

The National Drowning Report

08



Drowning deaths in 2007/2008

There were 261 drowning deaths in Australian waterways between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008. This figure is a decrease of 4 on last year's figure and a decrease of 27 on the 5 year average. The drowning death rate per 100,000 people was 1.23. (Figure 1)

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



Royal Life Saving

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

Methods

Information for the National Drowning Report 2008 is collected by Royal Life Saving Branches and analysed by the Royal Life Saving National Office. Information is collected from State and Territory Coronial Offices, the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and media reports.

Royal Life Saving uses a media monitoring service (both electronic and print all year round) to confirm drowning deaths reported in the media.

All care is taken to ensure that the information is as accurate as possible. However, these figures should be considered interim until the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) releases its 'causes of death' figures for the year 2008. These figures may change depending upon ongoing coronial investigations and findings as 86% of cases are still open. The report contains information on drowning deaths known as at 15 September 2008.

The 5 year average figures are based on information from the NCIS. Information provided does not include suicide, homicide, natural death (such as cardiac arrest), shark and crocodile attack, or hypothermia where known. All information presented is about drowning deaths.

The 5 year average represents the average calculated from the years 2002/03 to 2006/07.

The Challenge: 50% Reduction by 2020

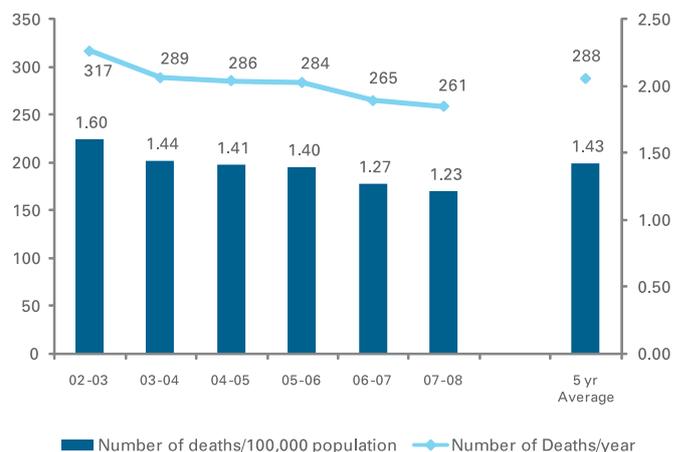
Early in October 2008 the Australian Water Safety Council launched the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011, with the target of a 50% reduction in drowning deaths by 2020. This ambitious undertaking will require high levels of collaboration between water safety agencies, government and the community in order to reduce drowning in Australia.

To achieve the 50% reduction by 2020 the Strategy identifies specific demographics where drowning death rates continue to cause concern including children under 5, people over 55 and men aged 18 to 34 years. Locations such as rural and remote waterways, home pools and surf beaches remain a high priority, as do drowning deaths of indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse people.

Royal Life Saving remains committed to working with other water safety agencies, government and the community through a range of innovative and well researched strategies to reduce drowning.



FIGURE 1. Unintentional Drowning Deaths & Death Rates, Australia 2002/03 to 2007/08, 5 year average



The National Drowning Report 2008

Everyone Can Be a Lifesaver

Location of Drowning Deaths

There have been reductions in the number of drowning deaths against the 5 year average in all locations except in ocean/harbour locations (Figure 2). The most common activities undertaken prior to drowning at ocean/harbour locations were fishing (including fishing from watercraft), using watercraft, swimming or undertaking leisure activities and diving/snorkelling. The largest reductions against the 5 year average were for drowning deaths in lakes/dams/lagoons where drowning was half (51%) the previous average and in bathtubs/spa baths (47%) (Figure 2).

Drowning continues to occur across a diversity of locations reinforcing the need for all people in the community to have a broad set of water safety awareness and lifesaving skills to protect themselves and those in their care from drowning.

Activity undertaken immediately prior to Drowning deaths

Drowning deaths as a result of participation in high risk recreational activities have been identified as a priority in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011, in particular using watercraft, fishing, and scuba diving and snorkelling. The good news is watercraft (by 11%), fishing (by 23%) and diving/snorkelling (by 21%) drowning deaths are all down this year compared with the 5 year average (Figure 3).

Water sports and recreational activities continue to be popular with Australians of all backgrounds. Unfortunately these activities do not come without drowning risk. This year there were increases on the 5 year average in the number of people undertaking swimming / leisure activities (by 12%) and falling into water (by 3%), however for all other activities there was a decrease in the number of deaths compared to the 5 year average.

