

National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks Implementation Report

June 2023



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Royal Life Saving is a public benevolent institution (PBI) dedicated to reducing drowning and turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. We achieve this through: advocacy, education, training, health promotion, aquatic risk management, community development, research, sport, leadership and participation and international networks.

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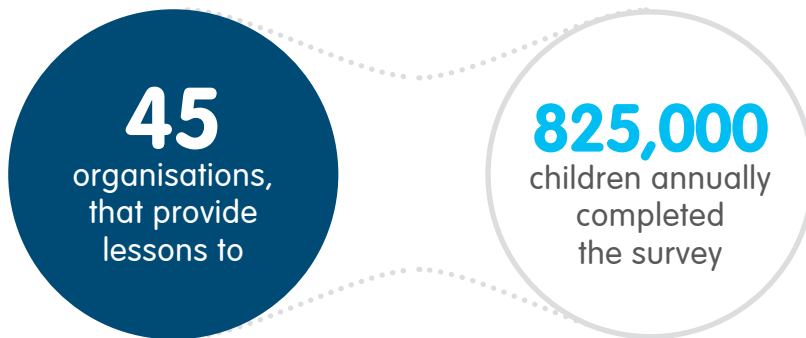


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of our national office in Ultimo, Sydney are the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to Australia's First Nations cultural and spiritual connections to water, and acknowledge the land where we work, live, and play always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



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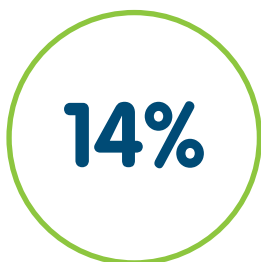
Swim and Survive remains the most popular and widespread swimming and water safety curriculum delivered in Australian swim schools



of all respondents utilising the Swim and Survive program



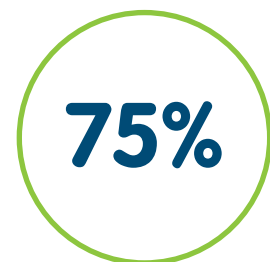
utilise a variation of the Swim and Survive or their own developed program



of respondents used swim school and program data to track student achievement against the National Benchmarks



More than 20 different data collection systems are in use by swim schools across Australia



of respondents are interested in participating in a data collection project on the National Benchmarks

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides insight into the current implementation status of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and assessment against the three Benchmarks in swim schools and programs across Australia.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 prioritises swimming and water safety skills as a key focus area to reduce the risk factor for drowning.

This research is the first step in addressing several of the key activities within the Strategy including but not limited to:

- Enhance research and improve data collection relating to the swimming and water safety skills of children, teenagers, and adults.
- Partner to establish policy, education program content and campaigns.
- Establish a national database on children's swimming and water safety skills.
- Implement and evaluate the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework.

As the revised Framework and Benchmarks were launched almost three years ago, the findings will assist with the determination of future initiatives to increase the use and implementation of the Framework, and the reporting against the Benchmarks.

The survey respondents represented a cross-section of swim schools and programs across Australia including metro and regional locations in each State and Territory, as well as differences in the operation model, program curriculum, size and number of locations. The data obtained was from 45 organisations that provide swimming lessons to over 825,000 children annually.

The purpose of this research was to:

- Improve the understanding on how swim programs collect data and how data is utilised.
- Ascertain interest in participating in a national data collection project.
- Gauge awareness of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and the National Benchmark by program providers.
- Inform the level of alignment of swim program curriculum to the Framework, assessment of students against the Benchmarks and use of associated resources.

Overall, there is a relatively high level of awareness of the Framework and Benchmarks (77 per cent), but less so, consistent and industry wide use of these to guide program development and measure achievement. Whilst there is widespread support for the Framework and Benchmarks and a general belief that the content is fit for purpose and is a valuable resource, program curriculum continues to prioritise swimming skills over water safety skills.

There were no views expressed that the content requires any major updating or amending, however there was some concern that whether it be the Framework design, or the inherent challenges of teaching water safety to older age groups, that the application of the Framework with 13- to 17-year-olds is generally not being realised. Mapping of swim school programs to the Framework and Benchmarks had been done by 26 per cent of respondents. The research did not investigate this further, so it is unclear how this is done, to what extent and what this actually looks like.

Although 75 per cent of respondents are interested in participating in a data collection project to track student achievement against the National Benchmarks, currently only 14 per cent used the data they collect to track such achievement and the varying systems used highlight the complexities of a national collection system.

Recommendations emerging from this feedback can be summarised into three key actions:

1. Improve swim school provider awareness of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks and associated resources, as well as the alignment of the Swim and Survive program.
2. Undertake a structured data collection project to assess achievement against the three National Benchmarks, by seeking to collaborate with Departments of Education to track and report on children's swimming and water safety skills.
3. Provide support and resources to support teachers of the 13- to 17-year-old age group, to ensure increased achievement of the Benchmarks in this age group.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- › Greater national coordination of Framework and Benchmark advocacy and data collection is needed to ensure swim schools and the broader community are aware of the Framework and Benchmarks and the importance of implementation and measurement.
- › A structured data collection project on the National Benchmarks should be undertaken which seeks to work in particular with Education Department programs from which broad assessments of Benchmark achievements of the three age groups can be established.
- › Peak associations that represent private swim school owners should work to actively ensure awareness and application of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework to their members.
- › Greater and more nationally consistent communication and coordination is needed for swim schools that deliver the Swim and Survive program, as to the mapping of this program against the Framework and Benchmarks and data reporting the levels of achievement as against the Benchmarks.
- › Greater collaboration is needed with and between software developers to enhance their swimming and water skills data fields and reporting functionality in alignment with the Framework and Benchmarks.
- › Provide increased support and resources to teachers of the 13- to 17-year-old age group to enable increased achievement of the Benchmarks for these ages.
- › Greater coordination between education department programs and outside school hours programs is needed to support greater achievement and reporting against the Benchmarks.
- › Promote the resources available for swim schools to better educate their teachers on the Framework and Benchmarks, this may be best delivered through a targeted national campaign.
- › Develop and make available to swim schools an information pack regarding the application of GST exemption to “personal aquatic survival skills”.

BACKGROUND

The National Swimming and Water Safety Framework was first developed by the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia in 1999 and was aimed at providing a balanced swimming and water safety education model for use by Governments, educational institutions, the aquatic industry, teachers and parents. At this time, the Australian Water Safety Council set a National Benchmark as the desired competency standard to achieve prior to leaving primary school.

In response to increasing concern over declining swimming and water safety skills and knowledge, and research showing that children were leaving primary school unable to achieve the Benchmark, a National Swimming and Water Safety Education Symposium was held in 2017.

The Symposium aimed to address these issues and devise a strategy for lifting swimming and water safety skills for all children living in Australia, so that no child misses out. One recommendation that came from this Symposium was to review and update the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework.

The National Swimming and Water Safety Framework (the Framework) was then reviewed and updated by an expert reference group of swimming and water safety organisations, governments, peak sporting associations and learn to swim providers.

