate of 0.59, a decrease of 49% on the 10-year average of 1.16 per 100,000 population.

People residing in disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Deciles 1-4), accounted for 56% of total drowning deaths in WA, reinforcing the need for increased access and opportunities to swimming and education programs for those that need it most.

Drowning in WA mostly occurred at beaches (31%), followed by ocean/harbours (20%). The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (31%) followed by diving/ snorkelling (14%), indicating that people may not have had the swimming and water safety skills to help themselves out of difficulty or when partaking in high-risk activities.

49
Drowning Deaths in 2024/25

↑ 36% increase

36
10-Year Average

1.65
2024/25 Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

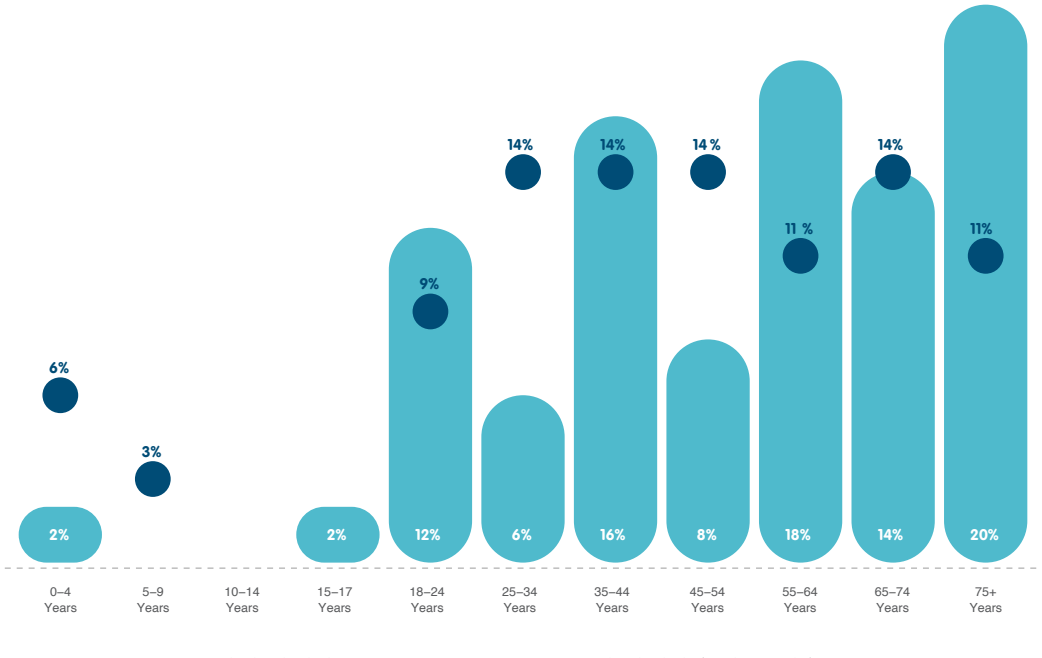
↑ 22% increase

1.35
10-Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate per 100,000

84%
Male

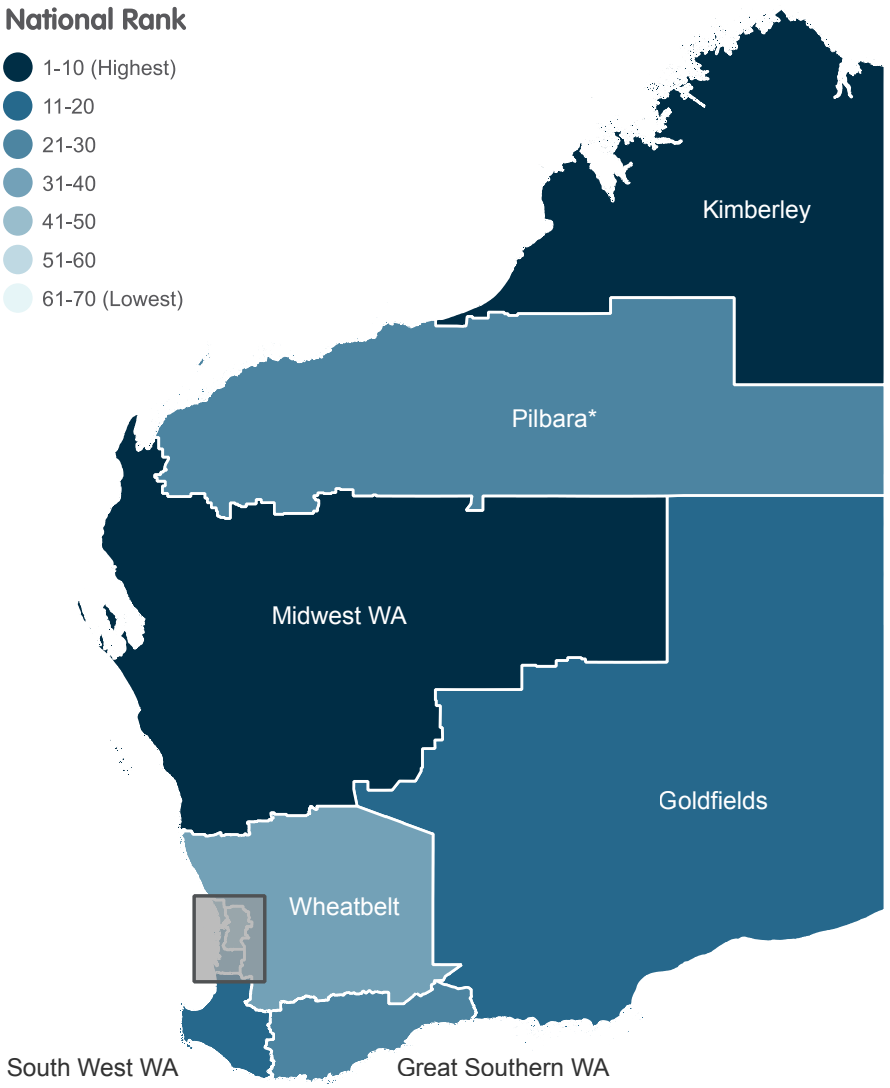
14%
Born overseas

Western Australia drowning deaths by age group, 2024/25



Residential fatal drowning rate by WA region, 2014/15 - 2024/25

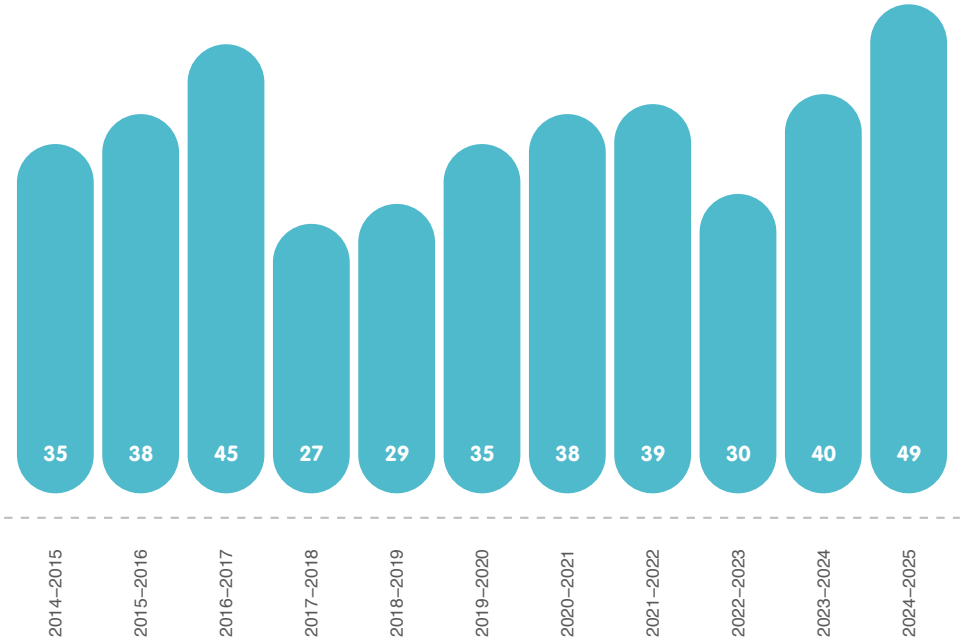
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each WA region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



