



# National Swimming and Water Safety Education Roundtable Summary Report

› Novotel Brisbane Airport, 4th and 5th June 2025



**ROYAL LIFE SAVING**  
AUSTRALIA



Australian Government

> POSITIONING STATEMENT

Bringing people together to **eliminate drowning** and **empower communities** to be safe around water.

> WE BELIEVE

Drowning is preventable.

Being able to swim is a human right.

Having the skills to enjoy the water safely is essential.

Access to safe places to swim contributes to happy, healthy, connected communities.



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AUSTRALIA

## > FOREWORD

Swimming and water safety skills are vital for all Australians. They are fundamental life skills that unlock a lifetime of safe aquatic recreation, physical activity, and wellbeing, and help protect individuals from drowning. Yet despite more than two decades of advocacy, research, and investment, a significant proportion of Australian children do not meet nationally agreed benchmarks for swimming and water safety.

Royal Life Saving Australia's research has consistently shown that more than 40% of primary school children are unable to swim 50 metres and float for two minutes - benchmarks considered essential for 12-year-olds. More recently, we reported this figure has climbed to 48%. Alarming, new evidence indicates that more than 40% of students in Year 10 (typically 16 years of age) cannot achieve even the benchmarks expected of 12-year-olds. One in ten children aged 5–14 years have never attended a swimming lesson, and the average dropout age is 7 - well before national benchmarks are reached. Nearly one-third of schools do not offer any swimming instruction, and one in four no longer hold swimming carnivals\*.

Why does this matter? Because swimming and water safety skills save lives. They underpin broader goals in education, health, and community wellbeing. Falling participation and widening inequities will have generational consequences unless addressed systematically.

The National Swimming and Water Safety Education Roundtable brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to build consensus and momentum for action. Participants included representatives from governments, education and academic sectors, aquatic facility and swim school managers, sporting associations, other peak bodies and community water safety providers.

The Roundtable objectives were to:

- Review approaches to addressing disparities in access to swimming lessons.
- Review the issue and solutions for children who missed out over COVID-19.
- Review existing governmental approaches to school, vacation and subsidy programs.
- Review youth access and the status of lifesaving in high schools.
- Review and strengthen pathways into swimming and aquatic recreation.
- Revisit past symposiums and revise the national plan to address the issue.

Across two days of discussion, the roundtable revisited past strategies, assessed current approaches, brainstormed problem statements and solutions to shape future plans.

**As an outcome, an updated 6-Point Action Plan has been formulated:**

1. Ensure no child or adult misses out.
2. Increase retention beyond age 7.
3. Focus on youth & the covid generation.
4. Boost government funding for swimming and water safety programs.
5. Embed the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework & Benchmarks in all programs.
6. Advocate for pool infrastructure and workforce sustainability.

The 6-Point Action Plan is supported by high-level advocacy of the importance of swimming and water safety skills. Swimming and Water Safety Skills are critical to reducing drowning and ensuring people enjoy the water safely. The United Nations is calling on all nations to include swimming lessons in school curriculum. WHO has declared swimming and water safety skills as a top priority intervention in a draft Global Strategy, and the updated Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 is elevating swimming and water safety skills to a national imperative.

We thank all Roundtable participants, but stress the need for urgent, collaborative and coordinated action. Join us in promoting the Roundtable's 6-Point Action Plan.



**Dr. Justin Scarr**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Royal Life Saving Society – Australia

\* Children's Swimming & Water Safety Skills: Teacher and Parent Perceptions, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia, Sydney, 2025.

## ➤ UPDATED NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR INCREASING SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY EDUCATION FOR ALL

### ENSURE NO CHILD OR ADULT MISSES OUT

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| ➤ Strengthen incentives to enable full participation for communities with vulnerabilities to drowning and otherwise likely to miss out. | ➤ Increase support to boost the reach of community programs targeting those not achieving benchmarks. | ➤ Support research and advocacy aimed at identifying and removing barriers and addressing disparities in access and achievement. |
|---|---|--|

### INCREASE RETENTION BEYOND AGE 7

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| ➤ Promote the importance of kids reaching and exceeding national benchmarks prior to leaving learn to swim programs. | ➤ Improve program delivery, the pathway and customer engagement to make swimming 'fun' for all. | ➤ Develop initiatives and strategies that encourage and support regular and ongoing participation in swimming and water safety programs. |
|--|---|--|

### FOCUS ON YOUTH AND THE COVID GENERATION

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| ➤ Implement urgent catch-up program for the kids (now 10-14 years) who missed out on lessons over during the COVID pandemic. | ➤ Target programs to meet the needs of youth and aim to increase the swimming, water safety and lifesaving skills of secondary school students. | ➤ Promote opportunities and pathways to aquatic sport, recreational activities and employment for older children and youth. |
|--|---|---|

### BOOST GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY PROGRAMS

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| ➤ Ensure program and policy design enables equitable access and supports people missing out. | ➤ Strengthen government policies and funded programs including school, vacation and subsidies for learn to swim. | ➤ Strengthen collaboration and clarity of purpose across government(s), community and industry groups, private learn to swim. |
|--|--|---|

### EMBED THE NATIONAL SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY FRAMEWORK AND BENCHMARKS IN ALL PROGRAMS

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| ➤ Provide opportunities for programs to be mapped and endorsed against the framework | ➤ Develop and implement a national data collection and benchmarking reporting mechanism. | ➤ Coordinate campaigns to boost awareness about the importance of benchmark achievement for all. |
|--|--|--|

### ADVOCATE FOR POOL INFRASTRUCTURE AND WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| ➤ Advocate for pool infrastructure planning and investment, with sufficient support for low-resource councils and communities. | ➤ Strengthen accreditation and professional development systems for instructors and other aquatic workers. | ➤ Develop and maintain national frameworks for workforce development and pool infrastructure provisioning. |
|--|--|--|

## > OPENING SESSION

### PRESENTATION

#### Welcome address, and research insights

Dr. Justin Scarr, CEO, Royal Life Saving Australia

#### Research Insights

- > Drowning trends over a century have decreased dramatically from over 50 deaths per 100,000 population per year to less than 10 deaths per 100,000. This decrease coincides with various initiatives including the introduction of community swimming clubs, establishment of Royal Life Saving Societies, swimming teacher certification, department of education funded school swimming programs, and an increase in public pools.
- > Recent research highlights:
  - 48% of year 6 students cannot swim 50m and tread water for 2 minutes
  - 40% of year 7-10 students cannot achieve the primary school benchmark
  - 7.5 hours in the median time allocated by schools for learn to swim
  - One in ten children aged 5-14 have never attended swim lessons
  - 33% of children stop lessons between 7-9 years and commonly by age 7.