The updated Framework aims to enable individuals to develop the skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and behaviours required to lead safe and active lives in, on and around a range of aquatic environments. Programs aligned to the Framework would provide individuals with a balanced water safety, personal survival, and swimming education.

Three National Benchmarks were established for swimming and water safety education as the desired competency standards every Australian should have the opportunity to acquire and maintain. These National Benchmarks in Swimming and Water Safety identify key performance metrics that are achievable at the ages of 6 years, 12 years and 17 years. These Benchmarks are underpinned by research into swimming and water safety that validated what skills and knowledge were being achieved and are capable of being achieved.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 launched in 2021, identified the lack of swimming skills and water safety knowledge to be a major risk for drowning and that a strong focus towards developing such skills and knowledge is a priority if the aspirational goal to reduce drowning by 50% by 2030 is to be achieved. The key activities for 2021-2025 focus on strengthening research and data outcomes, effective policy and advocacy for swimming and water safety education opportunities, collaboration, implementation and evaluation of systems to increase the standard of swimming and water safety skills and knowledge.

As such, since the launch of the updated National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks in 2020 and the new Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia sought to gain a greater understanding of the level of application of the Framework and Benchmarks by swimming and water safety education providers nation-wide by undertaking this research.

For more information on the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework visit

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/educate-participate/swimming/national-swimming-and-water-safety-framework>

The Framework seeks to provide the following:

1. Support a structured and consistent understanding of swimming and water safety education across Australia.
2. Provide explicit learning opportunities to explore, strengthen and refine skills relating to swimming, water safety and physical activity within the aquatic environment.
3. Guide those responsible for developing, providing or selecting a swimming and water safety program.
4. Encourage participation from the early years, throughout primary and secondary school and beyond as a lifelong activity.
5. Accommodate individuals of all ages and abilities including those that have had little or no access to a swimming and water safety education.

The Framework contains a number of components that together outline the features contributing to an individual's development of swimming and water safety education.



RESPONDENT PROFILE

SWIM PROGRAM PROVIDER

Forty five organisations, that provide lessons to 825,000 children annually completed the survey. Respondents were from across Australia providing services in metropolitan and rural settings. Whilst the overwhelming majority of the larger operators provided responses, many smaller providers also completed the survey ensuring that a representative cross section of the industry was obtained through the survey.

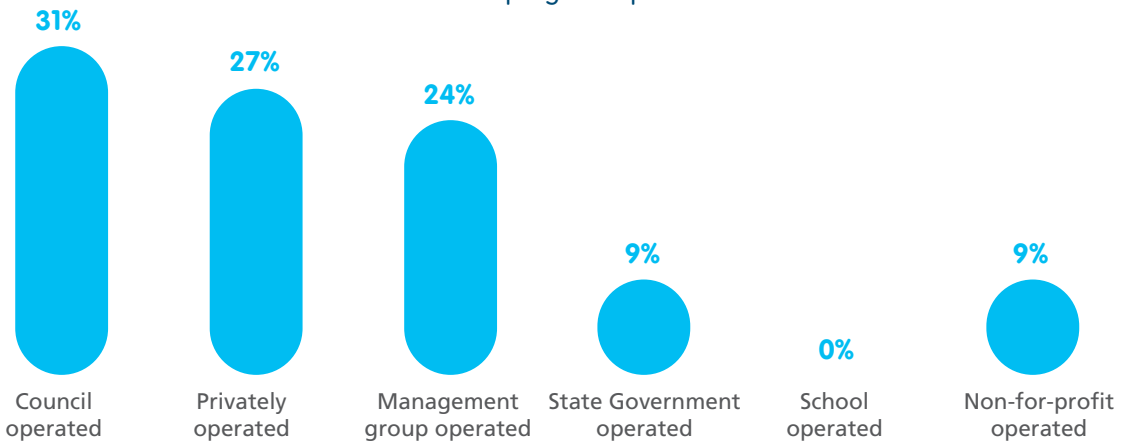
The forty five respondents indicated the number of locations their organisation operated; whether it was a single or multiple locations. The table below provides a clearer indication of the number of swim schools or programs the responses may reflect. At a minimum the forty five organisations represent 269 locations and at a maximum 333 locations.

Attempts were made to ensure that equitable responses were received from the various classification of providers, however no programs directly provided by schools could be sourced. The number of state government responses was also limited due to the actual number of such programs across the country, whilst it was also found that there were a limited number of not-for-profit operators, relative to the other categories.

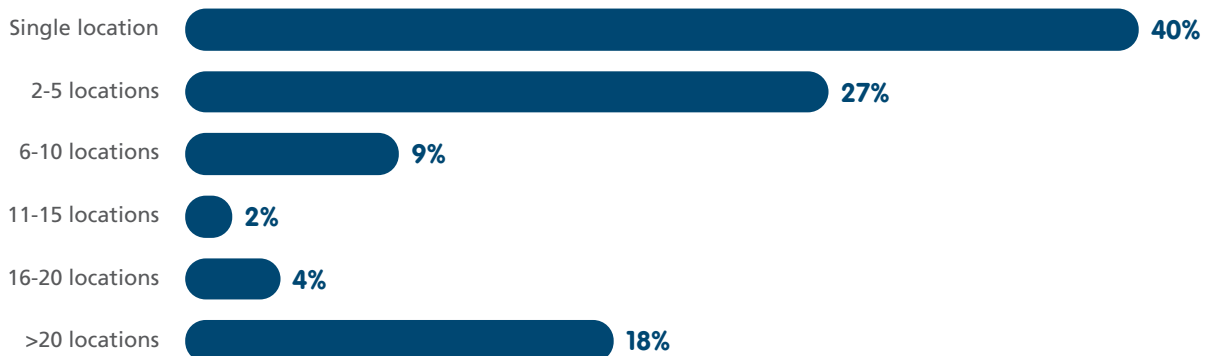


The organisations surveyed collectively provide swimming and water safety lessons to over 825,000 children annually