Drowning deaths by age and gender

In 2007/08 there were 204 (78%) male and 57 (22%) female drowning deaths, making males over three times more likely to drown than females. Drowning deaths are down by 9% on the 5 year average. This reduction should be considered cautiously as a large number of cases are still being investigated by coroners (86%).

There was a decrease in the number of drowning deaths against the 5 year average in all except for the 35-44 years age group. The largest decreases on the 5 year average were in the 65+ years (by 25%), 0-4 years (by 20%) and 55-64 years (by 15%) age groups.

FIGURE 2. Drowning Deaths by Location, Australia 5 Year Average, 2007/08

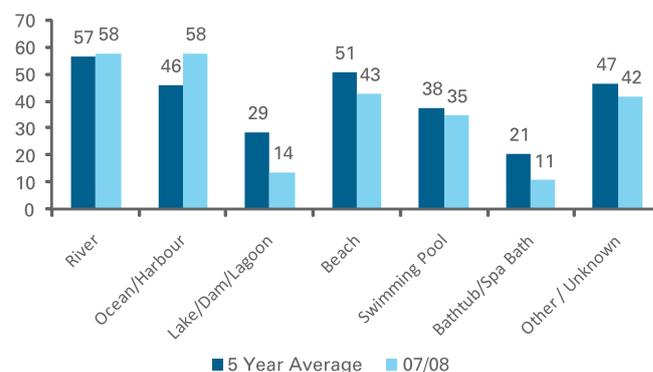
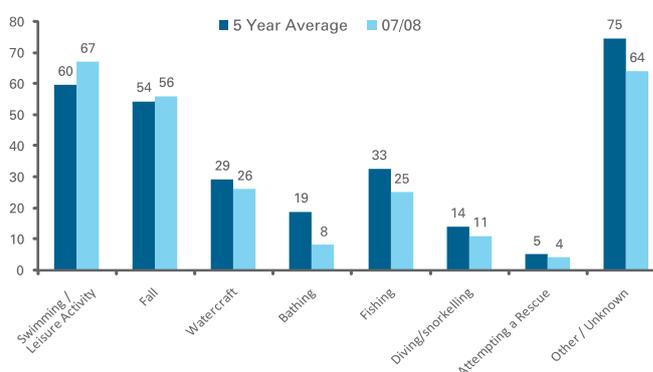
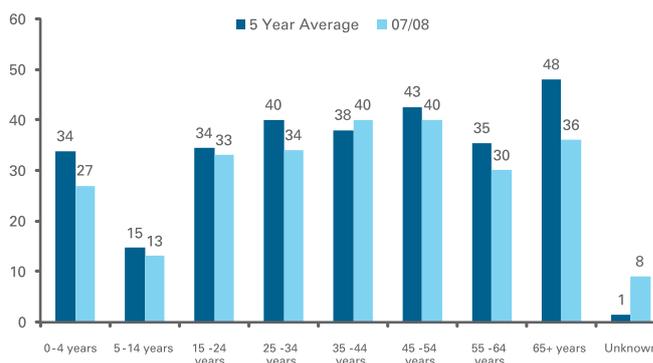


FIGURE 3. Drowning Deaths by Activity, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2007/08



Note: Using the NCIS improves case ascertainment, but due to a number of factors, including privacy and a lack of witnesses to the drowning incident some information may not be available. This is reflected in the large number of other/unknown cases.

FIGURE 4. Drowning Death by Age Group, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2007/08



Swim and Survive

To ensure a 50% reduction in drowning deaths by 2020, water safety and lifesaving education is vital for all school children. Last year there were 13 drowning deaths in children aged 5-14 years. Royal Life Saving believes children can start working towards becoming a lifesaver, through learning water safety and swimming skills at an early age. The Royal Life Saving Swim and Survive program is the perfect start to a lifetime of safe participation in recreational activities in and around water.



Children: 0-4 years

Drowning deaths in young children

Children under 5 years of age have been identified as a high priority area of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011.

There were 27 drowning deaths in young children in 2007/08 (Figure 5), which is a reduction of 21% on the 5 year average of 34 (Figure 3). Royal Life Saving believes that everyone can be lifesaver, particularly parents of young children, by undertaking the four KEEP WATCH actions:

- Supervise young children constantly (within arms' reach) whenever they are in, on or near water.
- Restrict a young child's access to water either by putting a barrier around the water or around the child.
- Undertake water familiarisation with your child, to help you to become aware of your child's abilities and the potential dangers to children around water.
- Learn resuscitation so you are able to respond if an incident occurs.