#### Past Symposiums

We've held National Swimming and Water Safety Education Symposiums\*, bringing together stakeholders to discuss the issues and build consensus on solutions, including the development of a 6-point plan:

- > School and vacation based programs
- > National Swimming and Water Safety Framework
- > Benchmarking, tracking and reporting
- > Kids that miss out
- > Address Pool based barriers
- > Swimming and lifesaving beyond primary school

\* National Swimming and Water Safety Education Symposium, Sydney, 19-20 April 2017, 2nd National Swimming and Water Safety Education Symposium, Sydney, 19-20 May 2018, National Swimming and Water Safety Education Reference Group Workshop, Sydney, 24 September 2019, National Aquatics Symposium, Melbourne, 9-10 March 2023

"Complex problems are best solved with others."

#### Achievements against the original 6-Point Plan

- > Heavily influenced revision of swimming and water safety policies in most states and territories including major reform in Victoria, Northern Territory and inclusion of swimming lessons in voucher programs country-wide.
- > New and increased funding for school and vacation swimming and water safety programs.
- > National Swimming and Water Safety Framework revised and launched in 2019.
- > Three National Benchmarks identified at ages 6, 12 and 17 years.
- > Research into children's swimming and water safety skills post-Covid, and more recently from the perspectives of school teachers and parents.
- > Research into health, social and economic value of aquatic industry, and the state of aquatic facility Infrastructure.
- > Report on equal access to public aquatic facilities.
- > Research on aquatic industry workforce and subsequent aquatic workforce framework.

#### Impact of Covid-19

- > Pool closures and extensive lockdowns prevented children from learning to swim.
- > A cohort of children have missed out, with those now aged 10-14 years unlikely to re-engage and catch-up skills.
- > Excessive waitlists, staff shortages and cost of living pressures have amplified the problem.

#### Roundtable plan





## > OPENING SESSION

### PRESENTATION

#### **Drowning in 0-17 year-olds over the past 20-years**

Lauren Miller, Senior Research and Policy Officer, Royal Life Saving Australia

##### **0-4 years**

499 drowning deaths over 20 years

Average 25 deaths per year

42% reported the child could not swim

51% swimming pools (95% private), 16% bathtubs

77% unintentional fall into water

##### **5-9 years**

151 drowning deaths over 20 years

Average 8 deaths per year

53% reported the child could not swim

28% rivers/creaks, 25% swimming pools

34% swimming, 34% unintentional fall

##### **10-14 years**

96 drowning deaths over 20 years

Average 5 deaths per year

8% reported as a good swimmer

36% river/creeks, 19% swimming pools

47% swimming/wading

##### **15-17 years**

108 drowning deaths over 20 years

Average 5 deaths per year

12% reported as a poor swimmer

35% rivers/creeks, 21% beaches

47% swimming/wading, 20% alcohol involved

### **Key takeaways**

- > Drowning has decreased in younger children over time, specifically 0-4 years but there is a lack of change in school-aged children.
- > The lowest rates of drowning are at age 10, but rates increase ten-fold by age 20.
- > Locations change as children get older.
- > Less supervision in older children and more risk-taking.
- > Children missed out or are now showing skill gaps due to Covid-19.
- > Swimming ability data is lacking in some age groups.
- > Continue prevention and safety campaigns with a focus on where children are drowning and how to transfer skills.



# NATIONAL SWIMMING & WATER SAFETY EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE



4-5 JUNE 2025, QLD

CONSIDERING the HEALING POWER of WATER



PRE EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITIONS PLAY A PART

RISK TAKING BEHAVIOUR

SOCIO ECONOMIC DISPARITIES in INCOME MUST BE CONSIDERED

THIS CAN'T BE SOLVED BY one GROUP ALONE

WHY NOW?

THERE ARE HARD & SOFT OUTCOMES of this TYPE of SESSION

BUILDING LAYERS of BETTER

CREATING AN UNDERSTANDING of the PROBLEM

COVID STOPPED THINGS

COVID MEANT that THERE WERE MINIMAL LESSONS & UPTAKE

43 DROWING DEATHS PER YEAR IN AGES 1-17

WHAT ARE the SKILL GAPS?



CONSIDERING NON FATAL DATA

CONSIDERING THOSE BORN OVERSEAS in the OLDER AGES

AS they GROW OLDER they MISSED LESSONS

DIFFERENT AGES SHOW DIFFERENT SUPERVISION



SUPERVISION LEVELS HAVE CHANGED

MOST CASES SHOWED SUPERVISION WAS AN ISSUE

LOCATIONS ARE CHANGING



DATA CAN COME from MEDIA & POLICE REPORTS

SHARED SOLUTIONS

the AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY



6 POINT PLAN



CREATING CHANGE that FLOWS downstream

50% OF KIDS SITTING on the EDGE MEANS IT NEEDS to CHANGE



UNDERSTANDING HOW LESSONS WORK for UNDER 5's



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## ➤ ACKNOWLEDGE THE STRENGTHS AND CELEBRATE THE WINS!