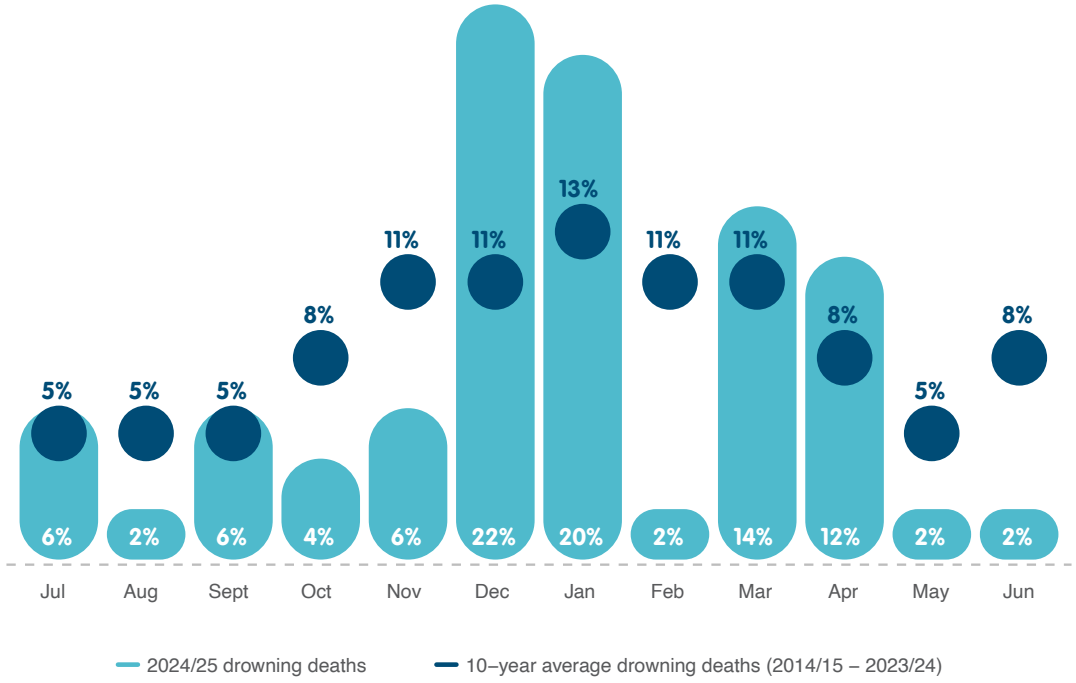
Region	Rate/100k	National Rank
Kimberley	4.49	3
Midwest WA	3.09	6
Goldfields	2.17	16
South West WA	2.02	18
Great Southern WA	1.67	23
Pilbara*	1.45	29
Wheatbelt	1.4	31
South Perth	1.23	38
North Perth	1.13	45
East Perth	1.06	49

*Rates caluclated from less then 10 cases, interpret with caution

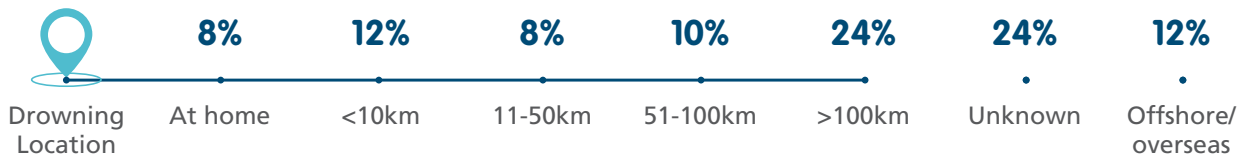
Western Australia drowning deaths by financial year, 2014/15 to 2024/25



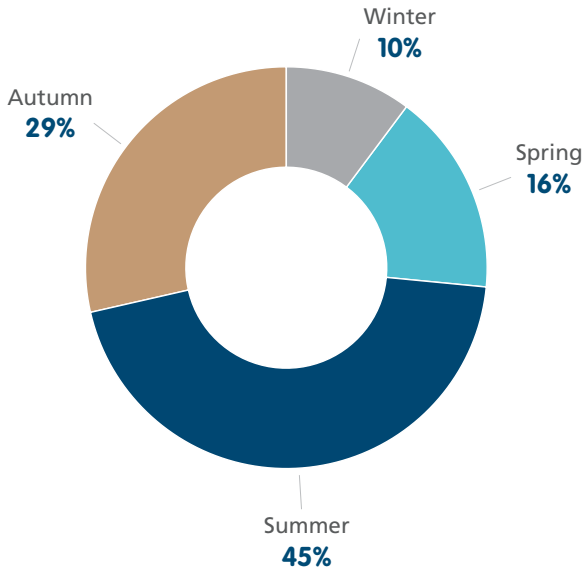
Western Australia drowning deaths by month, 2024/25



Drive distance between residence and Western Australia drowning location, 2024/25



