

NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT 2026

313

people drowned in
Australian waterways



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH



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Turning loss into action

The National Drowning Report 2026 presents a comprehensive analysis of fatal drowning incidents across Australian waterways between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

Now in its 32nd edition, and the fourth produced jointly by Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia, this report reflects our shared commitment to the goals of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. By combining our evidence, expertise and reach, we aim to strengthen community awareness and sharpen drowning prevention efforts nationally.

While drowning deaths have eased from last year's sharp rise, the toll remains unacceptably high: 313 lives lost, still 10% above the 10-year average. Tragically, our projections show we are not on track to meet the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 goals. We remain committed to changing that trajectory by focusing our efforts where they are needed most.

Beyond the numbers

Beyond every number in this report is a life cut short: a person loved by family, known in their community, and forever mourned by those who knew them, witnessed their loss, or tried to save them. To the families and communities grieving the loss of a loved one, we carry that loss with you, and it deepens our commitment to this work.

This report exists to turn that loss into action, grounding evidence-informed water safety and drowning prevention in the stories behind the data. We advocate to spare other families, communities and first responders the devastation that drowning leaves behind.

Insights That Sharpen Our Response

Drowning in young children continues to decline. Deaths in children aged 0-4 fell to 39% below the 10-year average this year, as pool fencing, legislation and public education turn around what was once a national disgrace.

Drowning among young adults remains stubbornly unchanged. Rates among 15-34-year-olds have stayed persistently high for a decade, driven largely by males, rising independence, unsupervised activity and risk-taking behaviour.

Drowning risk is climbing for older Australians. Rates are rising across most age groups over 45 years, with those aged 65-74 years now recording the highest rate of any cohort (2.33 per 100,000), a 54% increase on the 10-year average.

Coastal drowning deaths are on the rise. Beaches, rocks and ocean/harbour locations made up 48% of all drowning deaths this year, up 16% on average, with ocean/harbour deaths alone rising 55%, driven mainly by boating. Diving and snorkelling deaths rose 26%, with older divers and those with cardiac conditions most at risk.

Drowning is spreading beyond the summer months. October deaths were 71% above average while December fell 19% below, pointing to a broader spread across spring, summer and autumn.

Inequity continues to shape drowning outcomes. People in disadvantaged and regional areas remain at higher risk, with over half of drowning deaths in disadvantaged areas among children aged 0-9. Overseas-born Australians accounted for 39% of deaths with known birth country and made up 51% of all deaths among 25-34-year-olds.

Drowning deaths rose in most states. All states except the Territories and Western Australia recorded increases on the 10-year average, with South Australia recording the largest rise at 29%.

Drowning is being driven by three main factors

This year's figures reflect deeper shifts already reshaping drowning risk in Australia, trends that will accelerate over the next decade unless we act now.

1. Swimming skills are declining across the population.

Access to swimming, water safety and lifesaving education is uneven, with financial, geographic, time and budget barriers limiting many families and schools alike. Being able to swim is more than a survival skill; it is a shared rite of passage that connects people to community. Closing this gap demands sustained investment so every Australian can learn to swim, stay safe, and belong in the water.

2. Australia's population is ageing.

Older Australians are staying active in the water longer, but ageing brings changes in strength, mobility and medication use that increase drowning risk. Those aged 65+ now account for almost a third of drowning deaths (30% in 2025/26). The goal is not to discourage older Australians from the water, but to help them engage with it safely. For many, time in the water is also time with others, whether in a warm-water class or a gentle lap with friends, and that social connection matters as much as the exercise itself.

3. A changing climate is reshaping when and how Australians meet the water.

Extreme heat and longer warm seasons are pushing drowning beyond summer into spring and autumn, and beyond weekends into the working week. Growing cultural diversity also means many Australians bring limited water experience, requiring prevention that meets all community needs. And as extreme weather grows more frequent, lifesavers are increasingly called on to respond to floods and other climate-driven disasters, well beyond their traditional patrol duties.

What Are We Doing About the Problem?

Australia has a clear national roadmap for reducing drowning, and the drivers behind this year's figures show exactly where that response must sharpen. 2025 marked the midpoint of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 (AWSS), and we are not on track to meet its 50% drowning reduction target in many areas. A Midpoint Update, published in January 2026, identified where greater focus, investment and action are needed to accelerate progress, and these findings have been distilled into three National Imperatives: the priority areas where collective effort must now be strengthened to change Australia's drowning trajectory.

Three National Imperatives

Strengthening swimming and water safety skills for all.

Too many children and young people still lack the skills to enjoy the water safely. Beyond the pool, that means having the skills to navigate currents, deep water, and unfamiliar aquatic environments safely. Reversing this trend is imperative.

Localising water safety efforts.

We must all recognise that all drowning is fundamentally local, felt most deeply by families, friends, neighbours and first responders within a community. Reducing drowning nationally means focusing locally, building local water safety coalitions and plans that bring the energy, resources and knowledge only communities themselves can provide.

Aligning policies and partnerships.

This approach to system change means working to unite whole-of-society action across every level of government and sector able to embed water safety and drowning prevention into existing programs, especially where they have downstream impacts that prevent drowning. Policies and initiatives must connect from Canberra to states, territories and local government, all the way to the community pool, beach or riverbank, reaching people well before their toes are in the water.

No matter the population, place or activity you're seeking to address, the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 offers a clear starting point. In most contexts, it points to the things that matter most: the research, the populations, the programs and the policy adjustments that need to be prioritised. We invite governments, organisations and communities across Australia to use it as the foundation for their own drowning prevention and water safety efforts.