Swim school or program operation model



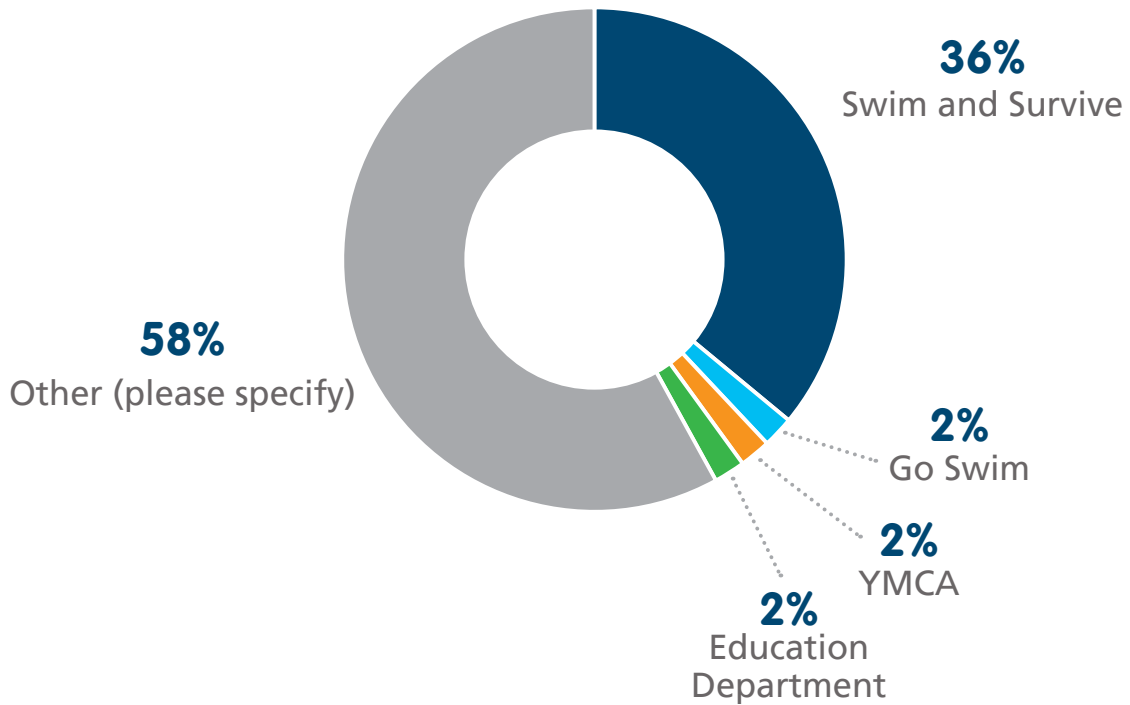
Number of swim school locations per survey participant



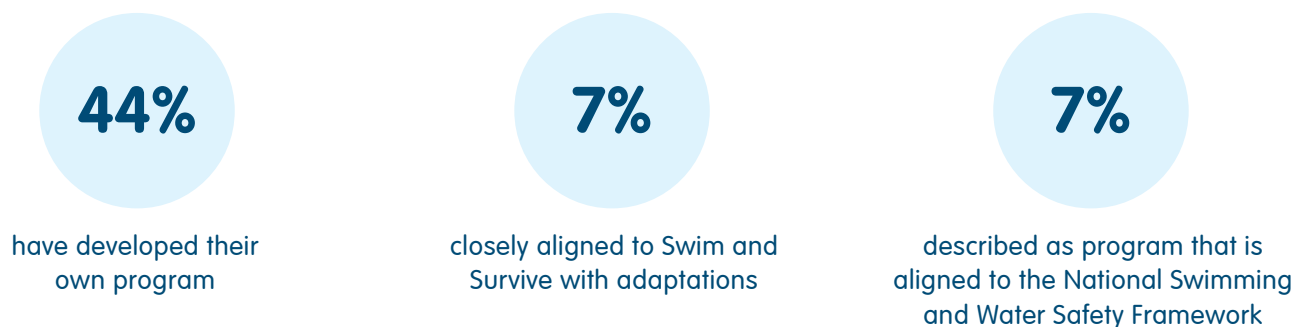
Swim program curriculum

Swim and Survive remains the most popular and widespread swimming and water safety curriculum delivered in Australian swim schools with 36 per cent of all respondents utilising the Swim and Survive program, whilst 58 per cent utilise a variation of the Swim and Survive or their own developed program.

Swim program curriculum used



Of the 58 per cent who utilised "other" programs, they can generally be categorised as follows:



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

COLLECTION OF DATA

The survey questions in this section focused on ascertaining information about what systems are used to collect student data, what type of data is collected mainly at initial enrolment, main uses of data and potential interest in national data collection. This information will help to inform improvement in collecting rich data, and development of future systems to enhance reporting.

System used to collect students data

The survey data highlighted that 45 organisations were utilising 20 different systems, including 5 locally developed systems, and 2 manual systems as per the table below. This demonstrates the complexity for the collection of data to measure childrens' swimming and water safety skills and knowledge across a wide variety of systems.

Links Modular Systems	12	23%
Perfect Gym	9	17%
iClass	8	15%
Locally developed system	5	9%
Swimbiz	3	6%
Swim Desk	2	4%
Xplor Recreation	2	4%
Phoenix	2	4%
Game Day	2	4%
Active World	2	4%
Manual System	2	4%
Centaman	1	2%
Udio	1	2%
Envibe	1	2%
Gymaster	1	2%
	53	100%

Data collected

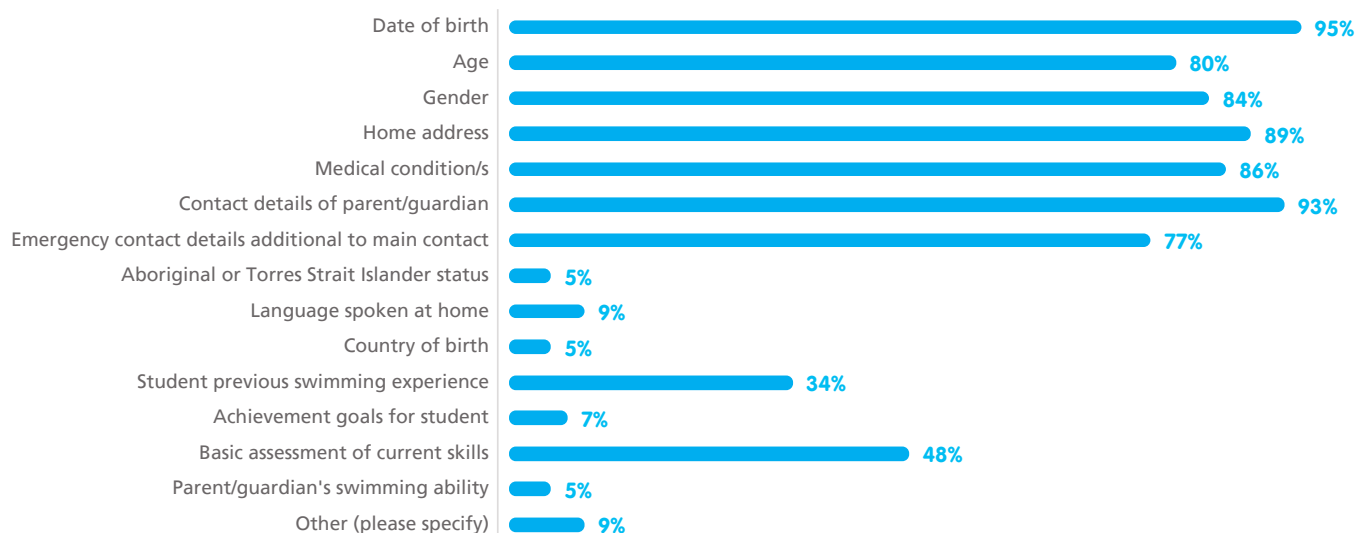
For this question, respondents selected all the variables listed that they collected from customers at the time of enrolment. The number of variables selected ranged from one to 11, with the average being seven variables.