Western Australia drowning deaths by season, 2024/25



Western Australia drowning deaths by activity, 2024/25

31% Swimming and recreating

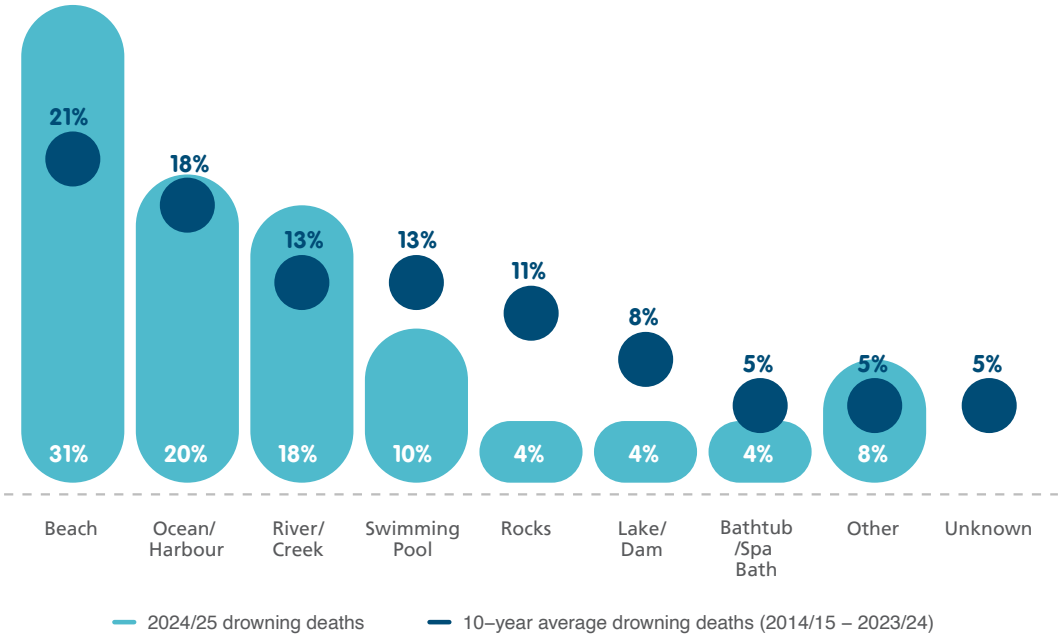
14% Diving/snorkelling

10% Boating

8% Watercraft

6% Attempted rescue

Western Australia drowning deaths by location, 2024/25



Risk Factors

6%
of cases drugs were recorded

10%
of cases alcohol was recorded

Fatal drowning

The information presented in the National Drowning Report 2025 has been collated from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS), State and Territory Coronial offices and year-round media monitoring. The number of drowning deaths are collated in partnership with Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs) and Surf Life Saving Australia and analysed by Royal Life Saving Australia. The data presented in in the Insights by Key Drowning Locations: Beaches, Ocean/Harbour, and Rocks sections were analysed by Surf Life Saving Australia. Information contained within the NCIS is made available by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety. Due to limited information available for Victorian cases, information has been provided by Life Saving Victoria where available. There are some differences between location definitions and coding between Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving due to planning and operational reasons, which may result in some double counting in the location data analysis.

Royal Life Saving Australia uses a media monitoring service for broadcast, print and online all year round to identify drowning deaths reported in the media. This information is then corroborated with information from the NCIS, police reports, Royal Life Saving STMOs, and Surf Life Saving Australia before being included in the National Drowning Report.

Great care is taken to ensure that the information in this report is as accurate as possible. Figures may change depending on ongoing coronial investigations and findings, as 71% of cases are still under investigation (i.e., open) as this report went to press. Royal Life Saving Australia regularly publishes ongoing studies, which provide detailed information on long-term data trends.

Information on the drowning deaths included in this report is correct as of 30th July 2025. Historical drowning data are correct as of 1st July 2025 in accordance with Royal Life Saving Australia's ongoing data quality assurance policy. All cases in the Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database are checked against those in the NCIS on a regular basis and figures are updated in annual National Drowning Reports as cases close. The 10-year averages in this report are calculated from drowning death data from 2014/15 to 2023/24 inclusive.

Drowning rates per 100,000 population are calculated using population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publication 'Australian Demographic Statistics' (Cat 3101.0). Percentages and averages are presented as whole numbers and have been rounded up or down accordingly.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas [3]

The Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area, including both relative advantage and disadvantage measures.

For SEIFA 2021, the concept of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage is the same as that used for SEIFA 2016 and SEIFA 2011. That is, the ABS broadly defines relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in terms of people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society.

A low score indicates relatively greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage in general. For example, an area could have a low score if there are:

- many households with low incomes, or many people in unskilled occupations, AND
- few households with high incomes, or few people in skilled occupations.

A high score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage in general. For example, an area may have a high score if there are:

- many households with high incomes, or many people in skilled occupations, AND
- few households with low incomes, or few people in unskilled occupations.

Data for socio-economic status was determined using the socio-economic index for advantage and disadvantage for an individual's usual place of residence [10].

In this 2024/25 Drowning Report, IRSAD values were determined based on residential Statistical Area 1 geographies, whereas previous reports have used residential Postal Areas. Statistical Area 1 provides greater granularity.

Sub-state and territory regions

The regional maps presented in the Insights by State and Territories section are intended to provide a general sense of the relative burden of drowning for residents in different parts of each state and territory. The sub-state/territory regions presented align with the local health districts/units of each state or territory, defined by the health department in that state/territory. In cases where these geographies do not align to other defined Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) boundaries, the health district boundary was re-aligned to closest Statistical Area 1 (SA1) boundary. That is, if an SA1 overlapped with different two regions, it was assigned to the region that it shared the most area with.

Drowning cases were assigned to each region based on the home residence of the person who drowned. For drowning cases occurring in Victoria, available data on home residence was limited to postcode only. Victorian cases were therefore assigned to regions (Victorian Local Public Health Units) based on proportion of overlap; postcodes fully contained within a region were assigned to that region, postcodes with geographic area split across one ore more regions were assigned to the region with which they shared the most area.

Exclusions and categorisations

Drowning deaths as a result of suicide or homicide, deaths from natural causes, shark and crocodile attacks, or hypothermia have been excluded from this report. All information presented in this report relates to drowning deaths or deaths where drowning is a contributory cause of death.

Coastal locations include beaches, ocean/harbour and coastal rocks. Inland locations refer to rivers/creeks (including waterholes and waterfalls), lakes/dams, ponds. 'Non-aquatic transport' relates to drowning deaths involving a means of transport that is not primarily designed or intended for aquatic use such as cars, motorbikes, bicycles and aeroplanes among others.

Means of transport primarily used for aquatic purposes are categorised under 'boating' (water-based wind or motor-powered vessels, boats, ships and personal watercraft, such as boats, jet skis, sail boats and yachts). 'Watercraft' refer to water-based non-powered recreational equipment such as those that are rowed or paddled (e.g., rowboats, surfboats, kayaks, canoes, surf boards and boogie boards). Within this report, 'swimming pool' includes home swimming pools, public swimming pools, hotel and motel pools, and portable swimming pools among others.

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving Australia would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing the Royal Life Saving Australia National Drowning Report 2024/25:

- Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs)
- Surf Life Saving State and Territory Organisations
- The National Coronial Information System (NCIS)
- Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)
- The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)
- Jessica Bryan - The National Coronial Information System
- Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Bernadette Matthews (Life Saving Victoria)
- Hannah Graefe (Calverley) (Life Saving Victoria)
- Lauren Nimmo (Royal Life Saving Western Australia)
- Rick Carter (Studio One Another)

The drowning prevention research of the Royal Life Saving Australia is supported by the Australian Government.

This report was compiled and written by Lauren Miller, Mackenzie Haller, Lasindu Yapa Abeywardene, William Koon, and Stacey Pidgeon from Royal Life Saving – Australia, and Jasmin Lawes, Rebecca Stolper, and Sean Kelly from Surf Life Saving Australia.

2025 National Water Safety Summit and midpoint update to the Australian Water Safety Strategy

The Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS) sets out a shared agenda for the broad multidisciplinary network that is dedicated to preventing drowning and promoting safe use of the nation's waterways and swimming pools.

2025 marked the halfway point of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, providing a critical opportunity to assess national progress and confirm whether current priorities remain fit for purpose. In the lead-up to the Summit, a series of targeted workshops and stakeholder consultations were held across the country, focused on reviewing the Strategy's direction and identifying what's most needed to achieve the target of halving drowning by 2030. Insights from these sessions - alongside emerging research - informed a proposed update to the Strategy.