Investing in drowning prevention

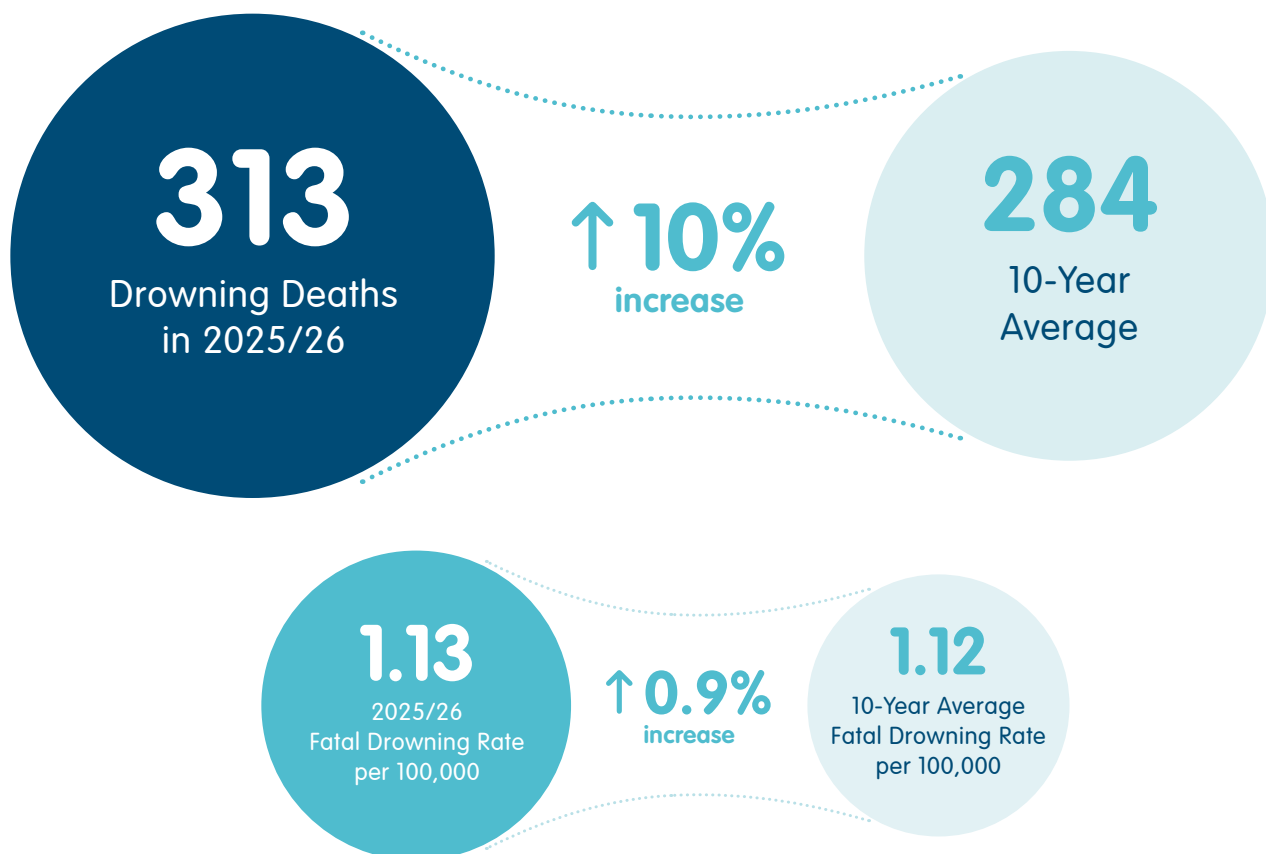
The evidence in this report underlines the importance of sustained investment in water safety and drowning prevention. The renewal of the Federal Government's Water and Snow Safety Program, together with the recently launched We Swim Multicultural Community Water Safety Program, provides a critical foundation for this work, alongside targeted efforts to address drowning risks at unpatrolled locations and black spots. Achieving the ambitions of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 will take continued commitment and enhanced investment from every level of government, alongside the efforts of communities and the water safety sector.

A Message for Every Australian

Every family, every community, every one of us has a part to play. This report is a call to action, and so is a simple reminder: following straightforward water safety advice can, and does, save lives.

- Always supervise children in, on, and around water.
- Learn swimming, water safety, and lifesaving skills.
- Wear a lifejacket when boating, rock fishing, or paddling.
- Swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs around water.
- Know the conditions; check the weather.

We urge you to join us in sharing these messages with the people you love. Together, we can prevent drowning.