### Objectives

- Acknowledge progress since the first Swimming and Water Safety Symposium in 2017
- Discuss the role of Government and different providers of swimming and water safety
- Establish strengths and perspectives on opportunities for improvements
- Highlight positive impacts and outcomes

### PANEL 1: GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

Lucette King, Sport Policy Advisor, NSW Department of Education  
Jan Sutherland, Manager Sport and Water Safety, SA Department of Education  
Liam Smyth, Manager Swimming and Water Safety Branch,  
WA Department of Education

### PANEL 2: GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

Tim East, Principal, School of Sport Education,  
NT Department of Education  
Garry Day, Manager Curriculum, Teaching and Learning,  
QLD Department of Education  
Geoff Adams, Senior Policy Advisor,  
VIC Department of Education

### PANEL 3: PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

Nick Cox, CEO, Belgravia Leisure  
Todd McHardy, CEO, Bluefit  
Julie Zancanaro, Managing Director, Hills Swimming  
Georgie Nichol, Executive General Manager, AUSTSWIM

### Summary of Insights

- Many speakers reported costs are still high post covid, predominantly transport and pool entry.
- WA Department of Education noted big challenges in regional areas but partnering with others has helped. Despite the challenges wherever there are enrolments, they sent people out to deliver.
- Water Safety has been embedded in the SA Department of Education program for a long time and the key focus is children being effective learners.
- Children not learning to swim means they miss out on aquatic recreation activities like sailing, surfing or kayaking.
- All Northern Territory students in years 1-6 will have access to swimming and water safety lessons. By the time a student is in year 6, they will have the opportunity to meet the competencies of Swim and Survive Level 7 (National Benchmark). There are no additional costs to families. School of Sport Education NT has mapped schools to their nearest pool and providing logistical support.
- The Victorian Department of Education fund school to offset the costs of delivering swimming and water safety programs to students - \$40/\$48 (metro/rural) per government primary student and \$235/\$270 (metro/rural) per government specialist and English language student. All students in government primary, specialist, English language and Catholic primary schools. Outcome is the Victorian Water Safety Certificate (mapped to National Benchmark).
- The Queensland Department of Education provides funding to support schools without onsite pools to deliver water safety education through learn to swim grants.
- Providers indicated the challenges haven't changed dramatically from previous years, but the waitlists have come down.
- Parents need to know what safety means – parent education is free! They are open to learning about water safety.
- Focus on creating consistency and producing lifelong swimmers.
- Infrastructure planning needs to change vision and look further in future to meet the growing and changing needs of communities.



# SESSION 1: ACKNOWLEDGE the STRENGTHS & CELEBRATE the WINS!

## PANEL 1

### GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

LUCETTE KING  
-NSW DEPT OF EDUCATION-  
JAN SUTHERLAND  
-SA DEPT OF EDUCATION-  
LIAM SMYTH  
-WA DEPT OF EDUCATION-

in W.A...

SOME BIG CHANGES  
in the REGIONAL AREAS



WHEREVER ENROLMENTS  
EXIST, WE HAVE LESSONS

WE SENT PEOPLE  
AROUND the STATE  
to DELIVER



in S.A...

our PROGRAM  
IS the OLDEST

IT'S BEEN  
EMBEDDED in  
our PROGRAM  
for A LONG TIME

WATER SAFETY is,  
out & AROUND  
the WATER

IT'S ABOUT CHILDREN  
BEING EFFECTIVE  
LEARNERS

PROGRAM  
AVAILABLE for ALL  
GOV SCHOOLS



CONSIDERING  
DISABILITY CONNECTED  
WITH the WHOLE CLASS  
PROGRAM

COST of LIVING  
CRISIS IS IMPACTING  
IT ALL

in N.S.W...

ROLLING out A  
FUNDING PROGRAM

COSTS POST COVID  
ARE HIGH



TRANSPORT  
COSTS & Pool  
COSTS

RISK AWARENESS  
RAISING

BUSH NIPPERS



KIDS NOT LEARNING  
to SWIM MEANS they  
MISS out on RECREATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES LIKE SAILING or  
KAYAKING.

SURFING  
CONNECTIONS

PREP  
TO YR 6

FEAR vs  
BRAVADO

## PANEL 2

### GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

TIM EAST  
-NT DEPT OF EDUCATION-  
GARRY DAY  
-QLD DEPT OF EDUCATION-  
GEOFF ADAMS  
-VIC DEPT OF EDUCATION-

in N.T...

OUR PROGRAM  
HAS BEEN FLYING  
out the DOOR

MULTIPLE  
DELIVERY  
OPTIONS

IT'S TURNED  
into AN ELECTION  
COMMITMENT



PARENTS DON'T  
PAY ANYTHING for  
this PROGRAM

WORKING WITH MORE  
REMOTE AREAS through  
EXCURSIONS

WE EXCEEDED  
our BENCHMARKS

WE WORK WITH  
PARENTS, PRE-TEACHERS  
to BECOME SWIM  
TEACHERS



in QLD...

EDUCATION  
GRANTS

MULTIPLE  
AREAS of SUPPORT

TRAINING of  
STAFF PROVIDED



WATER  
SAFETY  
EDUCATION

FUNDING for  
SCHOOLS WITHOUT  
POOLS

PARENTS NEED  
to KNOW WHAT  
SAFETY MEANS

the PARENTS  
WANT IT!

THE CHALLENGES  
HAVEN'T CHANGED  
DRAMATICALLY from  
PREVIOUS YEARS



LIFT YOUR  
VISION & Look  
FURTHER



WE HAVE  
A LONG WAY  
to Go!