Over 85 per cent of respondents were collecting standard demographic and contact information such as date of birth, gender, home address, medical conditions and contact details of parent/guardian, at the time of enrolment, whereas the percentage of respondents who were collecting information relating to experience, skills and goals were far less:

Students previous swimming experience	34%
Achievement goals for students	7%
Basic assessment of current skills	48%

Responses to this question also revealed that very few respondents collect information relating Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status (5 per cent), language spoken at home (9 per cent) and country of birth (5 per cent).

Data collected at initial enrolment

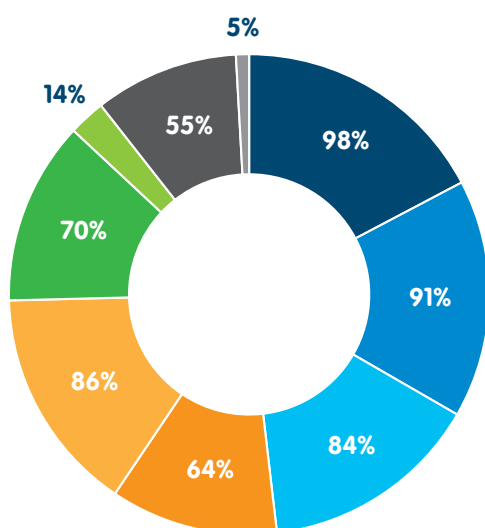


How data is utilised

Only 14 per cent of respondents used collected data to track student achievement against the National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety.

86 per cent of respondents tracked students' achievement of skills and knowledge within a level, whilst 70 per cent tracked these achievements over a period of time across levels. Only 14 per cent of respondents used swim school and program data to track student achievement against the National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety.

How data collected is utilised



- To record the enrolment information in the Swim School management system (98%)
- For class scheduling purposes (91%)
- To track student attendance (84%)
- To measure acquisition and retention of customers (64%)
- To track student achievement of skills and knowledge within a level (86%)
- To track student achievement over a period of time across levels (70%)
- To track student achievement against the National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety (14%)
- To write a report for management indicating key metrics of performance against KPIs (55%)
- Other (please specify) (5%)

Interest in participating in a data collection project on the National Benchmarks

75 per cent of respondents are interested in participating in a data collection project on the National Benchmarks.

Three quarters of respondents are interested in participating in a data collection project on the National Benchmarks.

Of the 25 per cent who were not interested, the three highest rated reasons for not participating were:

- Privacy reasons.
- Insufficient time.
- Program is not aligned to National Benchmarks.

All state government operated programs were interested in participating in a data collection process, whereas only 50 per cent of not-for-profit respondents were interested in participating.

Privately Operated	83%
Management Group Operated	73%
State Government Operated	100%
Not-for-profit Operated	50%
Council Operated	69%

Single centre operations are the least likely to participate in a data collection project, whereas the organisations with 20 or more locations were the most likely.

Single location	65%
2 - 5 locations	83%
6-20 locations	71%
>20	88%

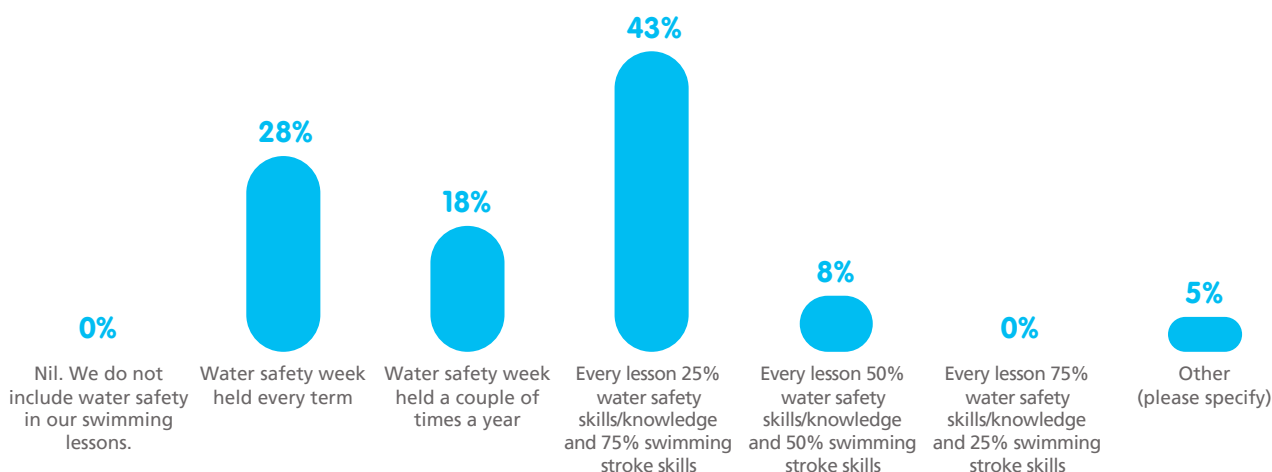
SWIM PROGRAM CONTENT

This section of the survey focused on investigating the balance between swimming stroke skills and water safety skills and knowledge in swim programs and time spent on elements of each of the Benchmarks, in order to get a sense of the opportunity for children to achieve all learning outcomes. Swimming stroke skills have long been the focus of swim programs at the expense of survival and water safety skills rather than broad and balanced lesson content.

Incorporation of water safety skills and knowledge into programs

100 per cent of respondents had some element of water safety included within their swim program, although the level of content varied from minimal to the optimum of equal attention.

Water safety skills and knowledge in swim program



Only 8 per cent of respondents allocated equal amounts of time to water safety and to swimming stroke skills in accordance with the Framework

46 per cent of respondents' delivery of water safety skills were limited to either a water safety week each term, or a couple of times a year which correlates with 10 per cent and 5 per cent respectively of the total of class time dedicated towards water safety. A total of only 8 per cent of respondents allocated equal amounts of time to water safety and to swimming stroke skills, which is the recommended allocations as per the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework.

Management group operated centres were the most compliant with this expectation with 18 per cent of these operators allocating 50 per cent of all classes to water safety followed by council operated with 7 per cent. This raises questions about the credibility of claims as to the relative merits of learn to swim education as a drowning prevention effort when insufficient time allocation is given to water safety and lifesaving education by many learn to swim providers.

Water safety in swim program by operational model

	Every lesson 25% water safety skills/knowledge and 75% swimming stroke skills	Every lesson 50% water safety skills/knowledge and 50% swimming stroke skills
Privately Operated	50%	0%
Management Group Operated	18%	18%
State Government Operated	25%	0%
Not-for-profit Operated	25%	0%
Council Operated	50%	7%

The size of the organisations had a minimal bearing on responses, with all categories meeting the Benchmark by less than 8 per cent of their respondents respectively. There were similar responses by all number of location categories who identified the 25 per cent water safety/75 per cent swimming category as being the most common with an average of 39 per cent.

Estimate of time spent by teachers in a swim program on Benchmark outcomes

Respondents were asked to estimate the time spent by teachers on various elements of the three National Benchmarks. Respondents indicated how many minutes would be focused on each of the listed skills and knowledge over ten lessons (or a total of 5 hours).

