

A photograph of three Indigenous Australian children sitting on a blue mat in a swimming pool. They are all looking towards the right with their arms raised high, palms facing each other, in a gesture of prayer or celebration. The child in the foreground is a girl with dark curly hair, wearing a white tank top with a floral pattern and dark shorts. The child in the middle is a boy with short dark hair, wearing a teal t-shirt and red shorts. The child in the background is a girl with long dark hair, wearing a purple dress. The background is a blurred green landscape.

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

---

Drowning data for Indigenous Australians



2017/18\*

9

DEATHS

1.1 Deaths  
per 100,000

2016/17

14

DEATHS

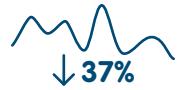
1.7 Deaths  
per 100,000

10-YEAR AVERAGE

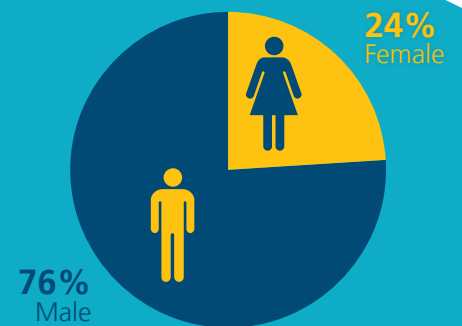
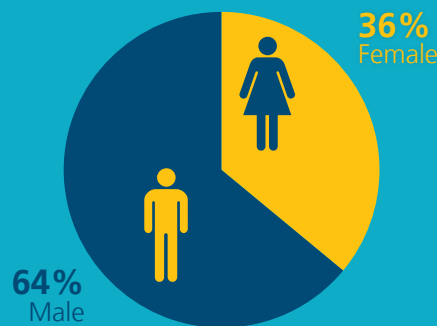
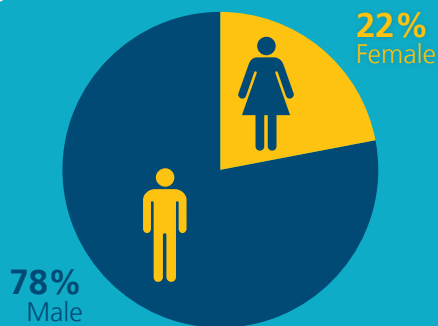
14