## PANEL 3

### PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

NICK COX  
-DEGLANVILLE LEISURE-  
TODD McHARDY  
-BLUEFIT-  
JULIE ZANCANARO  
-HILLS SWIMMING-  
GEORGIE NICOL  
-AUSTSWIM-

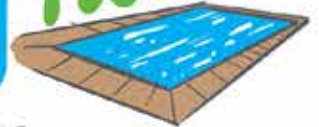


CREATING CONSISTENCY  
& PRODUCING LIFE LONG  
SWIMMERS

WAITLISTS  
HAVE COME DOWN

WORKING  
WITH BIGGER  
POOLS to  
TEACH  
MORE KIDS

50m  
POOLS



STARTING  
EARLY to BE  
ABLE to SURVIVE

INFRASTRUCTURE  
PLANNING

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## ➤ WORKSHOP ACTIVITY 1: SETTING THE SCENE

The first workshop focused on establishing a shared understanding of the key issues that need addressing and the challenges that impact swimming and water safety skill development. The goal was not to solve the problems, but to interrogate, refine and build consensus on their scope, impact and nature.

Groups were formed around whiteboards with a different problem statement. Group discussions focused on the questions - what is the problem, who is affected, and what are the consequences of inaction. Delegates rotated around the whiteboards, adding context and views to each.

### Objectives

- Generate common understanding and consensus on the nature of the problem(s)
- Establish the context of factors that contribute to the problem(s)
- Identify populations/communities/life stages most effected
- Discuss the consequences of not addressing the problem(s)

### Problem Statements

#### EARLY EXIT

How can the swimming and water safety pathway be improved to boost retention beyond age 7.

#### What is the problem?

- Value proposition is not compelling or communicated well enough to mitigate.
- Competing priorities as children get older.
- Year-round burnout vs. intensive programs.
- Bored, unsocial, individual, environment, activity not sport.
- Learn-to-swim is not riding a bike, it's like reading.
- The way learn-to-swim is delivered.
- No understanding of next steps or opportunities.

#### Who is affected?

- Children, often before they have achieved Benchmarks
- Parents and community
- Swim Schools and schools

#### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Low self-confidence and competence.
- Inability to participate in other aquatic activities.
- Risk of drowning later in life.
- Change in the nature of the swim school industry.
- Other activities / sport replaces learn-to-swim.

#### THE COVID GENERATION

How do we catch-up the generation of kids who missed out over COVID-19 and who are now aged 10-14 years?

#### What is the problem?

- A specific cohort of kids aged around 5-9 years at the start of the pandemic missed out on lessons, and subsequent development of knowledge, foundation skills, experience, physical literacy, and endurance. They have lost skills, confidence and interest.
- Difficulty in re-engaging this age cohort as they don't want to be put in 'beginner' classes or with younger children.
- Lack of program that is 'fit for purpose' to catch-and-top-up swimming skills.
- Children found alternative activities outside from aquatics.
- Lack of space for lessons.

#### Who is affected?

- Youth predominately now aged 10-14 years
- Providers and community
- Intergenerational impacts

#### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Increased drowning rates of youth.
- Decrease of physical activity.
- Decrease in participation in all aquatic and associated activities - intergenerational effects / decline in participation.
- Decline of performance outcomes for sport – technique gaps.

## YOUTH PATHWAYS

How can we boost lifesaving in high schools and pathways into employment, aquatic sports and recreation clubs?

### What is the problem?

- No place in the school curriculum in many States/ Territories.
- Perception – not aware of opportunities (pathways, employment, sport, well-being).
- No holistic view to multiple entry points.
- Lack of mentors.
- Perception that swimming is for the elite.

### Who is affected?

- Non or poor swimmers
- Ages 10-16 years predominately

### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Shift the future generations to inactivity.
- If you can't see 'it', you don't do 'it'.
- Decline in skills and confidence.

## BENCHMARKS

Are the National Swimming and Water Safety Benchmarks working as intended? What is the value in tracking achievement rates systematically

### What is the problem?

- No data collection agreement between state industry groups and Royal Life Saving.
- No ability to measure effectiveness, success or funding.
- No provision for disabilities.
- Lack of time, resources and consistency between programs.
- Language of benchmarks differs in education (learning standards).

### Who is affected?

- Children and parents – no understanding of achievement of skills
- Education – return of investment
- Industry

### What are the consequences of inaction?

- No identification of gaps in the program or system.
- Limits ability to understand connection to reducing drowning prevention.
- Lack of relevance of benchmarks if not understood or promoted.

## DISPARITIES IN ACCESS

What can we do to better reach communities who are under represented and lower the barriers to access?

### What is the problem?

- Lack of equity of access across communities.
- One size fits all approach isn't working.
- Need inclusion not exclusion or separation (disabilities).
- Affordability for lessons – not a priority when finding a job, feeding and housing family.
- High costs and limited funding.

### Who is affected?

- Children from various disadvantaged communities
- Migrants and refugees
- Those with disabilities
- Those who may not see it as a priority
- Those we don't know about or we are unable to reach

### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Increased drowning incidents.
- Intergenerational problems compounding.
- Cultural shift from being for everyone to those that can afford it.



## GOVERNMENT FUNDED PROGRAMS

What can we do to strengthen government funded programs? Are the programs reaching the right people and focusing on the right skills?

### What is the problem?

- Messaging of the issue and positive benefits of action – social, economic and health.
- Inflexibility of program design with limited engagement with end users – “one size fits all” and equity of access.
- Continuous shifting of goals and programs/messages.
- Competing priorities and profile of what we do – sport and education.
- Connected problems with workforce, infrastructure, capability.
- Barriers to access with digital vouchers.
- Program design and inconsistent benchmarks do not always match intent.
- Short term vision.

### Who is affected?

- The end user / participants, particularly vulnerable populations
- Children that are missing out

### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Programs don't meet needs or get cut.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

How do we address large gaps in infrastructure?

### What is the problem?

- Infrastructure is politicised – vote gathering, who's responsible?
- Capital investment vs. operational delivery.
- Lack of wider plan – broader structural/systems issue.
- Population increases, yet facilities not kept pace.
- Lack of learning from the 'fails' – design flaws and issues.
- No identification of who to go to, to get advice.

### Who is affected?

- Rate payers
- Young people
- Communities
- Future councils and readiness to make decisions

### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Wastage in dollars and lost potential.
- Lack of expertise and experience in making decisions and having the right people in the conversation.
- Social and health impacts for the communities.
- Building facilities that don't meet the community need or purpose.