The table below shows the responses for the estimated teaching time for each of the Benchmark outcomes for children aged 10-12 years and provides a total insight into the varied allocations of times. We observe that 33 per cent of respondents estimate their teachers spend more than 60 minutes of the 5 hours on the swimming skills element which does indicate that this would seem to be the program element for which the most time is allocated.

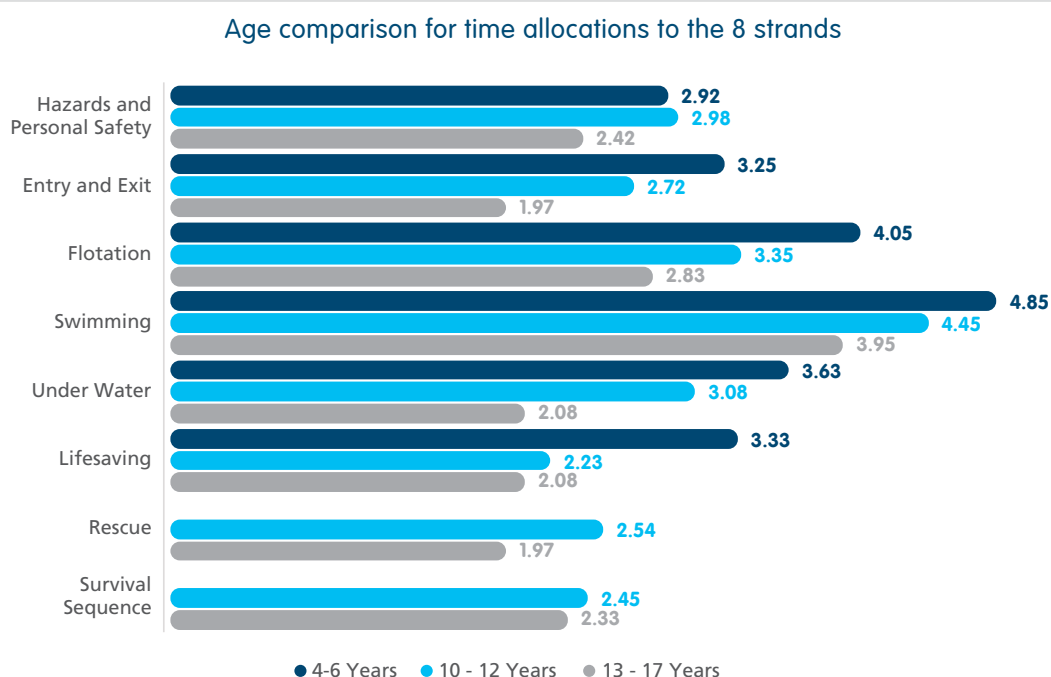
Similarly for the 4-6 years age group and the 13-17 years age group, 40 per cent and 31 per cent respectively spend more than 60 minutes on swimming skills. On the other end of the scale, 28 per cent of respondents indicated they spent no time on the lifesaving skills of responding to an emergency and performing a primary assessment.

A further 36 per cent allocated only 5% of total lesson time for this lifesaving skill. Likewise, rescue skills and personal survival skills were estimated to be allocated 15 minutes or less by 49 per cent and 53 per cent of respondents.

Estimated time spent over 5 hours on Benchmark outcomes for children aged 10-12 years

	0 minutes	15 minutes or less	30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes	More than 60 minutes
Understand and respect safety rules for a range of aquatic environments	3%	38%	40%	8%	5%	8%
Enter and exit the water for a range of environments	5%	39%	41%	10%	5%	0%
Float, scull or tread water for 2 minutes and signal for help	3%	25%	33%	20%	15%	5%
Swim continuously for 50 metres	3%	13%	13%	15%	25%	33%
Surface dive, swim underwater and search to recover an object in deep water	8%	25%	38%	18%	8%	5%
Respond to an emergency and perform a primary assessment	28%	36%	26%	5%	5%	0%
Rescue a person using a non-swimming rescue technique with non-rigid aids	13%	49%	18%	13%	8%	0%
Perform a survival sequence wearing light clothing	13%	53%	18%	13%	5%	0%

The swimming strand of the Framework is consistently the main activity within all age categories that the most swim teaching time is allocated. This is reaffirmed within the collective reporting of all age group time allocation for all 3 age groups, as shown in the following graph.



When the data is represented in alignment with the 8 strands, the responses highlight a diminishing commitment to the delivery of the water safety strands as children grow older, with 38 per cent to 44 per cent of respondents not allocating any time to the underwater, lifesaving and rescue strands for their 14- to 17-year-olds:

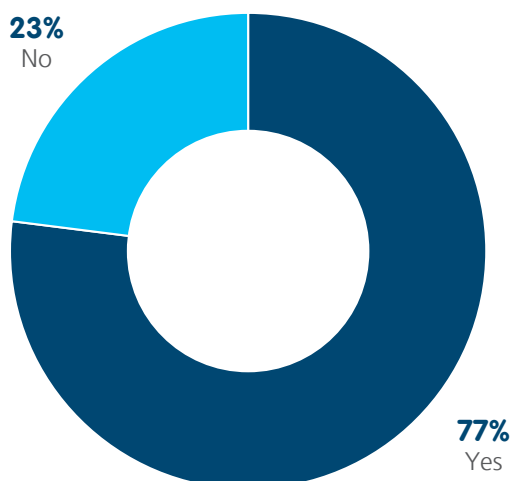
	% of respondents who spend no time on the activity listed (4 - 6 year olds)		% of respondents who spend no time on the activity listed (10-12 year olds)		% of respondents who spend no time on the activity listed (14-17 year olds)	
Hazards and Personal Safety	Identify rules for safe behavior at aquatic environments at or near the home	0%	Understand and respect safety rules for a range of aquatic environments	2%	Understand behaviours that affect personal safety in aquatic environments and activities	22%
Entry and Exit	Enter and exit shallow water unassisted	0%	Enter and exit the water for a range of environments	5%	Assist others to exit deep water using bystanders	33%
Flotation	Float and recover to a standing or secure position	0%	Float, scull or tread water for 2 minutes and signal for help	2%	Float, scull or tread water for 5 minutes and signal for help	20%
Swimming	Move continuously for 5 metres	0%	Swim continuously for 50 metres	2%	Swim continuously for 400 metres	15%
Under Water	Submerge the body and move through an obstacle	5%	Surface dive, swim underwater and search to recover an object in deep water	7%	Search in a deep water environment and recover a person	41%
Lifesaving	Not Asked		Respond to an emergency and perform a primary assessment	28%	Respond to an emergency and provide first aid	38%
Rescue	Not included in curriculum		Rescue a person using a non-swimming rescue technique with non-rigid aids	13%	Rescue an unconscious person in deep water	44%
Survival Sequence	Perform a survival sequence to simulate an accidental entry	2%	Perform a survival sequence wearing light clothing	12%	Perform a survival sequence wearing heavy clothing	26%



FRAMEWORK AND BENCHMARKS AWARENESS, IMPLEMENTATION & PROMOTION

Increasing awareness and implementation of the Framework and Benchmarks is essential to ensuring that children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum whereby their achievement can be measured and tracked regardless of the program delivery system.