TOP 3 LOCATIONS

22%
River/Creek



21%
Beach



20%
Ocean/Harbour



TOP 3 ACTIVITIES

28%
Swimming and Recreating



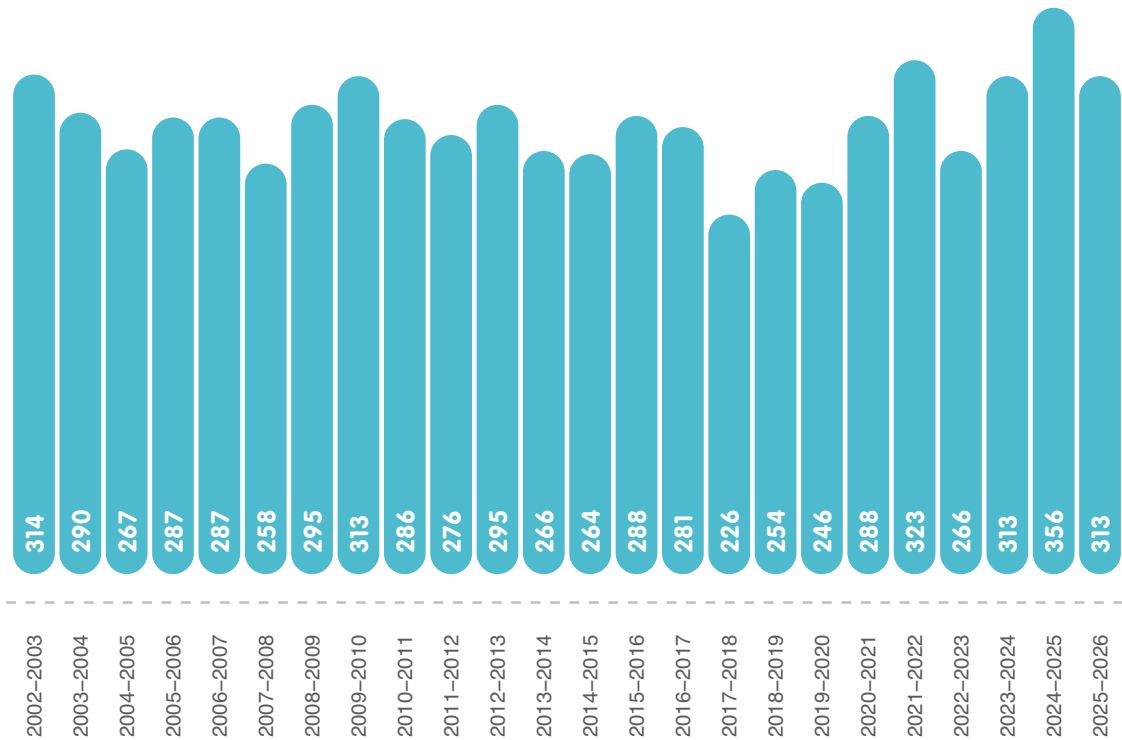
13%
Unintentional fall into water



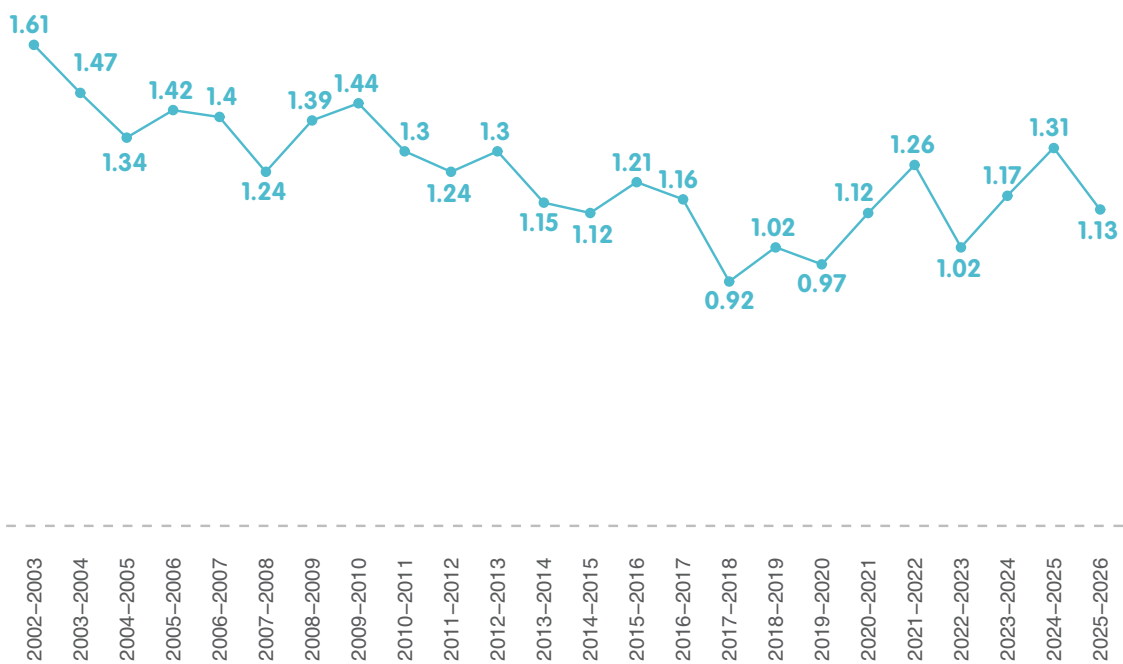
10%
Boating



Number of drowning deaths by financial year



Crude fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population by financial year



Data reported here may be different than reported in previously published National Drowning Reports. As additional information becomes available, cases may be newly identified and added and existing cases may be removed, updated, or reclassified.

> UNDERSTANDING DROWNING AND HOW TO APPROACH THIS REPORT

This brief section provides an overview of drowning and some guidance on how to approach the data presented in this report. For detailed information on data sources and methods used, please see the methods section on page 96.

What is drowning?

The globally accepted medical definition of drowning is: *The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion or immersion in liquid.* [2] Importantly, there are three outcomes for a person who experiences drowning: death, survival with morbidity, or survival with no morbidity. [2] Terms such as “near-drowning,” “secondary drowning,” and “wet/dry drowning” are no longer used.

Fatal and non-fatal drowning

This National Drowning Report includes information on fatal drowning only, that is, people who die from submersion or immersion in water. However, the burden of drowning is not limited to deaths alone.

Each year, hundreds of non-fatal drowning events occur in Australia which have a range of outcomes. Sometimes the person who drowns and survives might only need to visit a clinic or hospital for a check. In other instances, non-fatal drowning events result in permanent, life-altering neurological disability that severely impacts the person who drowns, their family, community, and caregivers.

The exact number of non-fatal drowning incidents is difficult to report with precision, which is why improving data systems for non-fatal drowning is a key activity in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. [1]

Understanding this year in context

This report often presents data from the current 2025/26 time period in comparison to a 10-year average. By looking at historical patterns, we can see how this year measures up to what we would expect from previous years, where numbers and rates have increased or decreased, and how the distribution of cases may be changing across different categories.

Throughout the different sections of this report, 2025/26 counts and rates are presented alongside the percentage increase or decrease from the 10-year average. This percentage-change measure helps explain the magnitude of the difference this year, but changes based on small counts can appear dramatic. Take note when percentage changes are based on a small number of deaths.

The following sections also include several graphics that show breakdowns by the proportion of drowning deaths in a particular group compared to the 10-year average. These figures indicate how the distribution of cases this year aligns or differs from what we have seen historically over the last decade.