## WORKFORCE

How can we strengthen swim teachers licensing / accreditation / professional development?

### What is the problem?

- Complex and multilayered so needs a range of solutions.
- Regional and remote capacity is very limited.
- Delivery model is not always contemporary or agile (limited RPL and RCC)
- Loss of expertise with exodus of staff post Covid-19, causing shortages.
- Balancing quality vs. quantity and maintaining retention.
- Size of workforce does not meet the demand.
- Upfront training costs, unpaid expectation (shadow hours), few opportunities for career progression and poor visibility of pathways.
- Over-casualised workforce and no clear direction to centralise employment or career development opportunities.

### Who is affected?

- Providers are over-promising and under delivering (not having sufficient staff so need to cancel programs).
- Families and communities particularly regional/ remote and vulnerable groups.
- Schools experience prohibitive costs – divestment out of other education priorities or programs.

### What are the consequences of inaction?

- Continued supply vs. demand issues
- Further loss of expertise, passion and skills
- Other career occupations become more attractive with a higher value proposition
- Access becomes more prohibitive.



## SESSION 2:

# SETTING the SCENE

## YOUTH PATHWAYS



## DISPARITIES in ACCESS



## BENCHMARKS



## THE COVID GENERATION



## INFRASTRUCTURE



## GOVERNMENT FUNDED PROGRAMS



## EARLY EXIT



## WORKFORCE



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## ➤ REDUCING PARTICIPATION DROP-OFF AND BOOSTING SKILLS & RETENTION FOR YOUTH

### Objectives

- Understand the reasons why children commonly leave lessons before age 7
- Identify strategies that can improve retention, and / or strategies to reach older children (>9 years)
- What is needed to enable children to achieve National Swimming and Water Safety Benchmarks
- Identify approaches to improve pathways and youth involvement

### PANEL 1: PARTICIPATION CLIFF

Natasha Hudoba, Head of Community and Aquatic Programs,  
Surf Life Saving South Australia

Dave DuBois, Head of Curriculum, Carlile Swimming

Matthew Simpson, National Participation Manager, Swimming Australia

### PANEL 2: BOOST YOUTH RETENTION AND SKILLS

Alexandra Ash, CEO, the Y Australia

Peter Leaversuch, CEO, Royal Life Saving WA

Adam Weir, CEO, Surf Life Saving Australia

### Summary of Insights

- Post learn to swim – onset of teen years is where we see a sharp decline in participation (the cliff),
- 1.1 million 0-14 years swum outside of school\*.
- 15% of all Australians over 15 swum in 2024-25\*.
- A better-connected system working together leads to better outcomes e.g. learn to swim and club relationships.
- Peak participation organised out of school is 5-8 years\*.
- Questions around the role industry plays in problems and solutions.
- Not all children are disengaging from aquatics altogether – they may be participating in other aquatic activities.
- Some children aged >9 years may have already achieved the National Benchmarks and are looking at other ways to be engaged in swimming or aquatic recreation.
- Need to communicate more with parents and use data to help parents understand the value of swim lessons.
- Lack of progression can cause dropout.
- Important to understand the key values of Gen Z (and Gen Alpha) to engage with them effectively. Gen Z want purpose driven careers which can be reflected in many roles in the aquatic industry.
- Ease of access and a simple process is essential for parents to consider enrolling.
- Youth need more 'Fun' and less competitiveness and pressure to perform.
- Successful clubs /programs often have a strategy around the family.
- New ideas aren't needed – we just need to execute the olds ones better!

\* Australian Sports Commission, AUSPLAY, A new picture of how Australians get active, May 2025.



# SESSION 4: REDUCING PARTICIPATION DROP OFF & BOOSTING SKILLS & RETENTION for YOUTH

## PANEL 1

### PARTICIPATION CLIFF

NATASHA HUDOBA  
- SHRE LIFE SAVING SA -  
DAVE DUBOIS  
- EARLE SWIMMING -  
MATTHEW SIMPSON  
- SWIMMING AUSTRALIA -

WE'RE  
DISCONNECTED  
FROM EACH  
OTHER



NOT ALL KIDS  
ARE DISENGAGING  
from AQUATICS ALL  
TOGETHER

CONTINUALLY  
ENGAGED in the  
PROCESS



BEING OK &  
SWIM WITHOUT  
GOGGLES AS  
THIS ISN'T  
COMMON SCENARIOS



BEING AN  
ADVOCATE in the  
LEARN & SWIM  
SPACE



FINDING WAYS  
to KEEP them  
ENGAGED

VALUE  
PROPOSITION  
FOR PARENTS



HOW WE  
USE DATA  
to HELP  
PARENTS

NOT MISSING  
OUT BECAUSE  
of YOUR  
BACKGROUND

COMMUNICATING  
MORE WITH PARENTS



CONSIDERING those  
WHO AREN'T GROWING  
UP in AUSTRALIA

WORKING WITH  
A COMMUNITY LEVEL

## PANEL 2

### BOOST YOUTH RETENTION & SKILLS

ALEXANDRA ASH  
- SH Y AUSTRALIA -  
PETER LEAVERSUCH  
- RYDAL LIFE SAVING SA -  
ADAM WEIR  
- SHRE LIFE SAVING SA -  
NICKY SLOAN  
- CITY VENUE MANAGEMENT -

WE DON'T  
NEED NEW  
IDEAS, WE JUST  
NEED to EXECUTE  
on the OLD ONES



TALKING  
ABOUT YOUTH  
& SPORTS &  
CAREER PATHWAYS

GEN Z  
WANT PURPOSE  
DRIVEN CAREERS

LACK of PROGRESSION  
CAUSES DROP OUT

HOW DO WE EVOLVE  
VOLUNTEERING?

TURNING UP  
to A PURPOSE  
BUILT FACILITY



SUCCESSFUL CLUBS  
HAVE A STRATEGY  
AROUND the FAMILY

SPORTS CAMPS,  
HOW DO WE MAKE  
IT WORK for SWIMMING?