Awareness of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and the three National Benchmarks



The extent of the awareness did vary based on the nature of the operations, with private operators having the lowest awareness at 42 per cent, which was markedly lower than the 4 other types of operations.

The size of the organisation did not correlate with greater or lesser awareness, noting that the highest awareness was to be found in those organisations that had 2 to 5 sites, followed by greater than 20 locations, which was relatively similar to single locations.

Note: Those respondents that had no awareness of the Framework and Benchmarks were not required to answer further questions relating to this topic area.

How respondents have become informed of the Framework and Benchmarks

Private operators have a significantly lower awareness of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework

The Royal Life Saving Society - Australia website, at 81 per cent was the highest method by which respondents had become aware of the Framework and Benchmarks, followed by a work or industry colleague and at a conference or webinar presentation:

Mapping of their program to the Framework and Benchmarks

26 per cent of respondents had mapped their program to both the Framework and the Benchmarks.

The privately owned and operated centres and the not-for-profit programs had the lowest levels of current mapping to the Framework, the Benchmarks or for both, with combined totals of 33 per cent and 25 per cent respectively, in contrast to Council operated and management groups that had 72 per cent and 63 per cent respectively.

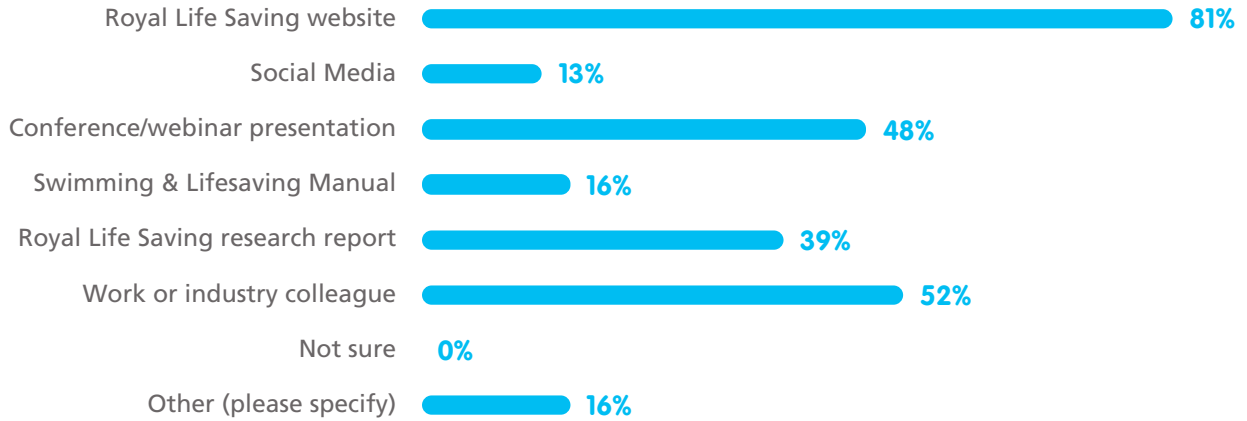
Only 25 per cent of not-for-profit organisations, and 33 per cent of privately operated centres map their program to the Framework, the Benchmarks or both.

69 per cent of organisations that delivered the Swim and Survive program were either mapping their program to the framework, or the benchmarks, or to both, despite the Swim and Survive program being fully mapped to the Framework and Benchmarks, and therefore the response should have been 100 per cent. This outcome would seem to suggest that Swim and Survive centres need to be better educated on the Swim and Survive program and its mapping to the Framework and Benchmarks and more nationally consistent communications methods developed for these delivery partners.

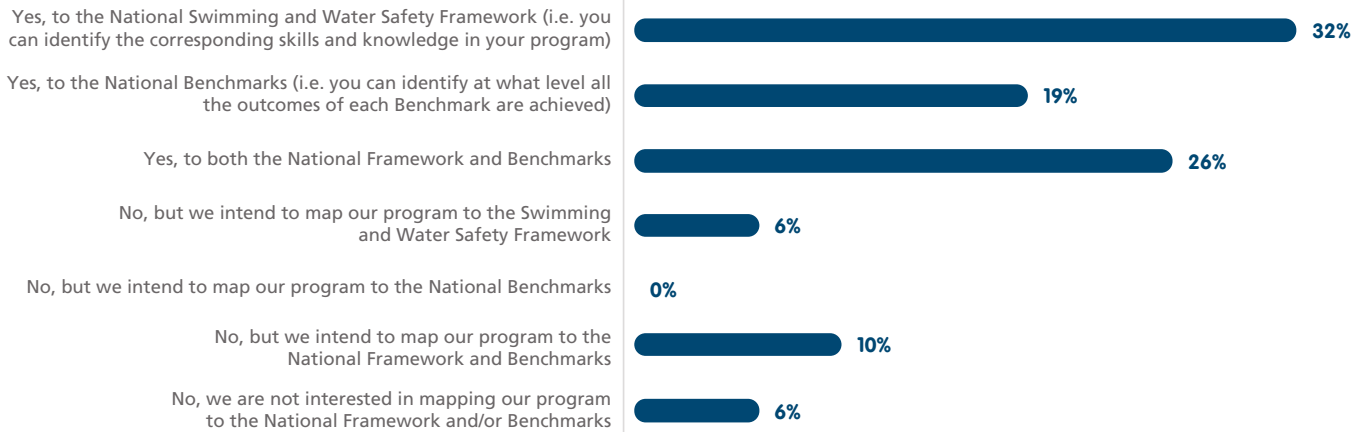
In contrast 39 per cent of those who had developed their own curriculum indicated positively they had mapped to the Framework or Benchmarks or both.

Swim and Survive partners need to be better educated on the existing alignment of the Swim and Survive program with the Framework and Benchmarks.

How respondents have become informed of the Framework and Benchmarks



Mapping of their program to the Framework and Benchmarks



Mapping of program to the Framework and Benchmarks by operational model

	Yes, to the Framework	Yes, to the National Benchmarks	Yes, to both
Privately Operated	17%	8%	8%
Management Group Operated	36%	0%	27%
State Government Operated	0%	25%	25%
Not-for-profit Operated	0%	0	25%
Council Operated	29%	29%	14%

	No, but we intend to map to Framework	No, but we intend to map to both	No, we are not interested	No response
Privately Operated	8%	0%	0%	58%
Management Group Operated	0%	0%	9%	27%
State Government Operated	0%	25%	0%	25%
Not-for-profit Operated	0%	25%	25%	25%
Council Operated	7%	7%	0%	14%

Reasons for disinterest in mapping program to the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks

Whilst only 6 respondents completed this question, the explanations does provide some useful insights into why mapping of programs is not occurring. These reasons included:

- Do not want to make changes to our program (2)
- No time
- We do in fact wish to
- We try, but not successfully.