Understanding counts, proportions and rates

When analysing drowning data, counts, proportions and rates are frequently presented to offer different perspectives. Each of these measures are useful but serve a distinct purpose. Counts represent the number of drowning events that occur within a given time frame, geographic location, and/or subgroup. Counts are useful for understanding the scope of the problem, communication about the burden, and for determining the required capacity and scale of services or programs.

While useful for discussing the absolute number of people affected, comparing counts between subgroups, such as age or a geographic region, can make understanding the context of that subgroup challenging. Sometimes it is helpful to examine the data as a proportion of drowning deaths instead. Percentages are often easier to understand and communicate in context, and they allow for simple comparisons between different groups that vary in the number of cases. Note that throughout the report, proportions are rounded to whole numbers for presentation purposes and therefore may not add to exactly 100%.

While counts and proportions offer important information, drowning rates, presented here as crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents, consider the size of the population at risk. Rates are especially useful for making comparisons between groups or locations and identifying high-risk populations to guide prevention efforts.

Comparing counts alone may be misleading because larger populations are more likely to have higher drowning counts simply due to their size. By using rates, we can compare the drowning burden across populations that vary in size, allowing us to identify groups that are disproportionately affected by drowning and should therefore be considered a priority for prevention efforts.

The different sections in this report include counts, proportions and rates. Be sure to take note which type of measure you are looking at.

National Fatal Drowning Dashboard

The Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database Dashboard is a public-facing interactive platform where users can query information from the Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database. The National Fatal Drowning Database features detailed variables on the circumstances of all unintentional drowning deaths that have occurred in Australian waterways since 1 July 2002. The Dashboard shows data published in this and previous National Drowning Reports, updated to reflect the most recently available information. Users may build custom graphics with fatal drowning counts or rates per 100,000 population, and a variety of filters. Updates to the dashboard primarily occur upon publication of the National Drowning Report, and periodically throughout the year as additional information becomes available.

Access to the Dashboard is free and highly encouraged for anyone interested in exploring Australian drowning data more in detail. For more information, scan the QR code below or visit: <https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/data>





> SECTION ONE: People - Who drowns?

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Drowning prevention strategies are most effective when tailored to specific populations and age groups. This National Drowning Report provides details on the people who drowned in 2025/26 to improve understanding of who is at an increased risk and ultimately to help prioritise and direct prevention efforts.

> INSIGHTS BY AGE GROUPS

Young Children 0-4 years

reported a drowning rate of 0.73 per 100,000 population; a 38% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 1.17 per 100,000 population. The sustained decrease in fatal drowning among this age group over the last two decades is encouraging, however, it still remains too high.

↓ 38%

DECREASE COMPARED TO
THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR
YOUNG CHILDREN 0-4 YEARS

Drowning among children 5-14 years

reported a drowning rate of 0.40 per 100,000 population, a 14% increase compared to the 10-year average of 0.35 per 100,000 population. Most drowning deaths in this age group resulted from swimming and recreating, reinforcing the need for swimming and water safety skills and knowledge to assist in unexpected situations.

↑ 14%

INCREASE COMPARED TO
THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR
CHILDREN 5-14 YEARS

People aged 15-24 years

reported a drowning rate of 0.97 per 100,000 population, a 5% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 1.02 per 100,000 population. Beaches were the highest location for drowning events (29%) followed by rivers/creeks (26%); with 18% of drowning deaths occurring 100km or further away from home. Over a third (38%) of drowning deaths occurred while swimming and recreating, followed by non-aquatic transport (12%) and boating (12%).

↓ 5%

DECREASE COMPARED TO
THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR
PEOPLE AGED 15-24 YEARS

People aged 25-34 years

reported a drowning rate of 0.90 per 100,000 population, a 16% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 1.07 per 100,000 population. Over half of drowning cases in this cohort were those born overseas. Specifically, this age group represented a quarter of drowning deaths that occurred in those born overseas (25%). Rivers/creeks (30%) was the leading location for this age group, followed by beaches (27%), with 19% of cases travelling over 100km or further from home to these locations.