EASE of ACCESS  
IS CRUCIAL for  
PARENTS



COMPETITION = PRESSURE

WE HAVE to COME BACK  
to the **FUN** DAMENTALS

IT'S PART of A  
SAMPLE EXPERIENCE



AS KIDS PROGRESS  
through SHRE LIFE  
SAVING, the NUMBERS  
DROP from 200 to 20



ROYAL LIFE SAVING  
AUSTRALIA

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## ➤ ADDRESSING DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO LESSONS

### Objectives

- Explore the status of underserved groups and people missing out
- Understand the barriers to access to lessons and achievement of skills
- Develop strategies to increase participation and reach (at scale)

### PRESENTATIONS

#### Priority populations drowning snapshot and access to lessons

Stacey Pidgeon, National Manager,  
Research and Policy, RLSSA

#### First Lap Voucher Scheme Evaluation: Focus on priority populations

Dr. Amy Peden, Senior Research Fellow,  
School of Population Health, UNSW

### PANEL 1: INDIGENOUS, MULTICULTURAL AND YOUTH

Markie Richards, Community Program Manager Queensland,  
Kari Organisation

Thereze Miburo, Bi-cultural Water Safety Officer, Aqua English  
Jeni Scott, Program Manager,  
Hurricane Stars Club and Scout Leader

### PANEL 2: REGIONAL, DISABILITIES AND LOW-SOCIO ECONOMIC

Floss Roberts, Executive Director, Royal Life Saving NT  
Antoinette Spear, General Manager, Autism Swim  
Nicole Gallpen, Team Leader – Far North Coast, Benevolent  
Society / Sensations Swim School in Lismore

### Summary of Insights

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are 1.7 times more likely to drown than non-Indigenous peoples.
- Almost 50% reduction in drowning rates over the 10-years (2008-2018).
- 28% are children aged between 0-14 years.
- 5% of all drowning deaths are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 34% of all drowning deaths were people born overseas.
- Two-thirds were thought to be a non-or poor-swimmer.
- Children from multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are less likely to access swim voucher programs.
- Children with disabilities and medical conditions are less likely to access swimming lessons that meet their needs.
- Pockets of funding for community programs but not ongoing or sustainable.
- Barriers to access include cultural and family norms, settlement priorities, fear of water or negative experience, low awareness of opportunities, shame or embarrassment of not being able to swim.
- First Lap Vouchers targeted children aged 3-6 years were predominately used by those already enrolled (10x) and high socio-economic (7x).
- CaLD families had lower rates of voucher creation and redemption than families who spoke English as home.
- Proportion of created vouchers redeemed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children living in regional and remote areas was significantly lower than for all children.
- The vouchers created a benefit-cost ration of approx. \$1.4 for each dollar invested (\$28 million).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to drown in inland waterways.
- Lack of access to safe swimming areas or a pool is an issue, as is transport.
- Important to have a welcoming and positive experience at pools and in lessons to encourage participation. Positive community connections.
- Other barriers include language, lack of information e.g. what to wear, lack of inclusive opportunities alongside mainstream, cost, technology.



# SESSION 5: ADDRESSING DISPARITIES in ACCESS to LESSONS

STACEY PIDGEON

- ROYAL LIFE SAVING AUS -

THINKING ABOUT  
the PEOPLE WHO  
ARE MISSING OUT

A  
SAFE  
SPACE

INCREASE  
PARTICIPATION  
& REACH

COMMUNITY LEADERS  
ARE TAKING ACTION

WE NEED TO  
WORK TOGETHER

PANEL 1

INDIGENOUS,  
MULTICULTURAL &  
YOUTH

MARKIE RICHARDS  
- KARI ORGANISATION -  
THEREZE MIBIRO  
- AQUA ENGLISH -  
JENI SCOTT  
- HURRICANE STARS CLUB  
- SCOUT LEADER -

HAVE A  
CONVERSATION  
WITH US

MOB MAKING  
A SPLASH

the AQUA  
ENGLISH  
PROJECT

NOT HAVING  
A WELCOMING  
EXPERIENCE  
in SWIMMING

TRANSPORT  
IS A BIG ACCESS  
ISSUE



LOW COST &  
FREE SWIMMING  
LESSONS

ASSUMPTION  
IS the KILLER  
of OPPORTUNITIES

GAPS in  
TECHNOLOGY  
KNOWLEDGE  
& UNDERSTANDING

HAVING A  
POOL to ACCESS  
IS AN ISSUE

TRYING to MEET  
the DEMANDS  
of the LESSONS

MAKING  
MEANINGFUL  
RELATIONSHIPS

LADIES SWIMMING  
LESSONS

KNOWING  
WHAT to WEAR  
WHEN SWIMMING

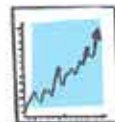
GOOD REDEMPTION  
in ALL LANGUAGE  
GROUPS!

5 PRIORITY  
POPULATIONS

MORE for THOSE  
WHO REALLY NEED IT



THERE'S BEEN  
A POSITIVE RETURN  
on INVESTMENT



FIRST LAP  
VOUCHER



REGISTERED  
PROVIDERS

PARENTS ARE  
VERY AWARE of  
LEARN to SWIM  
BENEFITS



PANEL 2

REGIONAL  
DISABILITIES  
& LOW SOCIO ECONOMIC

FLOSS ROBERTS A.M.  
- ROYAL LIFE SAVING A.T.E. -  
ANTOINETTE SPEAR  
- AUTISM SWIM -  
NICOLE GALLPEN  
- BEHAVIOUR SOCIETY / GENERATION  
SWIM SCHOOL -

WE DO HAVE  
CHALLENGES  
in REGIONAL  
AREAS

Food IS CURRENCY,  
WE HAVE LOTS of  
GREAT COMMUNITY  
CONNECTIONS



LOTS of FAMILIES  
HAVE NEURODIVERGENT  
KIDS they WANT to  
TEACH WATER SAFETY

CHILDREN on  
the AUTISM SPECTRUM  
ARE 160 TIMES MORE  
LIKELY to DROWN

INCLUSION

A PROGRAM  
ALONGSIDE  
MAINSTREAM  
SERVICES that  
CAN JOIN  
MAINSTREAM

PRE-SKILLS  
to DOING AN  
ACTUAL SWIMMING  
LESSON

BEING ABLE  
to HAVE A PLACE  
for ALL that's SAFE



SERVICE  
PROVIDERS for  
KIDS WITH DISABILITIES



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## > WORKSHOP 2: BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

Building on from the first workshop, this workshop focused on developing practical solutions that could help close the gap and make substantial improvements in swimming and water safety outcomes.