Assessment of students against the National Benchmarks

Whilst 50 per cent of respondents to this specific question answered that they did assess their students against the Benchmarks, it might be assumed those that who selected 'unsure' or did not choose to answer the question do not assess against the Benchmarks. Therefore, the total percentage who definitively assess against the Benchmarks is actually only 15 per cent. Also of note, is respondents did not assess against all three Benchmarks.

Promotion of the Framework and Benchmarks

Of those who did promote the Framework and Benchmarks, promotion to staff was the most utilised approach (40 per cent), followed by the training of staff on the Framework and Benchmarks (23 per cent).

Only 33 per cent of respondents have provided education or training to staff or patrons about the Framework or Benchmarks, highlighting the need for an industry-wide campaign.

Use of available resources

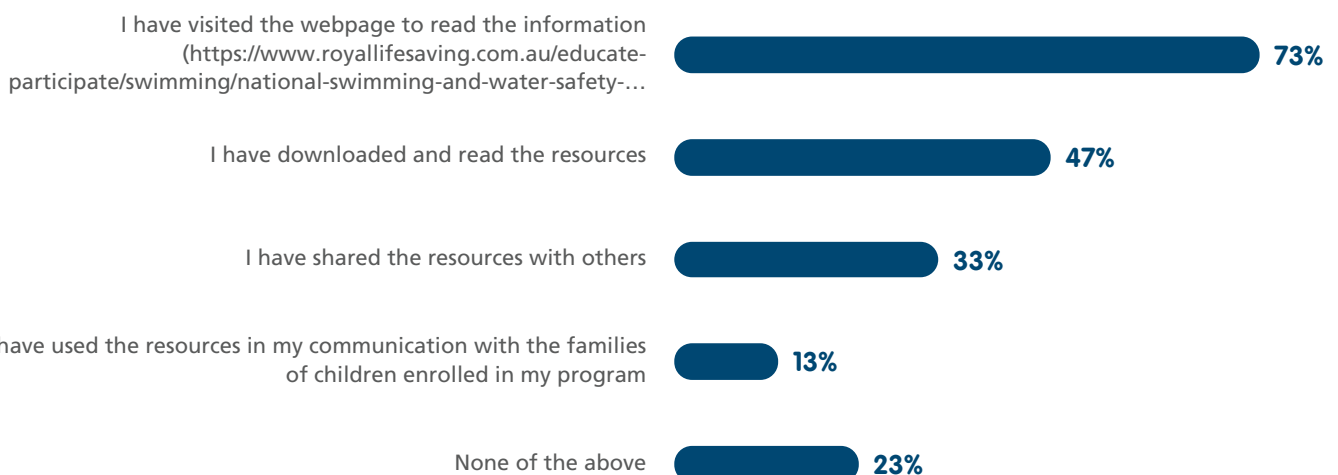
A number of resources are freely available for swim lesson providers to download from the website and utilise to support the awareness, implementation and promotion of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks.

Of the range of ways in which the resources can be utilised, the visiting of the Royal Life Saving national website was the most common (73 per cent), followed by the downloading of resources (47 per cent). As it is important for parents to be aware of what their children are learning in their swimming and water safety lessons, and have an understanding of the milestones and benchmarks their children should be achieving at set ages, it is surprising that only 13 per cent used the resources to communicate to parents and a further 23 per cent did not use the resources.

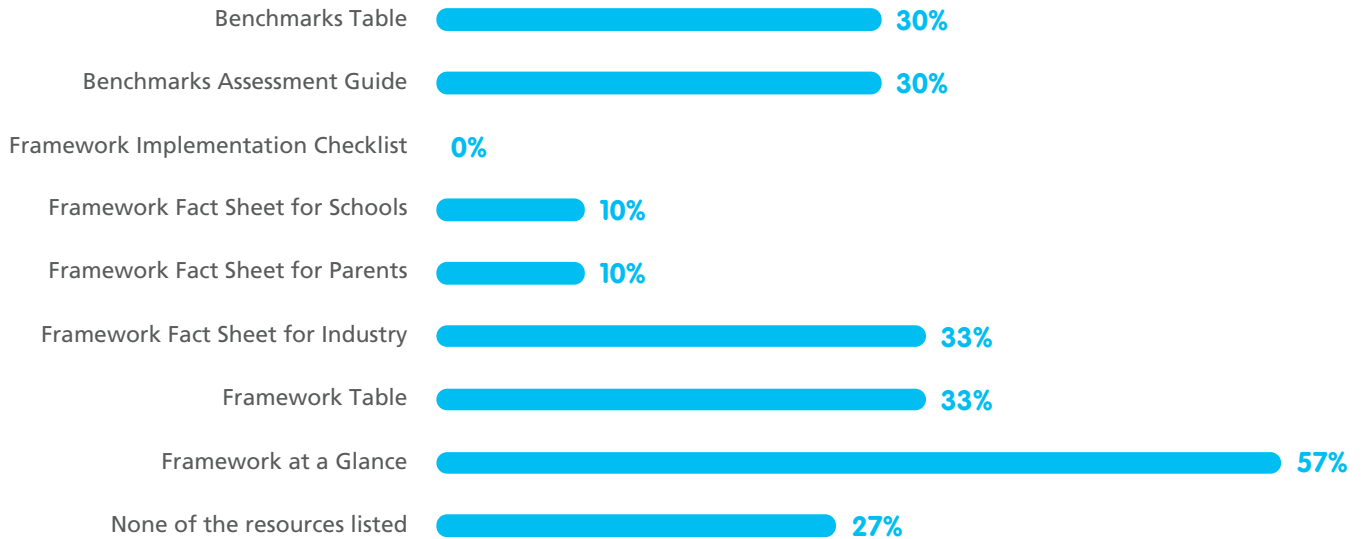
The following graph details the degree of use of the resources available, highlighting the "Framework at a glance" as the most used resource, whereas 27 per cent of respondents did not use any of the resources. It is interesting to note that the "Framework Implementation Checklist" has not been utilised by any of the respondents, despite the low level of awareness and mapping of the Framework as evidenced within the survey results.

The national promotion of this resource and the value that it can provide would therefore seem warranted. Aside from the implementation checklist, the other resources that are specifically focused for swim lesson providers such as the fact sheet for industry and benchmarks assessment guide are used by around a third of respondents. The low use of the other fact sheets for parents and industry corresponds to the above finding that the resources are not used highly in communication to families of children enrolled.