↓ 16%

DECREASE COMPARED TO
THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR
PEOPLE AGED 25-34 YEARS

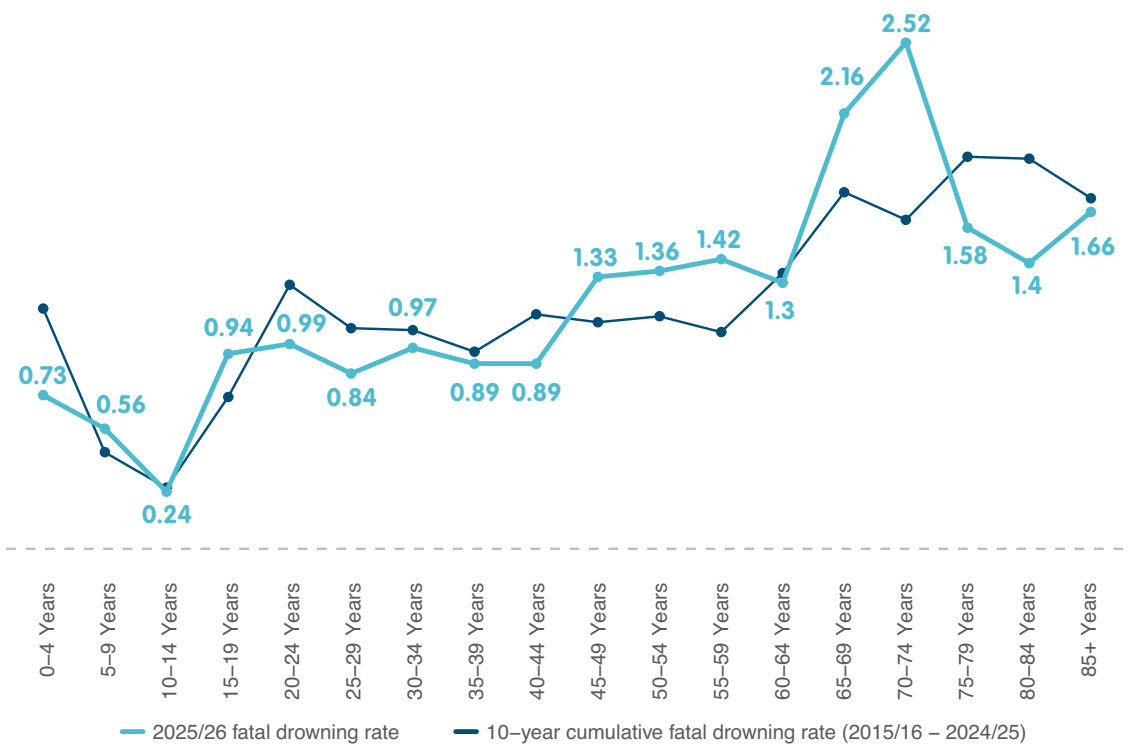
People aged 65 years and over

reported the highest numbers, proportions and rates of drowning in most states/territories except of NSW, NT and WA. There has been a steady increase in drowning events among older age groups since 2019/20. This year, those aged 65+ years recorded the highest drowning rate of 1.96 per 100,000 of all ages groups, an 11% increase compared to the 10-year average. Combined, swimming pools (25%) and ocean/harbours (25%), accounted for half (50%) of all drowning fatalities in this cohort. Promoting swimming and water safety skills and tailored prevention interventions for this age group should be prioritised.

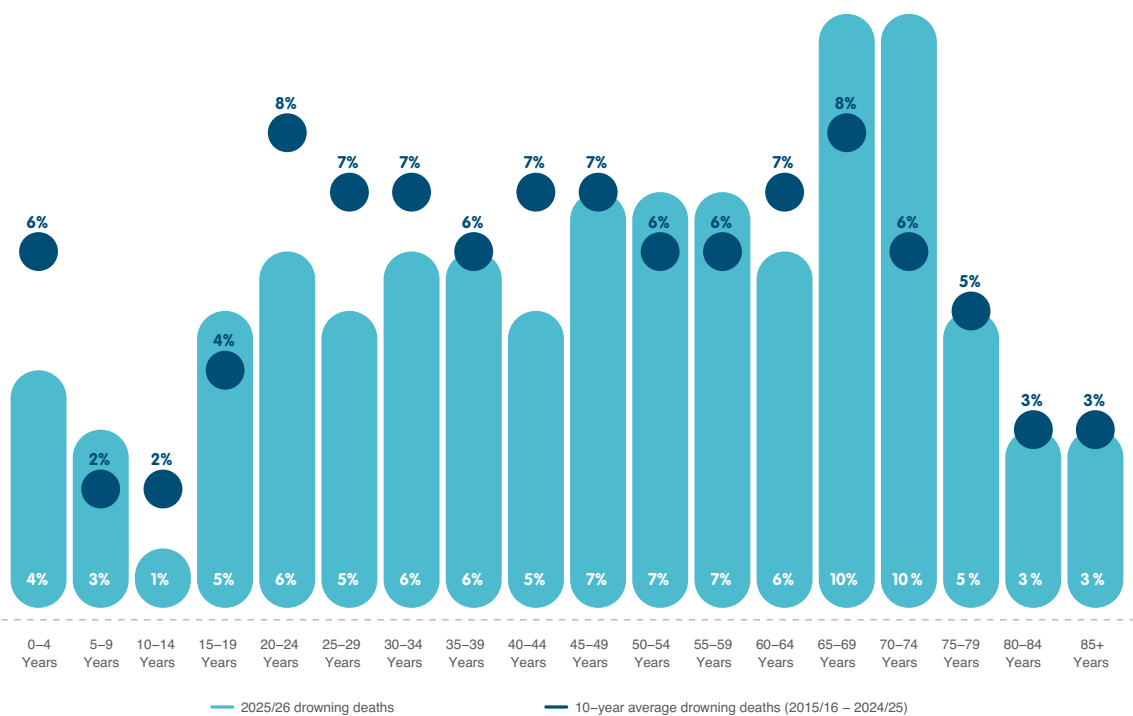
↑ 11%

INCREASE COMPARED TO
THE 10-YEAR AVERAGE FOR
PEOPLE AGED 65+ YEARS

2025/26 fatal age-specific drowning rate compared to 10-year average
fatal age-specific drowning rate in 5-year age bands



2025/26 Number of drowning deaths by 5-year age groups compared with the 10-year average



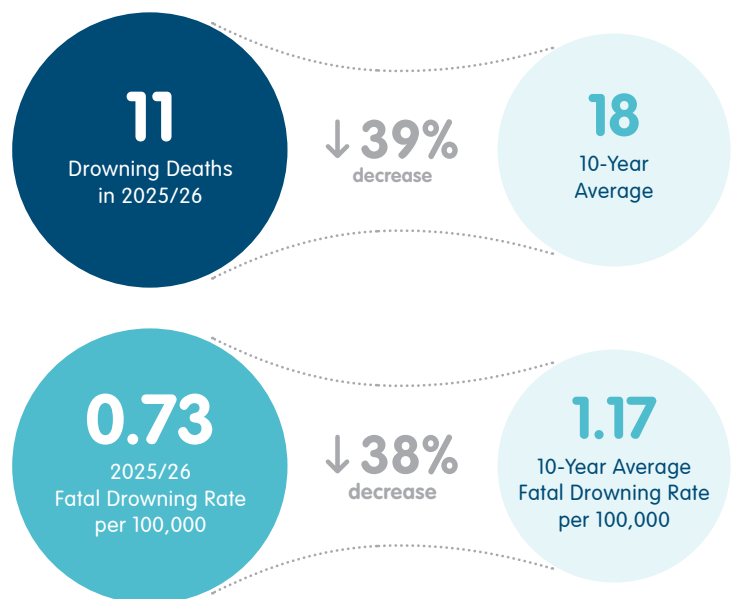
> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: CHILDREN AGED 0-4 YEARS

Fatal drowning numbers and rates for children aged 0-4 years have reduced in recent years. Drowning deaths in the 0-4-year age group represented 4% of all drowning cases in 2025/26; and decreased by 27% from last year (2024/25) and 39% from the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of the 0-4-year age group in 2025/26 also decreased by 38% compared to the 10-year average.

