



Multicultural Community Water Safety Program

Saving lives, removing barriers
and building belonging.



PROGRAM SUMMARY





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A national, evidence-informed initiative to reduce drowning risk, remove barriers to swimming and water safety education, and build belonging for refugees, recently arrived migrants and broader multicultural communities.

Funded by the Australian Government and led by Royal Life Saving Australia.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The WE SWIM Multicultural Community Water Safety Program is a national, evidence-informed initiative to reduce drowning risk, remove barriers to swimming and water safety education, and build belonging for refugees, recently arrived migrants and broader multicultural communities.

WE SWIM: Multicultural Community Water Safety Program is funded by the Australian Government and administered by Royal Life Saving. Royal Life Saving will bring together national coordination, community partnerships, and rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) into a single, coherent program. It is built around a commitment to saving lives, removing barriers, and building belonging.

All activities activate one or more of the four WE SWIM pillars; WE CONNECT, WE WELCOME, WE PROMOTE and WE LEARN, so that trust-building, cultural safety, communication and practical skill development are reinforced.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Multicultural communities experience higher drowning risk because of complex and layered vulnerabilities. These include lower swimming and water safety skills, limited familiarity with local hazards, and financial, language, cultural and access barriers.

These are most pronounced for refugees and recently arrived migrants during settlement and the decade after arrival and can persist across generations if unaddressed.

Multicultural youth and families can also feel unsafe, unwelcome or disconnected from local pools and beaches, aquatic recreation and employment opportunities, thereby weakening both safety and social cohesion.

SOLUTION

Royal Life Saving is providing national coordination and tiered place-based partnerships, community programs and pathfinding projects that co-design culturally responsive activity. This activity spans four pillars - WE CONNECT, WE WELCOME, WE PROMOTE and WE LEARN.

As a result, multicultural communities will gain safer access to aquatic environments, stronger swimming and water safety capability, more trusted information and experience more welcoming venues.

Over time, this will reduce drowning risk, remove barriers and build belonging for refugees, recently arrived migrants and broader multicultural communities.

The Program prioritises:

- **Removing barriers** to accessing lessons, programs, recreation and employment faced by multicultural communities.
- **Boosting community resilience** by facilitating subsidised, culturally safe swimming and water safety education.
- **Enhancing social cohesion** by forging new links between multicultural communities and their local aquatic facilities, swim schools, and swimming and surf lifesaving clubs.
- **Providing national coordination** focused on generating momentum and co-investment, raising water safety awareness, and building networks across partners to maximise shared learning and success.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Program's objectives are framed around safety, access, equity, cohesion and opportunity. They are deliberately practical so they can guide decisions about funding, partnerships and delivery.

Over the life of the Program, WE SWIM will:

- Reduce drowning risk for refugees, recently arrived migrants, multicultural communities and international students by improving swimming and water safety skills, hazard awareness and safe behaviours around water.
- Increase access and equity in swimming and water safety education by removing financial, cultural, language, gender and geographic barriers to participation in priority areas.
- Strengthen social cohesion by creating new and deeper connections between multicultural communities and local aquatic centres, swim schools, clubs and councils.
- Grow a more diverse aquatic workforce by creating pathways into swimming instruction, lifeguarding and community water safety leadership for people from multicultural backgrounds.
- Build sustainable local capability so councils, aquatic providers and community organisations can continue culturally responsive water safety programs beyond the funding period.

OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

Progress against these objectives is tracked through four linked outcome domains. These are interpreted alongside Royal Life Saving's community prioritisation tool, so results are read in the context of migrant population profiles, settlement patterns and drowning risk — not raw participation numbers alone.

REACH AND PARTICIPATION

- Number and spread of funded partnerships by tier, geography, priority cohort(s), and cultural and language groups.
- Participant numbers by age, gender, cultural and linguistic background, and settlement stage.
- Retention and completion rates for lesson-based and program-based activities.

SKILLS AND SAFETY OUTCOMES

- Participants achieving agreed swimming and water safety benchmarks (for example, 25–50m swim, floating).
- Reported improvements in confidence, hazard awareness and supervision behaviours among participants and caregivers.