Each group focused on one problem statement and firstly revisited the initial discussions on the issues and impacts. Groups brainstormed proposed solutions for their problem statement with the intention of generating at least three solutions and then reported back to the larger group.

### Objectives

- > Understand the challenges
- > Develop solutions for the problem statements
- > Identify outcomes for best policy buys
- > Establish measure for evaluation

### Solutions for Problem Statements

#### EARLY EXIT

How can the swimming and water safety pathway be improved to boost retention beyond age 7.

##### Ideas on solutions

- Make learn to swim engaging and fun (again!) for all ages and abilities.
- Promote lifelong engagement with competence into aquatics and beyond.
- Engage the family to create community.
- Set guidelines on desired outcomes/Benchmarks e.g. from 7-10 years or % of children in programs.
- Analysis on consolidated data.
- Encourage continuation in programs until Benchmarks achieved.
- Reward achievement against Benchmarks.

#### THE COVID GENERATION

How do we catch-up the generation of kids who missed out over COVID-19 and who are now aged 10-14 years?

##### Ideas on solutions

- A federally-funded (buses, entry, instructor, equipment) national "safety net" program (in water mandatory blended with class based water safety) delivered through schools in years 7 and 10.
- Year 7 and 10 students achieve the National Benchmarks (12 & 16 years) preferably in an intensive program ahead of summer (term 4)
- Supported by awareness raising and resources for schools
- Evaluation and data reporting
- Program mapped to framework/benchmarks
- Adaptive/inclusive programming for students who need extra support.

#### YOUTH PATHWAYS

How can we boost lifesaving skills of secondary school students and pathways into employment, aquatic sports and recreation clubs?

##### Ideas on solutions

- Change the perceptions – educate people about the opportunities that exist supported by more research.
- Promote programs through career days, advertising, mentorships – aquatic pathway and lifesaving championing.
- Remove barriers of access such as the expense, competitive nature, ability-based programs rather than peers and family engagement.
- Use youth leaders to promote and engage.

#### BENCHMARKS

Are the National Swimming and Water Safety Benchmarks working as intended? What is the value in tracking achievement rates systematically

##### Ideas on solutions

- Mapping (alignment) of programs to framework and benchmarks – look to other government/ industry frameworks.
- Best practice instructional standards for Swim Teachers – inclusion in training courses.
- Communication and education to community, parents and industry.
- Adaption to adults, access and inclusion to encompass all community members.
- Adopt a data collection plan – Government / Industry.

## DISPARITIES IN ACCESS

What can we do to better reach communities who are under represented and lower the barriers to access?

### Ideas on solutions

- Reallocate government funding to those that really need it and assist with reducing barriers to access.
- Engage those organisations / community groups that are doing this well and learn from them.
- Look at how this can be done at a larger scale.
- Improve understanding of inclusion. Need for inclusion not exclusion or separation.
- Teacher education as there's not just one way of teaching or learning.
- Consultation with community groups to understand barriers and needs.
- Making changes to the way things have always been done.
- Communication channels suitable for the community – some don't have social media or internet.

## GOVERNMENT FUNDED PROGRAMS

What can we do to strengthen government funded programs? Are the programs reaching the right people and focusing on the right skills?

### Ideas on solutions

- Improve initiative (program) policy design ensuring meeting need and equity of access i.e. means testing.
- Strengthen and enhance the connections between all levels of government and between government and industry.
- Understand the broader purposes of government funded programs (linked with policy direction) for better programs and proposals.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

How do we address large gaps in infrastructure?

### Ideas on solutions

- Need for a coordinated approach to design:
  - Input into the learnings/fails as part of continuous improvement
  - Universal design principles
  - Adequate working knowledge and experience in pool operations
  - Balanced evaluation of the WHY, and infrastructure need
  - With what components
  - Colocation – social benefit
- Policy change / input – RLSSA (or other) influence expectations and policy position – vocal about what are the outcomes for social impact, what is it that is being solved?
- Identify industries that have been successful in a coordinated approach or influencing policy or outcomes to learn from their approach.

## WORKFORCE

How can we strengthen swim teachers licensing / accreditation / professional development?

### Ideas on solutions

- Improved pathways:
  - Pathways to entry (shortage)
  - Pathways to career progressions (retention)
- Re-consider the delivery model
  - Including training package
  - Challenge operational delivery to better meet community needs (Cert IV requirement to be a trainer, delivery of teacher course)
  - Clarity of voice/need from employer and employee
- Government advocacy re. Cert IV requirements for training.
- Review of requirements of Swim Teacher registration – make it easier for teachers to gain qualifications.
- Learning from other sectors – fitness award is not fit for purpose
- Quality benchmark we are all prepared to stand behind – 'Good Practice Guidelines'.