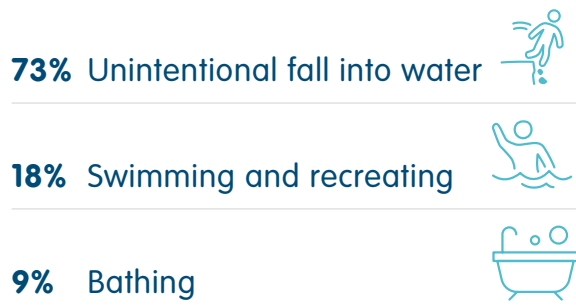
55% of all drowning deaths in this age group were males. Children aged 1 year accounted for the highest number of drowning deaths in this age group this year, with seven drowning fatalities recorded among 1-year-olds over the 12-month period.

The majority of drowning deaths occurred in a swimming pool (55%), with 'Other' being the second leading location (27%). The leading activity prior to drowning was an unintentional fall into water (73%) followed by swimming and recreating (18%) and bathing (9%).

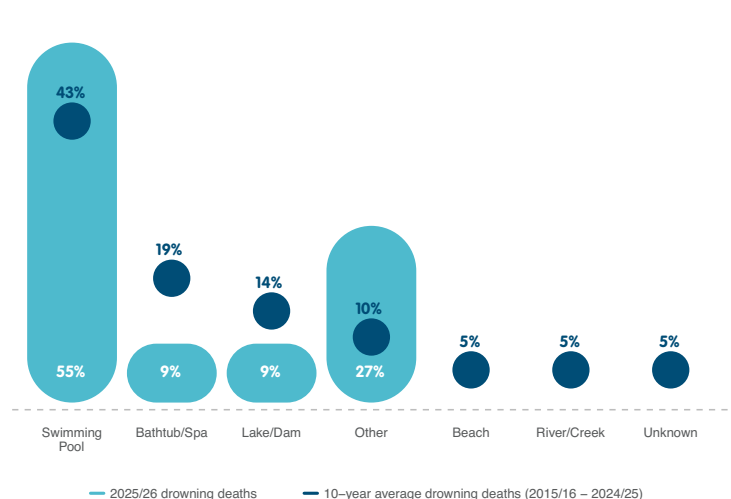
Successful decreases in drowning number and rates in this age group have occurred over the years due to increased public awareness and education, advocacy and research, government policy and enforcement [4]. However, this age group remains a priority area in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. Clear and effective drowning prevention measures for this age group exist, [5] and continued focus is required to maintain the successful trends observed over the past two decades [1].



Drowning deaths of children aged 0-4 years by activity, 2025/26



Drowning deaths of children aged 0-4 years by location, 2025/26



> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: CHILDREN AGED 5-14 YEARS

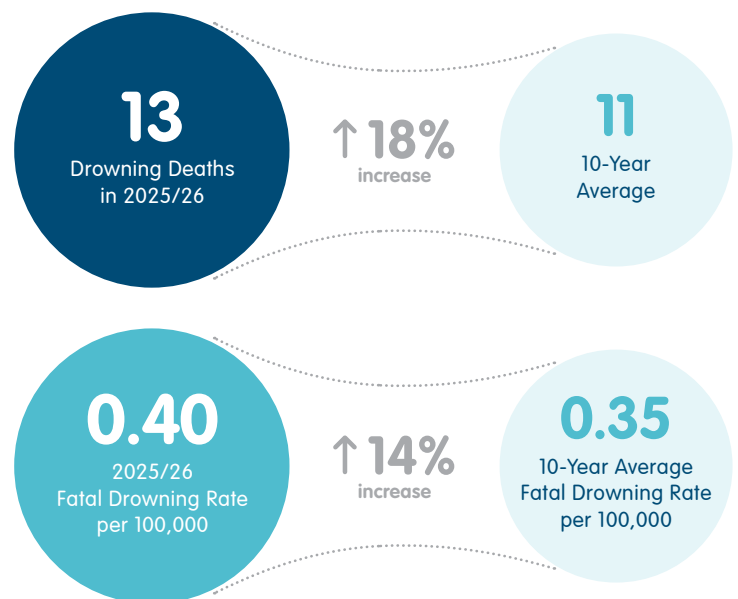
Drowning deaths in the 5-14-year age group represented 4% of drowning cases in 2025/26. The number of drowning deaths had an 18% increase when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 0.40 per 100,000 population, also increased by 14% compared to the 10-year average.

Over two-thirds of drowning deaths were males (69%). By single year, children aged 7 years recorded the highest number of drowning deaths.

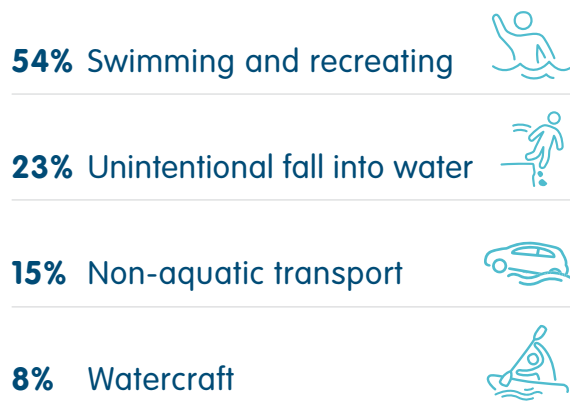
Drowning deaths in this age group were most frequent in swimming pools (38%), followed by rivers/creeks (23%), and beaches (23%). Top activities were swimming and recreating (54%) followed by an unintentional fall into water (23%) and non-aquatic transport (15%).