DEATHS

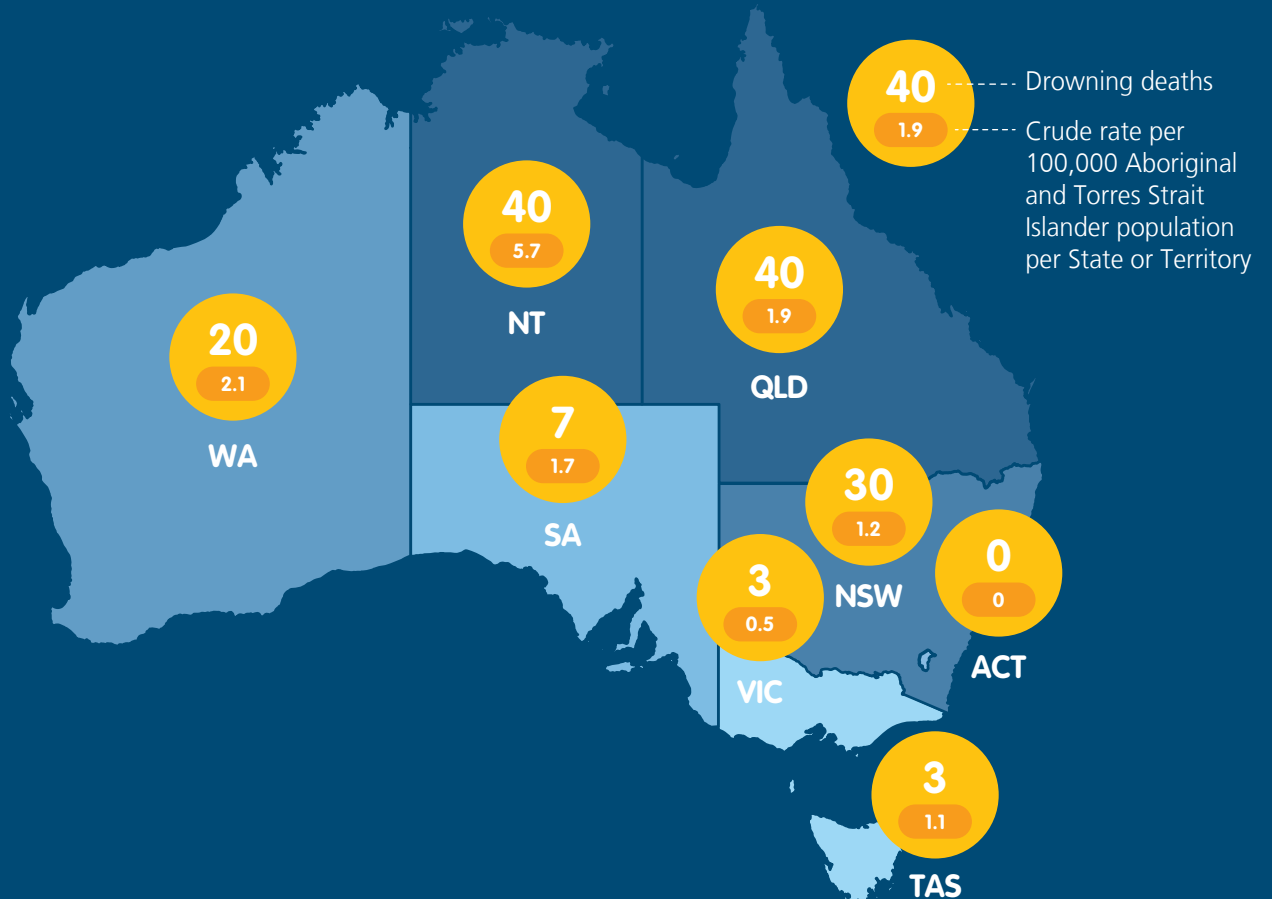
1.9 Deaths  
per 100,000



## SEX



## STATE AND TERRITORY BREAKDOWN



Drowning deaths among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from 2008/09 to 2017/18

\*Year data most currently available for.

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE



## SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY SKILLS

Children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds have previously been found to have lower levels of swimming and water safety skills and are less likely to achieve the skills identified in the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework<sup>25</sup> due to various reasons, including cost, access, medical conditions and cultural barriers.



## WIDER HEALTH AND WELLBEING BENEFITS

Establishing swimming and water safety programs, and pools in communities is not just about drowning prevention outcomes. Swimming pools provide wider health, wellbeing and social benefits to individuals and the community. Research investigating the value of swimming pools in remote communities has reported decreased skin, ear and nose infections, and increased physical activity and hygiene.<sup>26</sup> Anecdotally, increased school attendance has also been recorded in areas where pools and swimming programs have been introduced.<sup>27-28</sup>



## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Research has found that one visit to a swimming pool by an individual has a health economic value of \$26.39 in improved health outcomes and consequent reductions in health spending and absenteeism for the local economy.<sup>29</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities experience some of the poorest health outcomes in Australia. The overall value of a swimming pool in remote communities is likely to be much higher.

## CHALLENGES



Delivery of programs is very resource intensive, both from a staffing and financial perspective, especially in remote locations



Ensuring that programs and services are culturally appropriate, including the provision of a diverse workforce that includes Aboriginal staff



Access to remote communities can be difficult (both physically and in terms of gaining approval from Aboriginal communities)



Many pools in remote communities are ageing and require substantial work and funding to maintain



Governments should recognise that these pools are essential for improving health and social outcomes among people of all ages in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and remote communities



Ensuring that programs are relevant, sustainable and achieve real outcomes that are valued by the community

