

# AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY 2030

Focus Area Update:

**Young males (15-29 years)**

October 2023



## 2023 Young Males Drowning Prevention Workshop

In October 2023, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia organised an Australian Water Safety Council Workshop to advance drowning prevention strategies for Young males (15-29 years), a Key Focus Area of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. Practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and experts from Australia's drowning prevention and men's health sectors assembled at the Essendon Football Club in Melbourne for the one-day event.

The workshop included presentations from experts who work outside water safety, a panel discussion with young males working in a variety of drowning prevention and aquatics roles, a review of statistics and research on young male drowning, assessment of a variety of male-focused drowning prevention campaigns from Australia and New Zealand, and table-top discussions to assess and prioritise the key Australian Water Safety Strategy actions in this

area. The group determined four major priorities required for progress in this Focus Area of the AWSS 2030 (below) and came away with several important learnings relevant for young male drowning prevention efforts (synthesised on next page).



October 2023 AWSS Young Male Drowning Prevention Workshop, Melbourne.

## Major priorities for young male drowning prevention

### Renew focus on high school-based water safety education.

Robust water safety education is required in schools for population-level impact on young males. In addition to swimming and water safety skill attainment, social and cultural norms play an important role in drowning risk for this age group. Comprehensive programs in school settings focused on both skill ascertainment and healthy risk taking and informed decision-making concepts are needed.

### Involve young males in young male drowning prevention efforts.

We need young males to drive action, inform priorities, and guide efforts. Every drowning prevention initiative focused on this population should strive to be led, designed, or at minimum, informed by, young males. One action to improve engagement and empower young males is establishing a young male drowning prevention advisory group.

### Enhance campaign messaging strategies.

Campaigns that promote safer activity around the water should be designed by or in partnership with young males themselves, focused on specific behaviour change, follow health promotion and social marketing principals, and adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Successful messaging to this group involves strengths-based approaches and often leans on the power of peers as a motivator for behaviour.

### Collaborate for collective impact.

Drowning prevention for this complex and multi-faceted group requires diversity of ideas, perspectives, and leadership. To advance action in this space, drowning prevention organisations must partner with each other, and with groups outside of water safety that work with or for young males. One action to enhance collective impact is to integrate drowning prevention into existing men's health initiatives and messages.



This Focus Area Update Brief accompanies the Young males (15-29 years) Focus Area section of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 (pgs. 18-19). Please see the original AWSS 2023 document here: <https://www.watersafety.com.au/australian-water-safety-strategy/>

# Lessons from the 2023 Young Male Drowning Prevention Workshop

## Key takeaways for young male drowning prevention

- “Young males (15-29 years)” is a broad categorisation for this complex population. Segmentation of this group is likely to result in more effective drowning prevention efforts, for example, prioritising young males with a common geography, similar interests and values, or closer age ranges (e.g., 15-19, 20-24, 25-29 years).
- Peers are a driving force of behaviour for this population - young males place high value on their relationships with friends.
- By viewing risk taking as healthy and normal, young males can be supported to make informed decisions and be in control of their behaviours.
- Masculinity is evolving. Emotional connection, mental health, vulnerability, and physical wellness are increasingly associated with what it means to be a healthy young man.
- The digital communication landscape for reaching this population is changing quickly. Generally, is more likely to use Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok more than Facebook or Twitter/X.
- Access and equity factors are critical for young male drowning prevention efforts. The impact and intersection of socio-economic status, geography, ethnicity, and cultural background are related to one’s access to safe places to swim and swimming and water safety education.

## Workshop presentations

**A lived experience: pressures, challenges, and learnings in the AFL environment**

Ivan Maric, Richmond FC

**Men, masculinities and “health” behaviour**

Prof Murray Drummond, Flinders University

**Social marketing: Considerations for engaging for young males**

Prof Kate Westberg, RMIT University

**Lessons from Australia’s men’s health sector**

Glen Poole, Australia Men’s Health Forum

**“Don’t be that guy” – Male focused drowning prevention strategies in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Daniel Gerrard, Water Safety New Zealand

**Fatal drowning and risk taking among young males in Australia**

Dr. Jaz Lawes, SLSA  
William Koon, RLSSA

**Young Male Panel Discussion**

Matt Haanappel, AUSTSWIM  
Declan Gillard-Martin, RLS-SA  
Calden Lyons, Apollo Bay SLSC  
Kai Nielsen, Belgravia Leisure

## Key Questions for Behaviour Change Campaigns focused on Young Males

*Provided by Professor Kate Westberg, RMIT University*

Do we understand the different segments in the young male (15-29) target audience and see things from their perspective?

Are we clear about what specific behaviour(s) we would like the target segment(s) to do?

What gaps exist in the target segment’s knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, & capabilities?

What or who might influence the desired behaviour?

How is the target segment responding to current initiatives?

Are we considering a combination of activities in order to encourage young males to achieve the desired action?

Do the benefits of doing what we would like them to do outweigh the costs or barriers to doing it?

## Key Characteristics of Health Initiatives that Work for Men

*Adapted from the Australian Men’s Health Forum Guide to Male Friendly Services. See more at: [https://www.amhf.org.au/guide\\_to\\_male\\_friendly\\_services](https://www.amhf.org.au/guide_to_male_friendly_services)*

### Promotion

- Target men directly
- Meet men where they are
- Use male-friendly language

### Cultural

- Don’t view men as a problem
- Combine getting help with giving help
- Build social connection between men

### Structural

- Help men help themselves
- Support approaches “by men for men”
- Use male-friendly activities
- Work with men’s strengths

The 2023 Young Males Drowning Prevention Workshop was organized by Royal Life Saving Society - Australia with support from Surf Life Saving Australia and the Australian Government. We thank the Australian Water Safety Council and all those who attended.