Location of child drowning deaths

The majority of drowning deaths of young children resulted from the child falling or wandering into the water (Figure 5). The swimming pool was again the most common location. All children who drowned in a swimming pool fell or wandered into the pool.

The next most common locations were rivers and lakes/dams/lagoons (Figure 6).

For more information about how to keep your child safe around water visit -

www.keepwatch.com.au



FIGURE 5. Drowning Deaths of Young Children 0-4 Years, Australia 2002/03 – 2007/08

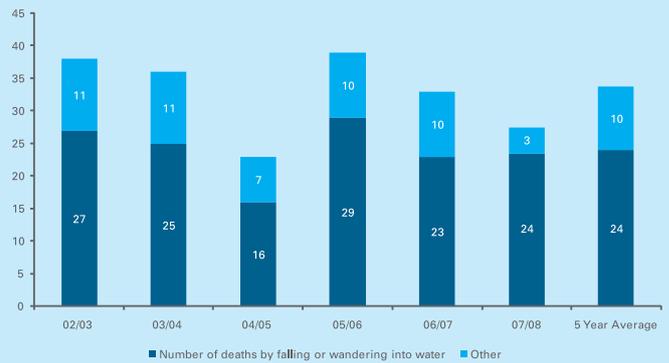
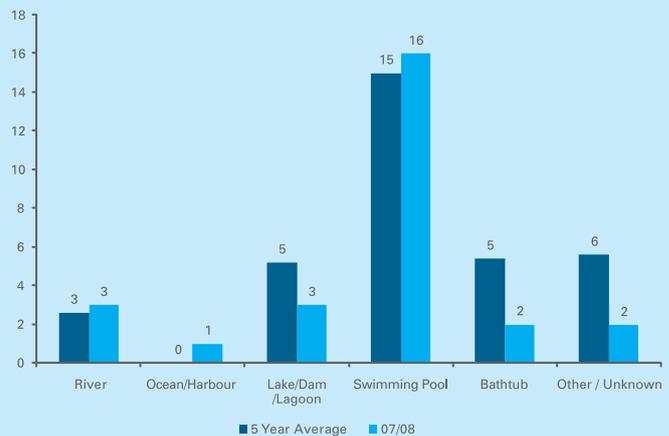


FIGURE 6. Location of Drowning Deaths, Young Children 0-4 years, 5 Year Average, 2007/08



Home Swimming Pools

Home swimming pools are the most dangerous aquatic location for young children and have been recognised as a priority area in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011. The strategy identifies three areas which will help prevent children drowning in home swimming pools:

- Improvement in systems that promote, monitor and enforce four-sided home pool fencing.
- Better information about the circumstances of home swimming pool drowning deaths and how they can be prevented.
- Establishing a system of regular checking and maintenance to ensure the fence, gate and latches are in working order.



Older Australians 55+ Years

Older people have been identified as a priority area of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011. It is critical to note that by 2020 there will be over 7 million people living in Australia aged over 55 years.

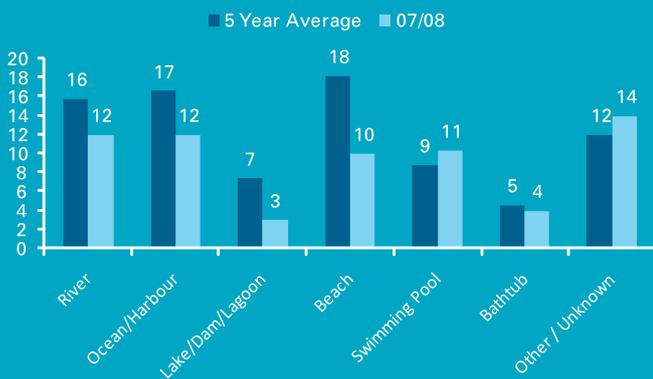
The strategy identifies three actions which are aimed at reducing the number of people over 55 years of age from drowning:

- Creation and implementation of a national public awareness campaign
- Creation and strengthening of drowning prevention programs
- Implementation of strategies that foster inclusive venues and development of workforces to meet needs of older Australians

Drowning deaths in older Australians

There were 66 drowning deaths in older Australians aged over 55 years this year, which is down by 17 (20%) on the five year average of 83 (Figure 4). Of the 66 deaths, 79% were male (Figure 7). While there has been a decrease in the number of drowning deaths over the last three years, this should be approached with caution as identification of drowning deaths in older people takes longer to establish using coronial information, particularly drowning deaths in baths.