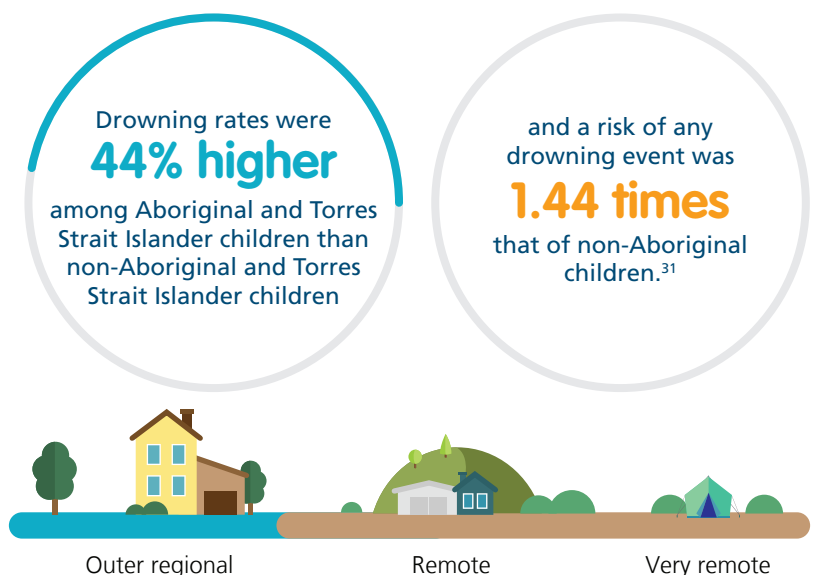


Cultural commitments and traditions need to be respected even if the program is interrupted and not able to be completed

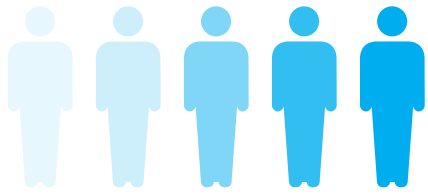
## REMOTENESS

Research shows there is a greater risk of drowning in rural and remote locations, due to the greater distance from essential services. Drowning deaths among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people most commonly occur in remote locations, despite only 18% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas.<sup>30</sup>

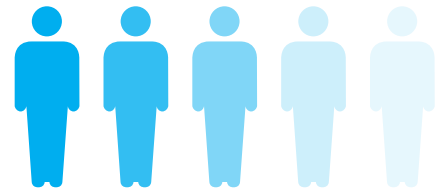
A Queensland study reported that all drowning events among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children occurred in regional or remote locations, compared with most non-Aboriginal children drowning in major cities.<sup>31</sup>



## 10-Year Data Breakdown



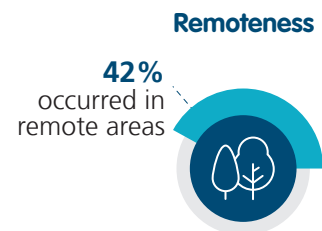
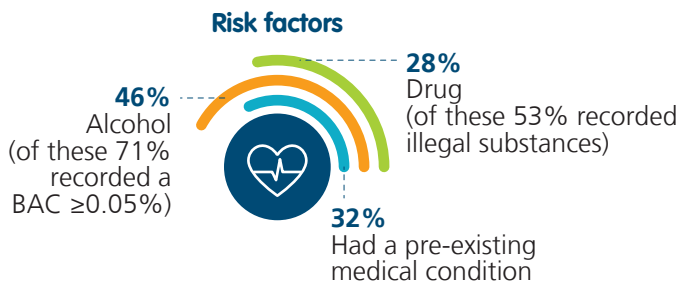
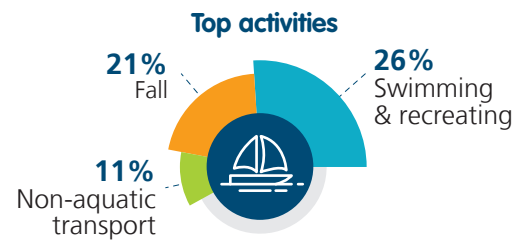
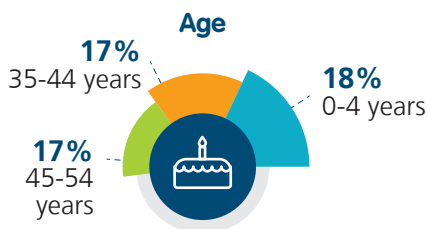
**143 People**  
who identified as Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander  
drowned in Australia