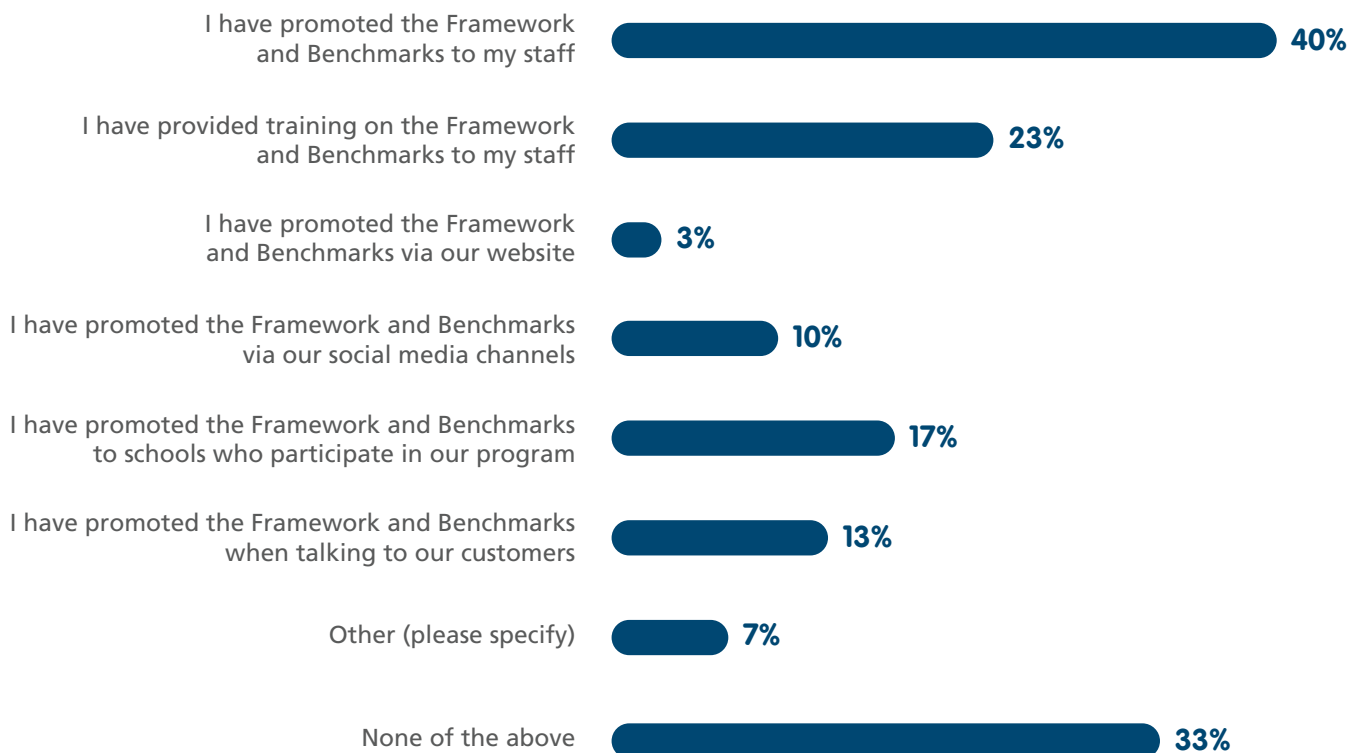
Use of available resources



Resources used by respondents



Promotion of the Framework and Benchmarks



KEY FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Respondents to the survey were invited to participate in a focus group discussion aimed to explore further their awareness, understanding and implementation of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks and discuss relating challenges and opportunities. Several key themes were evident many of which further supported the findings from the survey.

Impact of Covid-19 on implementation and promotion

The implementation and promotion of the Framework and Benchmarks have been put on the backburner as swim schools' priorities post Covid-19 have focused on staff recruitment, rapid onboarding and managing increasing waitlists upon re-opening facilities.

Limited staff and time resources have impacted on the teaching quality and have resulted in pushing children through programs to 'catch-up' causing low level skills post-Covid. Swim lesson providers report that together with the backlog of children who are behind in their swimming skills, there has been a significant drop in students aged 9+, which impacts children's ability to achieve the Benchmark for 12 years.

Lack of awareness and understanding

From the discussion, the lack of awareness and the level of understanding were main factors of why the Framework and Benchmarks were not implemented or promoted. Comments that 'many teachers have never heard of the Framework', 'they did not understand the competencies that should be obtained at certain ages', 'managers were aware but their teachers were not' and 'they were not aware that programs that aligned to the Framework and delivered personal aquatic survival skills could be offered as GST-exempt' were examples of this issue.

Discussion also reinforced there is a low level of understanding of Swim and Survive alignment to the Framework and Benchmarks. Participants continually reiterated that the quality of the resources available are excellent, but the real issue is the awareness and utilisation of the resources.

Challenge to deliver all the skills and knowledge

Participants indicated there was a challenge to teach the range of skills and knowledge within the Framework due to lack of teacher confidence and competence, availability of equipment and lesson time allocated for more complex competencies. Achievement of Benchmarks may be impacted by local circumstances, access to pool and program duration.

Even across programs delivered by the same provider, it was reported that there are major variances in what they can achieve as a result of the varying levels of resources available to commit to swimming and water safety and the facilities available. The lifesaving and rescue strands of the Framework were recognised as areas where teaching ability and confidence was lacking, and 30-minute lessons provided a challenge to achieve all elements of the competencies.

CONCLUSION

Ability to assess against the Benchmarks

Similarly with the challenges of teaching all the competencies within the Framework, participants indicated that evaluating children's competencies against the Benchmarks is unlikely due to limited time, teacher skillsets and the expectations of parents to maximise lesson time on teaching their children. Participants also noted that it was difficult to assess children of secondary school age due to the participation drop-out and those continuing in lessons were more likely engaged in competitive swimming.

A challenge that all shared was the ability to enter the achievement of competencies into their software systems, as the systems had limitations in terms of being able to enter such data. It was suggested that schools are in the best position to measure the competencies and benchmarks, and such assessments would provide a more accurate oversight not only of children within a school but enable an extrapolation of the results to gain insights into regional and state achievement of Benchmarks.

Future opportunities

Collectively the participants valued the National Framework and Benchmarks and recognised the key opportunities lie in actively promoting the Framework and Benchmarks to both teachers and parents to increase understanding of children's attainment of competencies, to encourage regular and continuous participation and to deliver lessons that provide opportunity for children to achieve the Benchmarks.

Communications to community and parents need to easily and quickly digested in formats that can be shared. Given the impact on participation and the low levels of swimming and water safety competencies of children due to Covid-19, it is an important time to advocate to parents to enrol their children to enable them to achieve the National Benchmarks.

Respondents to this survey reiterated the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmark resources are valuable and of high quality. However, not all swim school providers are aware of the resources or the importance of aligning their swim teaching curriculum to the Framework and Benchmarks.

A national campaign to promote these resources available for swim schools could support the recommendations emerging from the valuable feedback provided by survey respondents.

The swim school industry is still recovering and re-skilling swim instructors following the COVID-19 lockdowns, while also juggling the reality of children's missed lessons and children who are behind in their swimming skills. The National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks provide a strategic opportunity to ensure all children are receiving high quality swimming instruction. Unfortunately, many swim schools shared they are just trying to keep up with the backlog of children on waiting lists without the swim instructors needed to fill the gaps.

The Swim and Survive program is aligned with the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework and Benchmarks, providing a readily available and high quality curriculum for swim school providers who may like to align their teaching to include both swimming stroke and water safety instruction.

Improved software system capacity for swim schools to be able to enter students' achievements against the benchmarks will enhance our future data collection capabilities. Being able to track and measure children's achievements of the National Swimming and Water Safety Benchmarks is an important advocacy tool to ensure funding is being allocated to the age groups and communities who are missing out.



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