## SESSION 6:

# BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

## YOUTH PATHWAYS

1. CHANGE of PERCEPTION
2. PROMOTING PROGRAMS
3. REMOVING BARRIERS of ACCESS

## DISPARITIES in ACCESS

1. REALLOCATED GOVERNMENT FUNDING to THOSE WHO NEED IT
2. INCLUSION
3. VARIETY of APPROACHES

## BENCHMARKS

1. INSTRUCTIONAL
2. LOOK to OTHER GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORKS
3. WHAT'S the STORY & DATA COLLECTION

## THE COVID GENERATION

1. FEDERALLY FUNDED PROGRAM THROUGH SCHOOLS in YEAR 7 & 10, TERM 4 INTENSIVE (NEED to NAVIGATE FURTHER)

## INFRASTRUCTURE

1. BALANCED VALUATION of the WHY
2. WHAT INFLUENCE DO WE HAVE?

## GOVERNMENT FUNDED PROGRAMS

1. IMPROVE INITIATIVE DESIGN
2. STRENGTHEN & ENHANCE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT & INDUSTRY
3. UNDERSTAND BROADER TERMS to DELIVER BETTER

## EARLY EXIT

1. MAKING LEARN to SWIM FUN & ENGAGING COMMUNITY
2. CREATING LIFELONG ENGAGEMENT
3. HOW FAR SHOULD the KIDS GO & WHAT ARE THEIR BENCHMARKS

## WORKFORCE

1. IMPROVING PATHWAYS to ENTRY
2. RECONSIDER DELIVERY MODEL
3. CLARITY of VOICE
4. LEARN from OTHER SECTORS
5. QUALITY BENCHMARK



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› **National Swimming and Water Safety Education Roundtable**  
Novotel Brisbane Airport, 4th and 5th June 2025

## > ATTENDEES

### Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

Name	Role and Organisation
Dr. Justin Scarr	Chief Executive Officer
RJ Houston	General Manager Industry and Capability
Penny Larsen	National Manager Education
Stacey Pidgeon	National Manager Research and Policy
Lauren Miller	Senior Research Officer

### Government Representatives

Name	Role and Organisation
Lucette King	Sport Policy Advisor, NSW Department of Education
James Boyer	Sport and Activity Coordinator, NSW Department of Education
Tim East	Principal, School of Sport Education NT Department of Education
Garry Day	Manager Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, QLD Department of Education
Steph McCallum	Director Strategy and Policy, Sport and Recreation, QLD Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport
Jan Sutherland	Manager Sport and Water Safety, SA Department of Education
Jacqueline Copson	Water Safety Operations Coordinator, SA Department of Education
Liam Smyth	Manager, Swimming and Water Safety Branch, WA Department for Education
Peter Lillywhite	Principal, School of Swimming and Water Safety, WA Department of Education
Geoff Adams	Senior Policy Advisor, VIC Department of Education

### Aquatic Industry Representatives

Name	Role and Organisation
Brad Maunsell	CEO, AUSTSWIM
Georgie Nichol	Executive General Manager, AUSTSWIM
Adam Weir	CEO, Surf Life Saving Australia
Natasha Hudoba	Head of Community and Aquatic Programs, Surf Life Saving South Australia
Matthew Simpson	National Participation Manager, Swimming Australia
Brendan Ward	CEO, Swimming Coaches & Teachers Association
Gary Toner	Executive Officer, Swimming Coaches & Teachers Association
Luke Daly	CEO, Australian Swim Schools Association
Alexandra Ash	CEO, YMCA Australia
Nick Cox	CEO, Belgravia Leisure
Kirk Marks	General Manager, GOswim
Todd McHardy	CEO, Bluefit
Nicky Sloan	COO, City Venue Management
Peter Kennedy	Group Head of Learning & Development, Aquatic Achievers
Dave Du Bois	Head of Curriculum, Carlisle Swimming
Laurie Lawrence	Director, Kids Alive - Do the Five
Emma Lawrence	Operations Manager, Kids Alive - Do the Five
Julie Zancanaro	Managing Director, Hills Swimming
Deny Zancanaro	Managing Director, Hills Swimming

### Community Organisations

Name	Role and Organisation
Sarah Scarce	Director, The Aqua English Project
Thereze Miburo	Bi-cultural Water Safety Officer, The Aqua English Project
Zahra Rahimi	Bi-cultural Water Safety Officer, The Aqua English Project
Markie Richards	Community Program Manager Queensland, Kari Aboriginal Charity Organisation
Jeni Scott	Program Manager, Hurricane Stars
Antoinette Spear	General Manager, Autism Swim
Nicole Gallpen	Team Leader - Far North Coast, Benevolent Society
Georgie Trickett	Founder, Play on Media

## > ATTENDEES

### Royal Life Saving State and Territory Offices

Name	Role and Organisation
Michael Illinsky	CEO, Royal Life Saving NSW
Craig Roberts	General Manager, Royal Life Saving NSW
Renee Amidy	Aquatic Development Manager, Royal Life Saving NSW
Floss Roberts	Executive Director, Royal Life Saving NT
Nikki Thornhill	State Manager, Royal Life Saving QLD
Beverley Hunter	Education Coordinator, Royal Life Saving QLD
Jayne Minear	General Manager, Royal Life Saving SA
Catherine Greaves	CEO, Life Saving Victoria
Peter Leaversuch	CEO, Royal Life Saving WA

### Academia

Name	Role and Organisation
Dr. Amy Peden	Senior Research Fellow, School of Population Health, University of NSW

### Graphic Recorder

Name	Role and Organisation
Jimmy Patch	Creative Director & Founder, Patch Creative

### About Royal Life Saving Australia






Royal Life Saving Society - Australia is a public benevolent institution, established in 1894, and dedicated to bringing people together to eliminate drowning and empower communities to be safe around the water.

As a leading national drowning prevention and water safety organisation, we believe drowning is preventable, being able to swim is a human right, and access to safe places to swim builds healthier, more connected communities.

Our strategic approach focuses on eliminating drowning, empowering communities, strengthening safety, and succeeding together. We use our leadership, research, advocacy and education to foster inclusion, build resilience, and develop lifelong skills, so that every Australian can enjoy the water safely.

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## CONNECT WITH US

-  [RoyaLifeSaving](#)
-  [RoyaLifeSaving](#)
-  [RoyaLifeSaving](#)
-  [RoyaLifeSavingAust](#)
-  [RoyaLifeSaving.com.au](#)



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