

Lessons bridge swimming gap

December 09, 2019

With the summer break approaching, enjoying a swim at the beach, in a river, lake or pool is part of Australian life over the increasingly hot summer holidays

Sadly our love of the water can take its toll. Drowning deaths increased by 10 per cent in 2018-19, according to the Royal Life Saving Australia national drowning report. There was a 17 per cent increase in summer drowning deaths compared with the 10-year average.

That's where the NSW schools water safety program plays a vital role in teaching children the basics of survival in the water.

The School Swimming and Water Safety Program, run by the Department of Education, was recognised in 2015 with an award for the Most Significant Contribution to Water Safety by an Organisation at the NSW Water Safety and Austswim Awards.



The program has been running since 1954, despite cuts during the Greiner government's incumbency, and delivers quality water safety and learn-to-swim education for more than 100,000 students from 1400 schools across the state.

The lessons are mainly delivered by specialist school teachers who have been certified by Austswim, the national body for swimming instruction and water safety and its accreditation is the industry standard for swimming teachers.

Students in years 2 to 6 attend daily lessons of 45 minutes over 10 days. They learn about basic skills in water safety and survival and improve their water confidence. The School Swimming and Water Safety Program has three different models:

- centrally coordinated programs that are organised by the Department on behalf of applying schools
- the school-organised program, which caters for schools that are in smaller rural communities or remote areas, where schools organise their program
- primary aged students with disabilities and additional needs.

Federation's Swimming and Water Safety Special Interest Group is made up of members working in the program and is open to all members. The group meets regularly to discuss issues and provide advice to Federation concerning policies pertinent to the initiative. Issues include:

- rights and entitlements of members
- class ratios and program administration
- work health and safety

- Performance and Development Framework and Performance and Development Plan for teachers in the program
- identification of potential professional learning
- school funding.

Water safety has increasingly become a community concern, so much so that Labor took a national Swim Smart program as a promise to the May federal election.

Labor’s policy stated that school-based swimming lessons were inconsistent, with access depending on location, type of school and whether parents can afford private lessons. It proposed to fund additional swimming lessons for schools that need them, catch-up lessons for children requiring extra support, and provision for transport and entry fees.

NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT 2019

Royal Life Saving Australia’s research and analysis of fatal and non-fatal drowning across Australia between 1 July, 2018, and 30 June, 2019

276 people lost their lives to rivers and 98 in NSW, the highest of any state, and it is estimated a further 584 people experienced a non-fatal drowning incident

The total number of drowning incidents over the past year increased by 10 per cent on the previous year

There was a 39 per cent increase in multiple fatality events, that is multiple people drowning in one incident, compared with the 10-year average

The hottest summer on record saw a 17 per cent increase in drowning deaths when compared with the 10-year average

People aged 45 to 55 accounted for 15 per cent of the total number of drowning deaths, the most of any age group