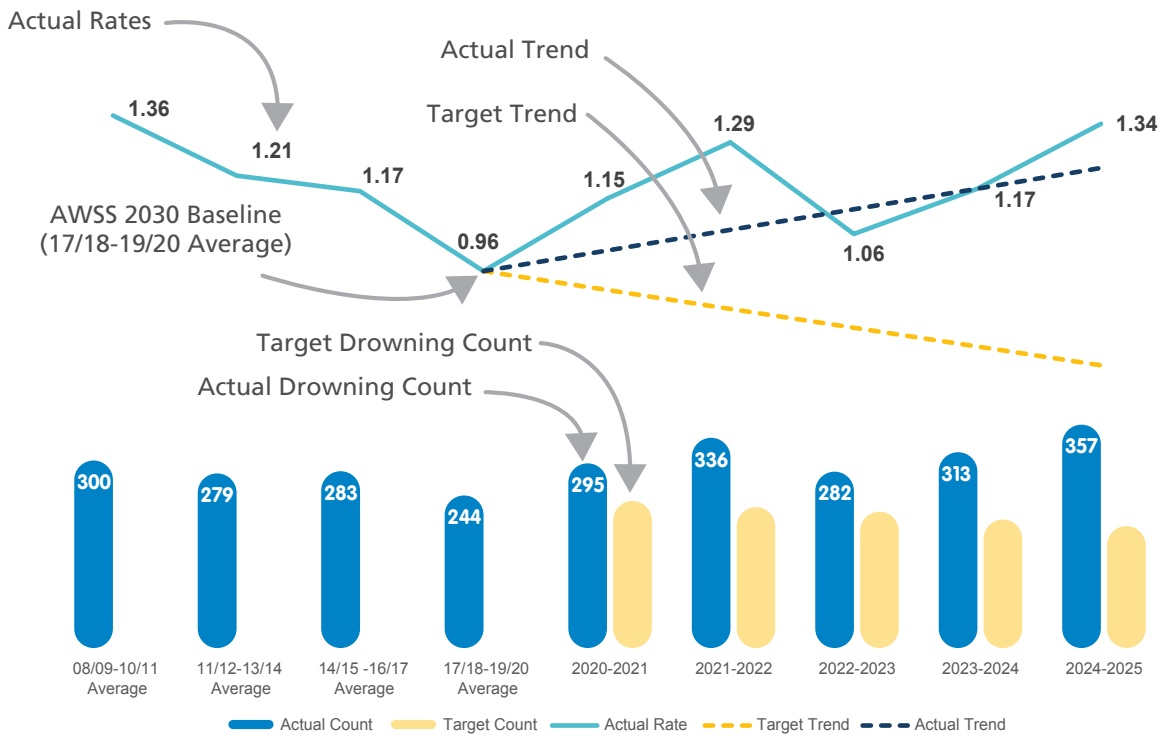
The draft midpoint update was released at the National Water Safety Summit 2025, hosted in Sydney by Royal Life Saving Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia on behalf of the Australian Water Safety Council, and held to coincide with World Drowning Prevention Day.

More than 230 delegates participated in plenary sessions and workshops that explored the drivers behind rising drowning rates, debated practical solutions, and renewed a shared commitment to prevention.

A public consultation process is now underway, with feedback from the Summit and online submissions to help shape the final version of the Strategy. The updated Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 will be released ahead of Summer 2025–2026.

Tracking progress towards a 50% reduction in drowning by 2030

The chart below compares actual trends, rates per 100,000 population, and counts to target trends and counts needed for a 50% reduction by 2030. At the midpoint of this 10-year strategy, drowning rates are increasing. Urgent collective action is required to reverse the trend.

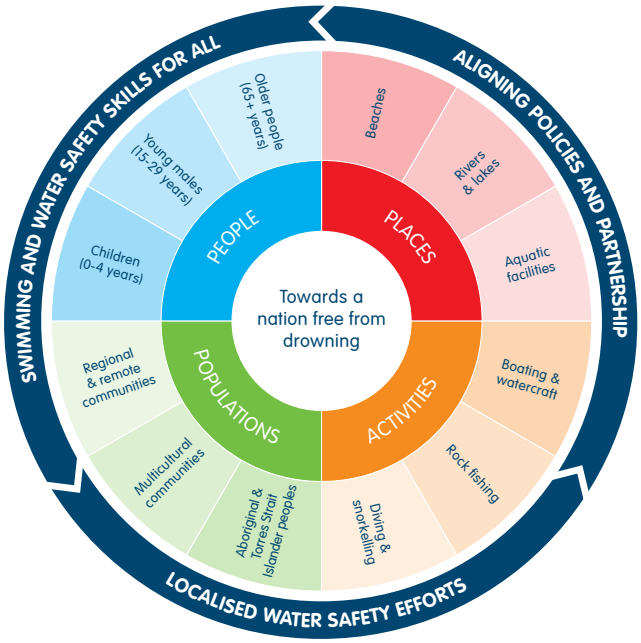


AWSS 2030 – Midpoint Updates

The Australian Water Safety Strategy midpoint updated framework is below, reflecting streamlined priorities and importantly, identification of three cross cutting national-level imperatives as major focus points that are critical to achieving long-term reductions in drowning.

National Imperatives

- Swimming and water safety skills for all
- Localising water safety efforts
- Aligning policies and partnerships



Multicultural communities are a priority population in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, with people born overseas accounting for 34% of all drowning deaths.

New research has explored migrant adults' knowledge, attitudes towards water safety and their participation in swimming and water activities; and drowning prevention programs focusing on multicultural communities.

The first part of the researching explored adult migrant's awareness, attitudes, and behaviour towards water safety.

Findings revealed factors linked to cultural norms and life experiences may influence perceptions, attitudes and participation around water. Identified risks toward drowning once in Australia included limited exposure to the water and a lack of safety knowledge and skills prior to migrating.

Study participants reported having limited awareness of water safety, shaped by their previous experiences and environments. Encouraging, for some migrants, there was a positive shift in awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards water safety after migrating to Australia an encouraging indication for future drowning prevention efforts.

A common theme reported by adults who had learnt to swim, was discovering the joy of swimming, not only from a safety perspective, also for inclusion and equity into the Australian lifestyle. Migrant adults perceived swimming as essential for inclusion in the Australian community and viewed swimming as a core part of Australian culture, 'Swimming is part of the DNA' (in Australia).

This research highlights that inequalities exist for some adult migrants regarding their safety around water and drowning risk, particularly when migrating to a country with a strong association of aquatic recreation and leisure like Australia. Drowning risk factors for adult migrants, extend beyond factors such as gender, age, and language/communications

The second part of the research examined swimming and water safety programs focused on multicultural communities.

Conclusion

To achieve the AWSS goal of reducing drowning by 2030, swimming and water safety programs need to effectively reach migrant communities. This research supports the need for dedicated swimming and water safety programs for migrant adults and provided new insights into the enablers and barriers to participation.

Four key themes were identified that provide new insights for program providers to consider when developing and delivering programs with multicultural communities.

1. Tailored program design and creating a welcoming space

Program managers and staff to actively create and promote a welcoming environment that supports physical, social and cultural safety including gender-specific classes, appropriate swimwear, and multilingual staff and pathways to employment in aquatic roles.

2. Barriers and enablers to participation

Fear of water, cultural norms, cost, and lack of childcare are common barriers to participation. Participants also expressed that being unable to swim can feel socially isolating in Australia. Many adults were motivated to learn to swim by their families and peers, or by negative past experiences.

3. Cultural safety and health outcomes

Programs that embraced cultural understanding - via staff diversity, inclusive settings, and social connection were linked with improved mental, physical, and community wellbeing.

4. Sustainability and impact

Long-term funding, staff empathy, flexibility, and strong community partnerships were identified as essential to program success and scalability. For these community level initiatives programs to have an impact, community members should be involved in the design and delivery of such programs.