The majority (54%) of drowning deaths among this age group occurred during the spring months (September to November). Additionally, 31% of the cases in this age group occurred on a Monday. The drowning deaths in this age group were frequently the result of swimming and recreating reinforces the need for swimming and water safety skills and water safety knowledge to assist in unexpected situations and unfamiliar locations.

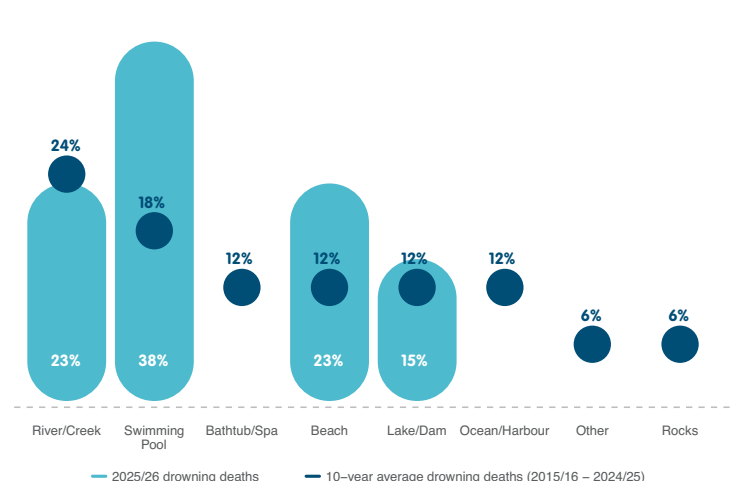
At least 31% of the drowning deaths in this age group involved people that were born overseas, but that number could be higher as 54% of the cases in this age group still had unknown country of birth at time of publication.



Drowning deaths of children aged 5-14 years by activity, 2025/26



Drowning deaths of children aged 5-14 years by location, 2025/26



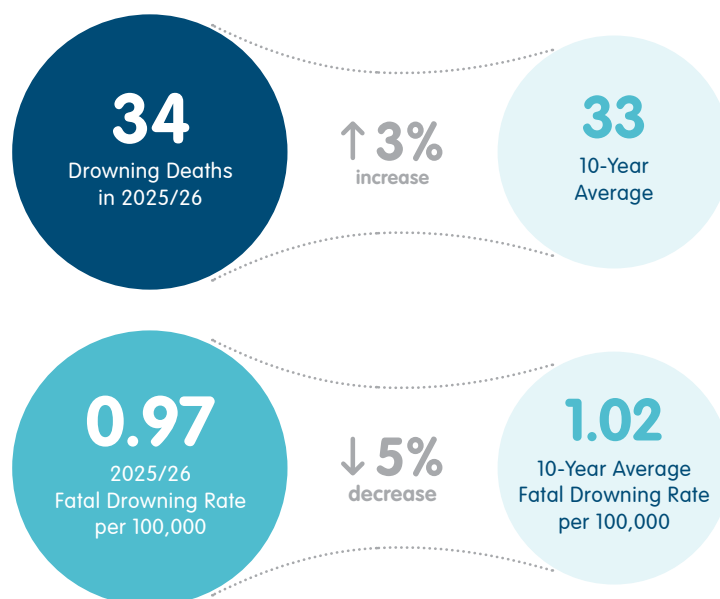
> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-24 YEARS

Drowning deaths in the 15-24-year age group represented 11% of all drowning cases in 2025/26. The number of drowning deaths increased by 3% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 0.97 per 100,000 population, decreased by 5% compared to the 10-year average. Highest increase in drowning deaths was found in those between 15-17 years specifically, with an 80% increase from the 10-year average and a 48% increase in the drowning rate compared to the 10-year average.

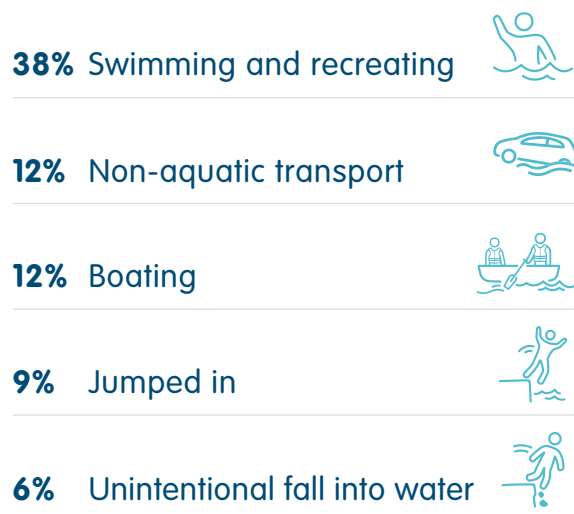
Drowning deaths in this age group were mostly among males (88%). Those aged 23 years recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in this age group (n=6).

Drowning deaths most frequently occurred at a beach (29%) followed by a river/creek (26%). The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (38%) followed by non-aquatic transport (12%) and boating (12%).

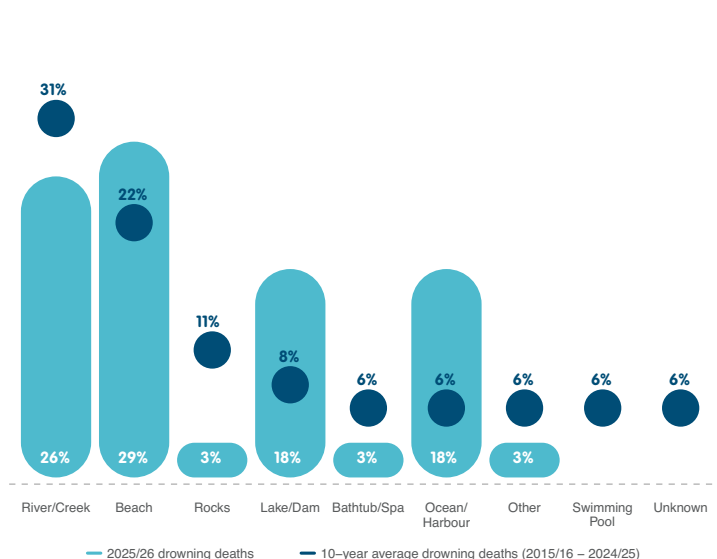
At least 32% of the drowning deaths in this age group involved people that were born overseas, but that number could be higher as 18% of the cases in this age group still had unknown country of birth at time of publication.