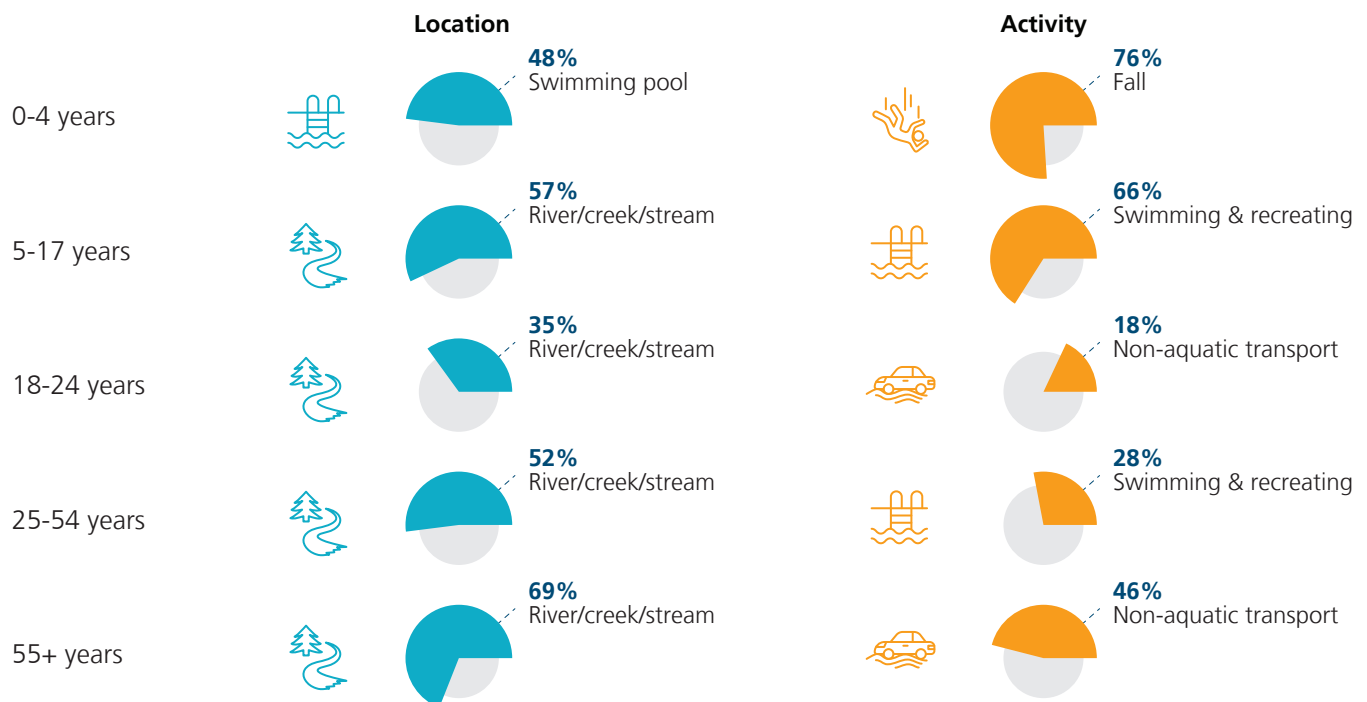
1<sup>st</sup> July 2008

30<sup>th</sup> June 2018

**5%** of total drowning deaths during the 10-year period but represent **3%** of the total population



### Risk factors differ by age



Previous research has found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have an incidence rate of drowning (fatal and non-fatal) 44% higher than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0 – 19 years), with swimming pools identified as the leading location.<sup>31</sup>



## ROYAL LIFE SAVING WA TALENT POOL PROGRAM

Royal Life Saving Society WA's Talent Pool Program is a youth engagement, training and employment initiative that uses the local community swimming pool as a vehicle to engage and develop first-time employment opportunities for Aboriginal youth throughout Western Australia. Talent Pool strives to provide real employment outcomes for graduates. These outcomes are achieved through the engagement of a range of stakeholders that work to support Talent Pool participants at all stages of their journey into employment.

### CHALLENGES



**30%** of participants were **unable to complete** the swim requirements of the Bronze Medallion qualification. This has driven change to the way the program is delivered to allow for week to week modulation to promote improved stroke technique and fitness conditioning



### KEY OUTCOMES

- Network of aquatic trainers established across three regions to reduce the need for 'fly in, fly out' instructors, and build capacity and capability of regional centres to teach and assess candidates up to Bronze Medallion qualifications.
- Allows capacity and opportunity to offer flexible programming and tailor training to meet local needs. Of the 13 instructors, five were Aboriginal.
- 75 program participants with combined 82 actual course graduates (some completed more than one course) with 88% completion rate.
- The Talent Pool Program has supported 26 participants to secure real employment or 'pending employment' opportunities on completion of qualifications – includes lifeguard, pool operator, pool attendant, swim instructor, aquatic trainer, project officer and events officer roles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



Plan and develop culturally appropriate strategies and programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Increase employment opportunities throughout the aquatic industry.



Develop partnerships to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for drowning prevention planning and implementation.



Incorporate swimming and water safety education with other health promotion programs/agendas.



Work with other agencies and partners to deliver programs in a culturally appropriate manner.



Align approach with other strategies and frameworks (eg, Closing the Gap, Indigenous Advancement Strategy).



Improve drowning data pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including non-fatal data.



Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan for engaging and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.