10-year summary of overseas born drowning deaths, 2014/15 to 2023/24

34%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS WERE PEOPLE BORN OVERSEAS

36%

WERE NEW ARRIVALS, IN AUSTRALIA FOR FIVE YEARS OR LESS

TOP THREE LOCATIONS

29%
Beach

22%
River/Creek

13%
Ocean/Harbour

TOP 3 AGE GROUPS

20%
25 – 34 years

14%
35 – 44 years

14%
65 – 74 years

TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF BIRTH


China


United Kingdom


India


Vietnam


New Zealand

To read the articles:

Willcox-Pidgeon, S., Devine S.G., Franklin, R.C. Adult migrants urgent need for drowning prevention in Australia: water safety perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, Health Promotion International, Volume 40, Issue 4, August 2025, daaf109, **https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf109**

Willcox-Pidgeon, S., Franklin, R.C. & Devine, S. Drowning prevention strategies for migrant adults in Australia: a qualitative multiple case study. BMC Public Health 25, 1911 (2025). **https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-23104-5**

Children's Swimming & Water Safety Skills Teacher and Parent Perceptions

Executive summary

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 identifies the lack of swimming and water safety skills as a contributing factor to drowning across the lifespan, but with particular emphasis on primary and secondary school years. Opportunities are greatest and crucial to obtain swimming and water safety skills during these life stages.

This report presents perspectives on swimming and water safety from parents and teachers of children aged from 4 years to 16 years old. The report explores key questions about perceived swimming and floating ability and assesses these perceptions against the National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety.

Royal Life Saving Australia has previously estimated that more than 40% of primary school children cannot meet the National Benchmarks of swimming 50 metres and floating for 2 minutes. Research shows that children from low-socioeconomic, regional/ remote, migrant and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities are most the likely to miss out.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, with an estimated 10 million swimming lessons missed by children between 2020 and 2022 due to pool closures, staff shortages and waitlists. This has likely contributed to a cohort of children and young people who are now unable to swim, making them extremely vulnerable to drowning.

This research has confirmed Royal Life Saving Australia's concerns that children are not reaching National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety and in some cases, falling well below the minimum standards. Teachers and parents hold similar perceptions of children's abilities, estimating that 48% and 46% respectively of year 6 students (typically 11-12 years of age) are unable to swim 50 metres and float for 2 minutes; the two key performance indicators of the National Benchmark for 12 year-olds.

The data also showed there is little improvement in skills once children progress through the secondary school years. Thirty-nine percent of parents of 13-14 year-olds (typically in school year 7 and 8) and similarly teachers (41% for year 7 and 39% for year 8) estimated they were unable to achieve the primary school benchmark. Alarmingly, teachers estimated that 39% of students in year 10 were unable to achieve this benchmark for 12 year-olds and 84% are unable to swim 400 metres: the National Benchmark for 17 year-olds.

With schools and parents increasingly under pressure financially, costs are a key barrier in providing swimming lessons. Thirty-one percent of schools do not offer a learn to swim program for their students and one in four schools do not conduct a school swimming carnival. One in ten children aged 5 to 14 years have never attended a swimming lesson in any form and the average drop-out age for those that have had lessons is between 7 to 9 years, well before achieving the National Benchmark for 12 year-olds.

Overall, the findings paint a worrying picture and reinforce the need for a nationally coordinated approach to boosting children's swimming and water safety skills before it is too late.

To read the report and more swimming research:
www.royallifesaving.com.au/research-and-policy/research-by-topic/risk-factors

TEACHERS PERCEIVE THAT:

48% of year 6 students cannot swim 50 metres and tread water for 2 minutes.

40% of year 7-10 students cannot achieve the National Benchmark for primary school students.

After year 7 there is little improvement in swimming ability.

84% of year 10 students cannot swim 400 metres, the National Benchmark for 17 years.

31% of schools do not offer a learn to swim program.

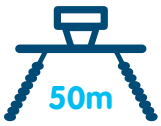
The three top reasons for schools not offering a learn to swim program are:

54% cost of lessons

48% limited staff resources or capability

36% lack of time

PARENTS PERCEIVE THAT:



46% of children aged 11-12 years (year 5 & 6) cannot swim 50 metres.

8% of children aged 11-12 years cannot float or tread water for 2 minutes.

46% of children aged 7-14 years cannot achieve the National Benchmark for 6 years (of this 13% are aged 11-14 years).

One in ten children aged 5-14 years have never attended swimming lessons.

The majority being from low socio-economic backgrounds and those living in regional locations.

33% of children stop lessons between ages 7-9 years.

Types of swimming lessons school-aged children are attending

60% of kids attend weekly group lessons outside of school hours

36% attend swimming lessons during school hours

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Australian Aquatic Facilities 2025 report provides a data-driven analysis of the current profile, state, challenges, and opportunities facing aquatic facility planners, owners and operators and governments. Using authoritative data sources this report presents a comprehensive assessment of the sector's impact, recent funding landscape and sustainability challenges.

KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

1. Aquatic Facilities: Social & Economic Value

421 million visits
annually to 2,103 publicly accessible aquatic facilities across Australia.

The social value of aquatic facilities has increased to
$12.84 billion per year,
up from $9.1 billion in 2021, and is inclusive of health, social, and economic benefits.

Each visit to an aquatic facility
generates $30.50
in economic benefits, reflecting improved health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and community engagement.

Drowning remains a major public health concern, with 323 fatalities in 2023/24.
Community access
to public pools has been a key to the Australian approach to water safety and drowning prevention for generations.

2. Infrastructure Challenges & Investment Needs

- There is new data on the average ratios of aquatic facilities to population.

AVERAGE AQUATIC FACILITY TO POPULATION RATIOS (APPROX)
Capital Cities: 1:20,000
Regional Cities: 1: 12,000
National average: 1:13,000

- People living in many regional and outer-metropolitan areas lack access to aquatic facilities for lessons, leisure and fitness. This gap in access contributes to social inequities. New data shows a need for better planning frameworks that account for geographic distribution and population growth projections.
- More than 6 million Australians (24%) must drive more than 10 minutes to reach a public pool; this figure is projected to rise to 7.3 million (29%) by 2032.
- 1.8 million Australians (7%) are more than 20 minutes away, highlighting the growing equity issue in public pool access.
- Analysis of Commonwealth investment shows $1.79 billion allocated across multiple programs, with $297.54 million (16.62% of total community infrastructure funding) going towards aquatic infrastructure in 2023 and 2024.
- While previous research identified 500 public pools are approaching the end of their lifespan with no national plan to address this, this report has found local governments are under significant financial pressure, with programs falling short of the demand. A dedicated funding stream for public pool feasibility plans, maintenance, upgrades and new facilities is likely needed.

3. Workforce Challenges & Safety Concerns

- Lifeguards responded to a 12.5% increase year-on-year in major incidents responded to by pool lifeguards. While causation is unclear, increased usage, a green workforce, fragmented approaches to training and accreditation and declining swimming skills post-COVID are likely to be influencing factors.
- There is an increasing trend of public aggression and abuse towards aquatic staff, requiring improved workplace protections, training and accreditation systems and support.

4. Sustainability & Climate Action

- Aquatic facilities are major energy consumers, requiring systematic upgrades to reduce environmental impact.
- The majority of pools still rely on natural gas, necessitating more programs for electrification and renewable energy adoption.
- Water waste and energy inefficiency remain key concerns, with leaks, evaporation, and outdated filtration systems contributing to excessive resource consumption.
- Leading facilities showcase the potential for fully sustainable, net-zero energy operations.