FIGURE 8. Location of Drowning Deaths of Older Australians 55+ years, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2007/08



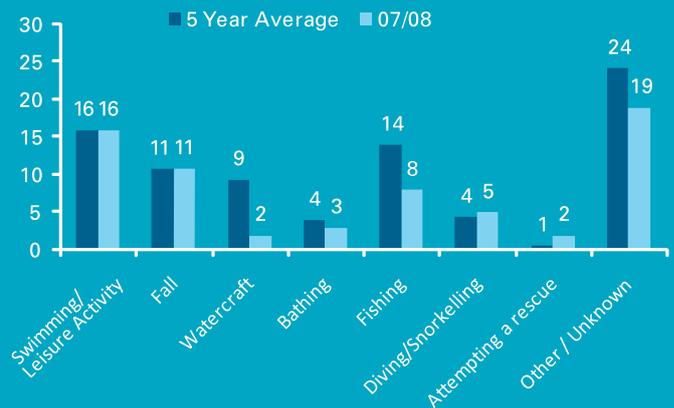
Drowning by location and activity of older Australians

Older people drown in a diverse range of aquatic settings, requiring them to have a broad range of lifesaving skills and knowledge to stay safe. Rivers (12), ocean/harbours (12), swimming pools (11) and beaches (10) were common locations for drowning deaths (Figure 8). The most common activity prior to drowning was swimming / leisure activity (25%), followed by falling-in following walking or playing near the water (17%) (Figure 9).

FIGURE 7. Drowning Deaths of Older Australians 55+ years, Australia 2002/03 to 2007/08



FIGURE 9. Drowning Deaths by Activity, Older Australians 55+ years, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2007/08



Snapshot: 18-34 year old males

Men aged 18-34 years combined with alcohol have been identified as a priority in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011 and while information about alcohol consumption is not available for this report the following gives a snapshot. This year (2007/08) there were 50 drowning deaths in males aged 18-34 years at a range of locations, particularly beaches (26%), rivers (22%), and oceans (20%). The most common activity was swimming or undertaking recreational activities in the water (40%) and three-quarters (76%) of drowning deaths occurred during summer and autumn.

Quick Facts on Drowning Deaths

YOUNG CHILDREN 0-4 YEARS

- 27 young children 0-4 years (10% of all drowning deaths)
- 18 (67%) were males
- 16 (59%) in swimming pools
- 24 (89%) fell or wandered into water
- 11 (41%) occurred during summer

CHILDREN 5-14 YEARS

- 13 children 5-14 years (5% of all drowning deaths)
- 9 (69%) were males
- 4 (31%) at lakes/dams/lagoons
- 3 (23%) in rivers
- 6 (46%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water
- 5 (38%) following a fall into water
- 6 (46%) occurred during the summer

PEOPLE 15-34 YEARS

- 67 people 15-34 years (26% of all drowning deaths)
- 56 (84%) were males
- 17 (25%) at the beach
- 16 (24%) in a river
- 26 (39%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 10 (15%) following a fall into water
- 10 (15%) while using watercraft
- 30 (45%) occurred during the summer

PEOPLE 35-54 YEARS

- 80 people 35-54 years (30% of all drowning deaths)
- 62 (78%) were males
- 24 (30%) in a river
- 20 (25%) in ocean/harbour locations
- 17 (21%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 11 (14%) were using watercraft prior to drowning
- 21 (26%) occurred during summer

PEOPLE 55+ YEARS

- 66 people aged 55 years (25% of all drowning deaths)
- 52 (79%) were males
- 12 (18%) in a river
- 10 (15%) at the beach
- 11 (17%) in a swimming pool
- 16 (24%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 11 (17%) following a fall into water
- 23 (35%) occurred during summer

Note: There were 8 cases (3% of all drowning deaths) where the age was unknown at the time of production of this report.

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving acknowledges the following organisations for their assistance:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics
- The National Coroners Information System
- State and Territory Coroners
- Media Monitors
- Jimmy Too Design & Photography

For more information contact:

Royal Life Saving Society Australia
National Branch on 02 8217 3111

ACT	02 6260 5800	NSW	02 9634 3700
NT	08 8981 5036	QLD	07 3823 2823
SA	08 8234 9244	TAS	03 6243 7558
VIC	03 9676 6900	WA	08 9383 8200

www.royallifesaving.com.au

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



Royal Life Saving

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY AUSTRALIA