SOCIAL COHESION AND ACCESS OUTCOMES

- New or strengthened links between multicultural communities and pools, clubs, councils and other local services.
- Perceived cultural safety and welcome in aquatic settings, captured through feedback from participants and community partners.
- Co-investment and in-kind support secured from local partners, indicating shared ownership and sustainability.

WORKFORCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

- Multicultural ambassadors, instructors, lifeguards, trainees and student leaders recruited, trained and, where relevant, employed.
- Evidence that water safety has been embedded into settlement services, local water safety plans, university programs or employer practices.

THE FOUR WE SWIM PILLARS

Every funded activity, at every tier, activates one or more of:



WE CONNECT

Build and strengthen links between multicultural communities and local aquatic facilities, swim schools, swimming and lifesaving clubs, and councils.



WE WELCOME

Improve cultural safety, create welcoming aquatic environments, expand workforce and leadership pathways for people from multicultural backgrounds.



WE PROMOTE

Deliver targeted, multilingual water safety messages through trusted voices and channels.



WE LEARN

Remove barriers to participation in swimming and water safety education and build skills aligned to agreed benchmarks.

BENEFICIARIES

The Program focuses on four beneficiary groups, reflecting the layered and evolving nature of drowning risk across the settlement journey:

- Refugees engaged in humanitarian and settlement support programs, often with low water safety awareness, limited swimming skills and limited connection to local aquatic centres and swim schools.
- Recently arrived migrants (less than 10 years in Australia on non-humanitarian visas), who may face language, financial and cultural barriers to learning swimming and water safety skills.
- Multicultural communities who have been in Australia longer term but still experience unequal outcomes because of access and equity barriers around water safety and aquatic participation.
- International students (where appropriate), who may have high exposure to aquatic environments but limited skills, local hazard awareness and links to safe aquatic recreation.

PRIORITY LIFE STAGES

Within these beneficiary groups, the Program gives particular emphasis to:

- School-aged children, especially those in humanitarian settlement programs or from recently arrived migrant families.
- Young people aged 13–24, who are more likely to engage in independent aquatic recreation and to be exposed to higher-risk activities.

With a secondary emphasis on:

- Multicultural adults and caregivers, whose decisions about participation, supervision and use of local aquatic facilities strongly shape family safety and inclusion.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

Delivery is shaped around priority cultural groups, life stages and places where drowning risk, settlement pressures and access barriers are most pronounced. This spans refugee-background communities (including Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, South Sudanese, Congolese, Somali, Eritrean, Sudanese, Myanmar Rohingya and Bhutanese communities), recently arrived migrant communities (including South and Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern and Pacific Island communities), and broader multicultural communities living in outer-metropolitan growth corridors and regional settlement hubs with high overseas-born populations and identified drowning risk.

These communities are not concentrated in one type of place. Royal Life Saving recognises and responds to the different settlement patterns, infrastructure, service access and water-hazard exposures across outer-metropolitan growth areas, established suburban communities and regional hubs.

HOW THE PROGRAM IS DELIVERED

Royal Life Saving funds a set of WE SWIM Multicultural Community Water Safety Partnerships, ranging from multi-partner, place-based collaborations to more targeted, partner-specific activity, all co-designed with multicultural communities:

- **WE SWIM Place-Based Partnerships** - multi-LGA or regional partnerships that shift systems at scale and build local capability that outlasts the funding period.
- **WE SWIM Community Programs** - focused, local partnerships that address a specific barrier, cohort or community, and build pathways into sustained participation.
- **WE SWIM Pathfinder Programs** - targeted initiatives, including refugee settlement pilots, community ambassadors, emerging leader scholarships and inclusive facilities work, that test and scale new approaches across the WE SWIM pillars.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

The program is aligned to the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 and its national target to reduce drowning by 50 per cent by 2030, the Commonwealth's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy, and the Multicultural Framework Review: Towards Fairness, and to Royal Life Saving's strategic framework for eliminating drowning, empowering communities, strengthening safety and succeeding together.

GET IN TOUCH

weswim@rlssa.org.au

www.royallifesaving.com.au/weswim



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