To read the full report:
www.royallifesaving.com.au/Aquatic-Risk-and-Guidelines/aquatic-research/state-of-aquatic-facility-infrastructure-2025

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a National Public Pool Investment Program

- Secure sustainable, dedicated funding to upgrade, expand, and replace aging aquatic facilities.
- Prioritise equitable access, focusing on growth areas and underserved communities.
- Ensure investment in energy-efficient, climate-resilient pools.
- Support feasibility studies for low-resource councils and disadvantaged communities.

2. Develop a National Public Pool Planning Framework

- Guide state and local governments on equitable planning and investment in aquatic facilities.
- Implement systematic needs assessments to ensure investment decisions are focused on population growth, access through the asset lifespan, and fit for purpose design, and prevent overinvestment in areas with limited demand.

3. Strengthen Workforce Protections & Professional Development

- Strengthen approaches to auditing and assessment of safety and quality outcomes at aquatic facilities and training providers.
- Strengthen industry licensing / accreditation schemes, empowering workers and ensuring quality training and accreditation outcomes.
- Strengthen supports for aquatic workers who may face abuse and aggression through industry-wide measures.

4. Implement National Sustainability Standards for Aquatic Facilities

- Support widescale electrification and energy efficiency upgrades.
- Invest in water-saving technologies such as ultra-fine filtration and leak detection systems.
- Adopt baseline national energy and water benchmarks for public pools, incentivise accelerated improvements to reduce ecological footprint.

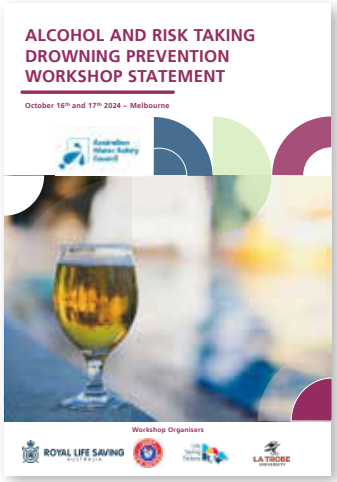
Alcohol and risk-taking workshop statement and 5-year data snapshot

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 (AWSS) identifies key drowning prevention priorities areas of focus, establishing a roadmap for action that aims to reduce drowning across Australia.

As part of an engagement approach focused on a midpoint review of the AWSS 2030, Royal Life Saving Australia, in collaboration with Surf Life Saving Australia, Life Saving Victoria, and La Trobe University's Centre for Alcohol Policy Research and Sport and Social Impact, convened a drowning prevention workshop on two focus areas of the AWSS 2030: Alcohol and other drugs and Risk taking.

The workshop's think tank environment brought together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to discuss current challenges, review relevant sections of the Australian Water Safety Strategy, and examine successful initiatives from related health sectors.

The workshop's main objectives were to foster collaborative thinking and to develop a collective agenda for tackling alcohol and risk-taking behaviours in aquatic environments, paving the way for more targeted and effective water safety interventions across Australia.



To view the 2024 Alcohol and Risk Taking Drowning Prevention Workshop Statement, please visit **https://doi.org/10.62977/87251**

Workshop participants discussed, prioritised and co-drafted the following list of essential actions. This call to action summarises the core takeaways and messages from the workshop.

1. **Investigate alcohol industry relationships**
   Illuminate the impact of the aquatic alcogenic environment. The influence of the alcohol industry on drowning prevention and water safety efforts requires careful investigation, with a focus on priority populations
2. **Lean into smart collaboration**
   We do better together. Foster innovative, multisectoral partnerships and a systems approach that facilitates wide-reaching stakeholder relationships to embed drowning prevention strategies across sectors and settings.
3. **Emphasise story telling**
   Stories are powerful. Identify opportunities to highlight and build the capacity of people with lived experience to support them to share their stories.
4. **Determine the role of alcohol in drowning**
   Build the knowledge base. Prioritise research that provides evidence quantifying the impact of alcohol and other drugs on swimming, floating, and other aquatic activities.
5. **Develop, implement, and evaluate interventions**
   Evidence-informed practice needs practice informed evidence. More interventions are needed that specifically address alcohol and other drug-related drowning, with a focus on evaluating impact, beyond reach or attitudes and knowledge
6. **Focus on policy regulation**
   National action requires policy engagement. Advocate for the development and enforcement of nationally consistent government policies to remove aquatic imagery (location and activity) from alcohol advertising and restrict alcohol consumption in and around waterways.
7. **Define 'risk taking'**
   Understanding risk is critical but it is poorly defined. There is an urgent need to better understand and define risk-taking in the context of drowning prevention and water safety to develop effective mitigation strategies.
8. **Embed approaches that consider the commercial determinants of health**
   Commercial entities influence health and wellbeing. It is essential to embed a focus on commercial determinants of health in drowning prevention and water safety efforts.
9. **Move towards impactful normative engagement**
   Awareness is necessary but not sufficient. Better engagement is needed with communities to support the development of skills that reduce drowning risk and lead to sustained behavioural change.
10. **Employ place-based approaches**
    Start with the places that people live and recreate. Increase collaboration between land & waterway managers on place-based risk management approaches.

1,485

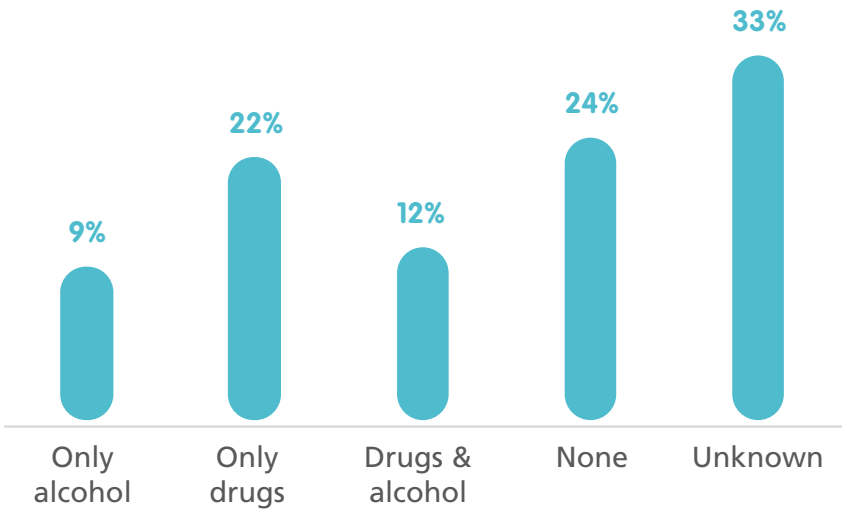
drowning deaths occurred in Australia

between 2019/20 to 2023/24

Alcohol consumption is known to impair our cognitive functions, influencing behaviour and risk-perception. The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 identifies alcohol and drug consumption to be a major risk factor in drowning events, highlighting the need to understand more around the characteristics of these behaviours.

This brief report covers a 5-year period on all alcohol and drugs present at the time of the drowning event, broken down by demographics, and whether the alcohol and/or drugs consumed were found to contribute to the drowning event.

Drowning cases in the presence of alcohol and drugs (2019/20-2023/24)



315 (21%)

drowning cases that reported alcohol present

498 (34%)

of cases that reported drugs present

174 (12%)

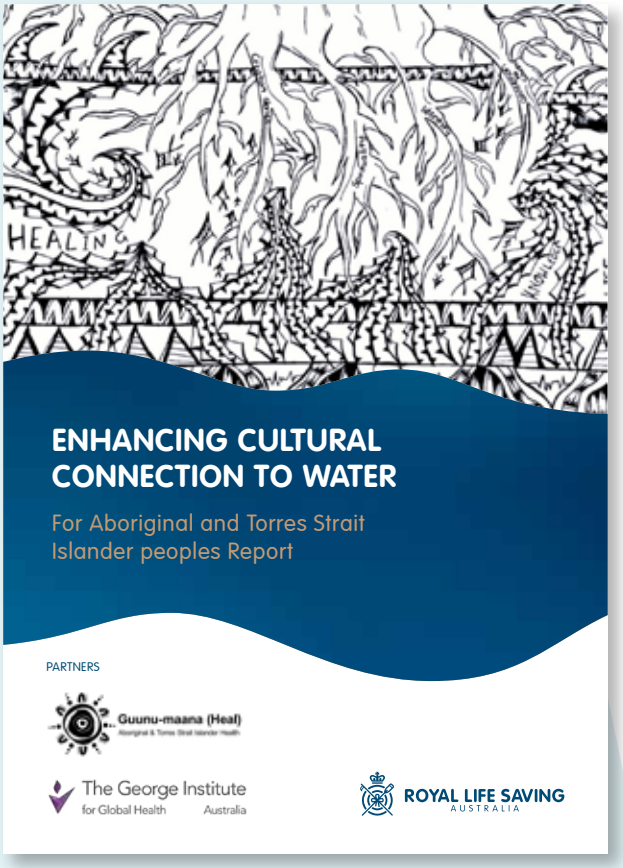
drowning cases that reported both alcohol and drugs present

Preface

This report was established by working at the knowledge interface, through a research partnership between Guunu-Maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, The George Institute for Global Health and Royal Life Saving Australia. Therefore, the presenting format will be reflective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 'ways of doing'.

Guunu-maana (Heal) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program is led through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing to generate evidence that privileges Indigenous knowledges through actions that empower people and communities.

Our commitment to research integrity is underpinned by equity, transparency and self-determination and maintains an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigm of health and healing of physical, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual elements. This report was led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers with the support of our non-Indigenous team allies and is written from our collective First Nations voices.



Executive Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems are an integral component in the tapestry of the world's oldest continuing culture. Recognising the intricacies of these systems is a critical process in reversing the colonial narratives, that have deliberately set out to oversimplify Indigenous knowledges and devalue connections to Country.

Although representing only 3.8% of the population of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples account for 5% of all drowning fatalities and are 1.7 times more likely to drown compared to non-Aboriginal people. Most incidences occur in remote and very remote communities (38%) with the leading activities attributed to swimming and recreating (21%) in rivers and lakes. One life lost to preventable circumstances is one too many. Seas and waterways are an inseparable dimension in connection to Country and contributes to a holistic understanding of life. It is critical that this connection be recognised and embedded within programs and initiatives to appropriately enhance water safety knowledge and skills, all while promoting social inclusion and cultural wellbeing. The aim of this report will be to identify what water safety programs are being delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia; and to highlight the meanings and connections to water. In doing so, this report will provide recommendations for integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems into water safety and drowning prevention strategies to enhance cultural connections.

This report conducts two scoping reviews in parallel. The first search (Question 1) was a systematic scoping review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water safety program being delivered across Australia. The second search (Question 2) was a desktop scoping review to understand from the direct voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples their meanings and connections to water.

Eight articles were included in the first stage, in total reporting on 14 water safety and education programs. Only one article was a peer-reviewed publication and therefore quality appraised. The second stage was a desktop review examining meanings and connections to water. The findings show that water means Knowledge, Healing and Life. It is upon these meanings of water that we draw connections to Creation Stories, Spirituality, Cultural Identity, and Country, all through a symbiotic relationship. These meanings and connections remain resilient, are place-based, interconnected and relational to our people and communities.

In a post-colonial society, promoting culture across generations is crucial. The water safety sector occupies a space of cultural significance. By working to implement the recommendations in this report, we can enhance cultural connections and adopt holistic approaches to water safety and drowning prevention strategies.

Key Recommendations

1. Reinforce how current programs, initiatives and services can connect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems (meanings and connections).
2. Assess community programs and initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural connection, safety and worldview.
3. Advocate for cultural responsiveness training to be included into the workforce in Australian water safety organisations, including holding a roundtable forum with key stakeholders and partners.
4. Utilise cultural interest to engage children, youth, adults and communities with water safety programs and initiatives.

Link to the report can be found here:
https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/research-and-policy/research-by-topic/populations

ABOUT THE ARTIST:
ANGELA WEBB – GUMBAYNGGIRR NATION

This artwork was developed Angela Webb, from Gumbaynggirr Nation for Guunu-maana (Heal). The meaning is Heal Spirit, Heal Country.

Summer Drowning Toll

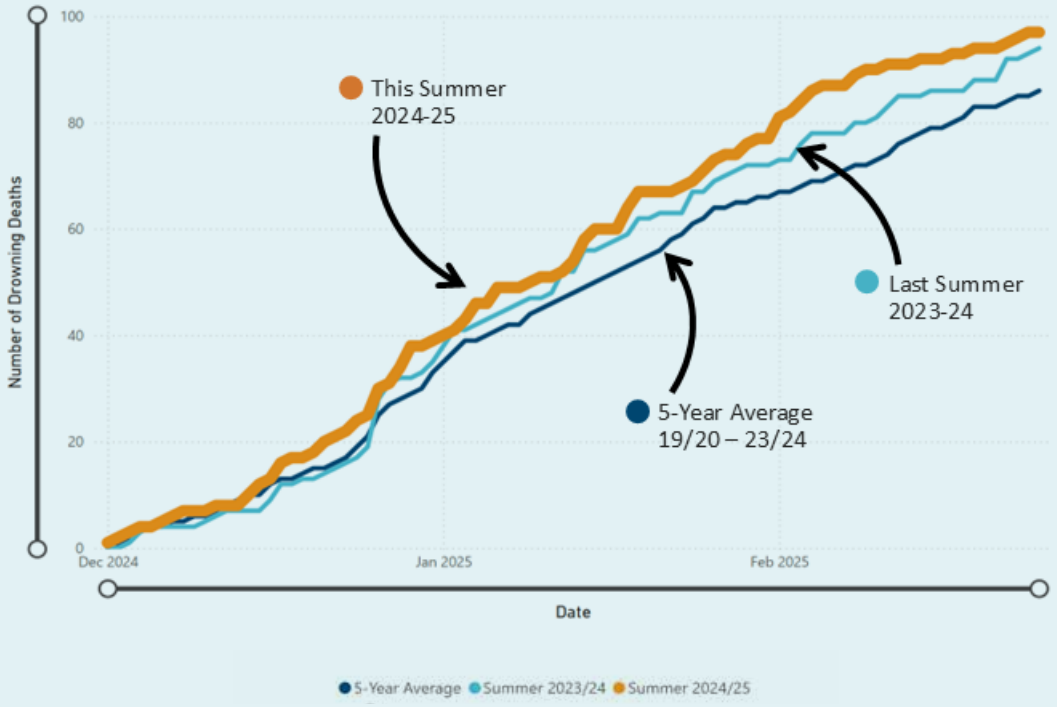
Royal Life Saving research shows a consistent peak in fatal drowning cases in the summer months. In a bid to understand the increased risks during this time, each year, we publish the Summer Drowning Toll from 1st December to the end of February, which charts drowning incidents around Australia in these months. This serves as a timely vehicle for us to promote safety advice in conjunction with our ongoing drowning prevention campaigns for particularly high-risk groups and communities, such as men, children and people from multicultural communities.

The purpose of the Summer Drowning Toll is to report on drowning number based on real-time report from the media and police reporting.

Royal Life Saving Australia's Summer Drowning Toll dashboard was updated daily over the summer (1st December 2024 to 28th February 2025).

This year, there was 104 drowning deaths that occurred over the summer period: a 5% increase from last year. Males accounted for 81% and those over the age of 55-years represented 32% of the summer drowning cases. Similar to last year, beaches were the leading location for drowning (32%), followed by rivers/creeks (30%).

Number of 2024/25 summer drowning deaths reported in the media compared to last summer and the five-year average



A 10-year national study 2014/15 to 2023/24
Lifestage in Focus: Children 0-4 years

197

children aged 0–4 years died from drowning between July 2014 and June 2024

20

children aged 0–4 years fatally drown each year on average

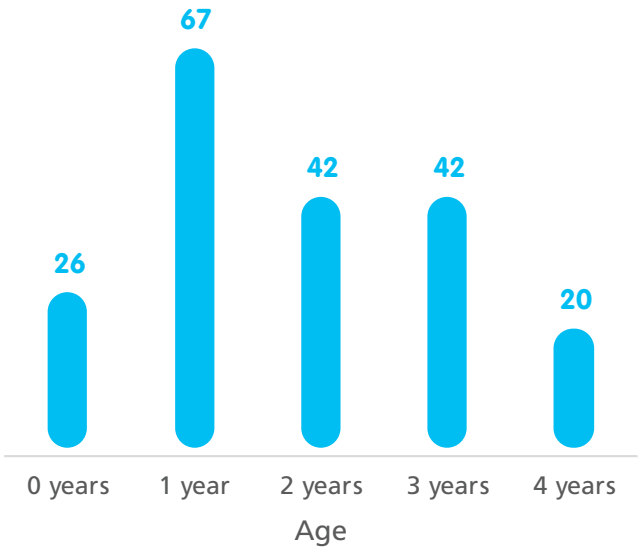
1.28
per 100,000 people

10-year cumulative crude fatal drowning rate in children aged 0–4 years

Over half (59%) of drowning deaths occurred in males, with leading activity being an unintentional fall into water (75%) followed by bathing (19%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 10% drowning among children aged 0-4 years.

There were nearly three times more drowning deaths among children aged 1-year, compared to those under a year. 57% of deaths in 1-year olds occurred in a swimming pool.

Number of drowning deaths by single year age, July 2014 to June 2024



Top location of drowning

47% Swimming Pool

19% Bathtubs/spas

15% Lakes/Dams

10% Other

8% River/Creek

59% of children first enrol in formal swim lessons between 0-3 years old.

To read the full report:
www.royallifesaving.com.au/library/research-report/people/10-year-national-study-of-child-0-4-drowning-deaths-201415-202324

Research Highlight:
Rip current drowning on Australian beaches

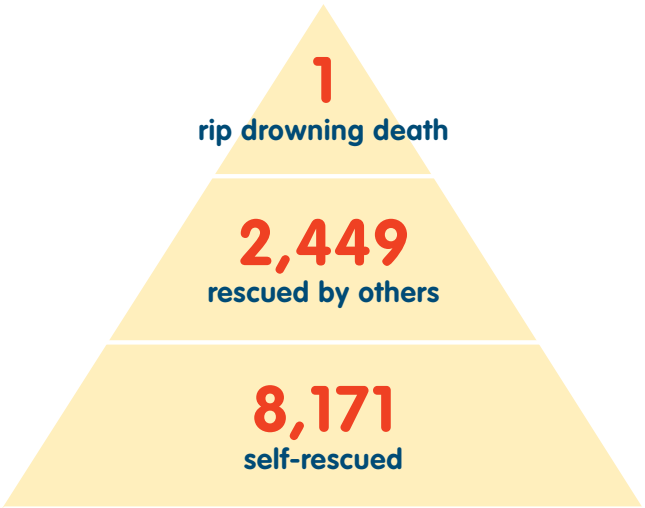
Every year, 21 people fatally drown due to rip currents – powerful channels of water that flow from the shoreline out to sea. With an estimated 17,000 rip currents along Australia's 52,000kms of coastline on any given day, the danger is widespread for beachgoers. Despite water safety campaigns, rip currents remain Australia's number one coastal hazard, claiming more lives annually than sharks, floods, and cyclones combined. New research analysed 19 years of rip current drowning deaths (2004-2023) to inform rip current education and prevention strategies.

85%
Male

38%
were adults aged 20-34 years

3 in 5
>1km from SLS service

44%
Outside of summer



Who is most at risk

Men account for 85% of rip current drowning deaths, with 20-34 year olds representing the highest-risk age group (38%). Encouragingly, we found that male rip current drowning rates have significantly declined since 2004. However, overall drowning rates have remained unchanged, indicating that while targeted safety campaigns may work for some groups, broader approaches are needed.

Unpatrolled beaches represent the biggest challenge for the beachgoers and risk managers. Three out of five rip current deaths occur further than one kilometre from a surf lifesaving service, and nearly half (44%) happen outside the peak summer patrol season. This emphasises the essential drowning prevention role played by lifesaving personnel, but acknowledges that they can't be on all beaches, at all times.

Assessing the burden beyond fatal incidents

For every tragic death, thousands of rescues and non-fatal drowning incidents also occur. Our research estimated that for each rip current drowning death, 8,171 people successfully self-rescued themselves and 2,449 people were rescued by others – including lifeguards, surfers, and members of the public. This highlights the significant danger rip currents pose that fatal drowning statistics alone don't capture.

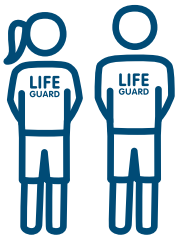
Rip currents will always be part of Australia's dynamic coastal environment, but the deaths they cause are preventable. Success will require moving beyond traditional approaches to embrace innovative education methods, strategic resource deployment, and community-wide water safety skills. The goal is not to deter people from our magnificent beaches, but instead to ensure they know how to enjoy them safely.

Looking ahead and future prevention strategies

Several critical areas for action have been highlighted in research and practice:

Technology & Innovation:

The growing popularity of technologies such as smart devices, geo-targeting of safety messages and artificial intelligence should be explored as avenues for rip education.



Strategic Lifeguard Placement:

Future research should identify high-risk, high-visitation locations where additional lifeguard services would have maximum impact.

Bystander Rescue Training:

Bystanders represent a valuable part of the public safety landscape, however, there is an urgent need for programs teaching safe rescue techniques. This includes training on when not to enter the water and how to alert emergency services quickly.

Community Life Savers & First Aid:

Expanding rescue equipment at popular unpatrolled beaches, along with community CPR and water rescue training, could help bridge the gap where professional services aren't available.

Kelly S, Ledger J, Koon W, Brander R, Peden AE, Daw S, Lawes JC. Quantifying rip current-related drowning deaths and exposure on Australian beaches. Injury Prevention. 2025 Apr 9.

To read the full article:
https://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/early/2025/04/04/ip-2024-045565

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Acknowledgement of Country

Royal Life Saving Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging recognising their continued connection to land, waters and communities.

Suggested citation

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Online **royallifesaving.com.au**
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Online **sls.com.au**
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