Drowning deaths of young people aged 15-24 years by activity, 2025/26



Drowning deaths of young people aged 15-24 years by location, 2025/26



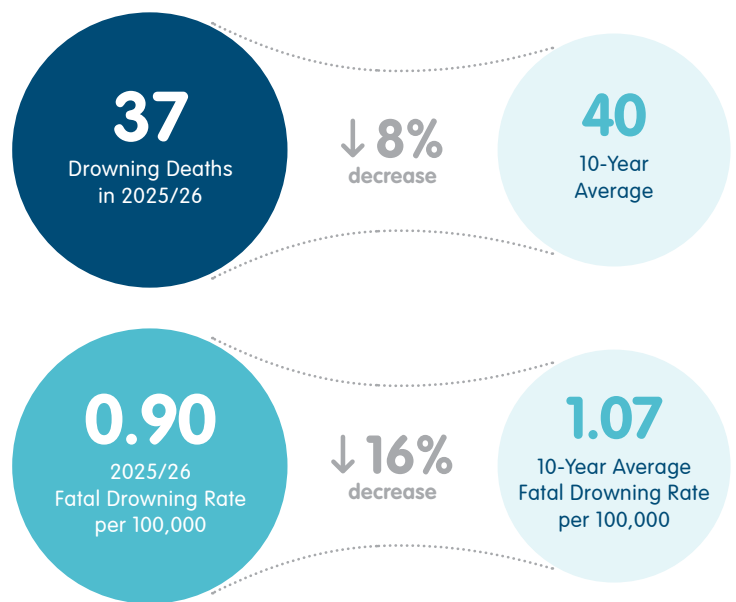
> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: ADULTS AGED 25-34 YEARS

Drowning deaths in the 25-34-year age group represented 12% of total drowning deaths in 2025/26. There was total of 37 drowning deaths, an 8% decrease compared with the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 0.90 per 100,000 population represented a 16% decrease compared to the 10-year average.

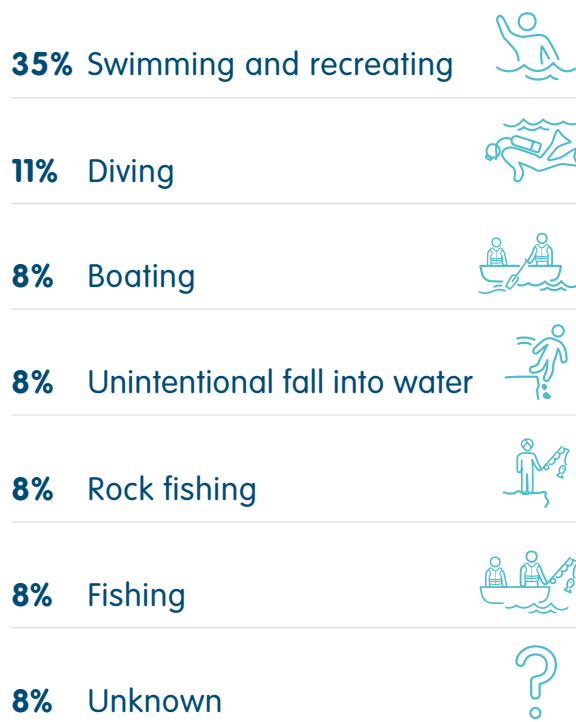
Males accounted for 84% of drowning deaths in this age group. Those aged 26 years recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in this age group (n=7).

The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (35%). The leading locations for drowning deaths in this age group occurred at river / creek locations (30%) followed by beaches (27%).

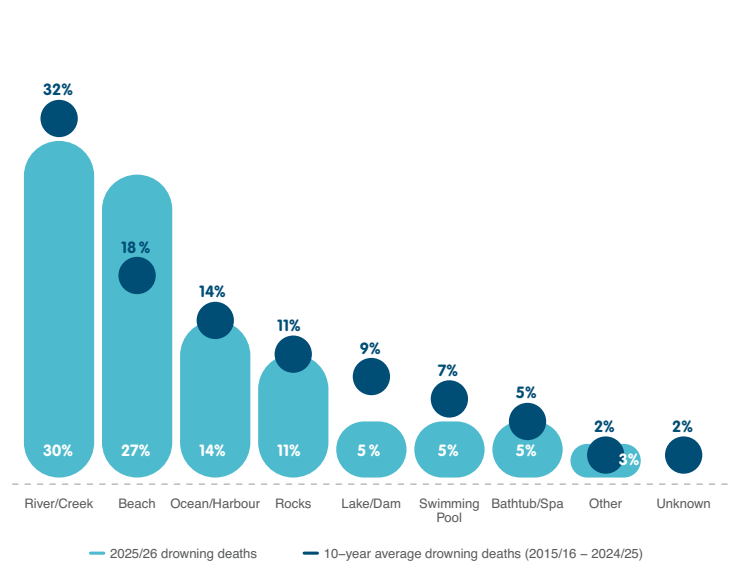
At least 51% of the drowning deaths in this age group involved people that were born overseas, but that number could be higher as 19% of the cases in this age group still had unknown country of birth at time of publication.



Drowning deaths of adults aged 25-34 years by activity, 2025/26



Drowning deaths of adults aged 25-34 years by location, 2025/26

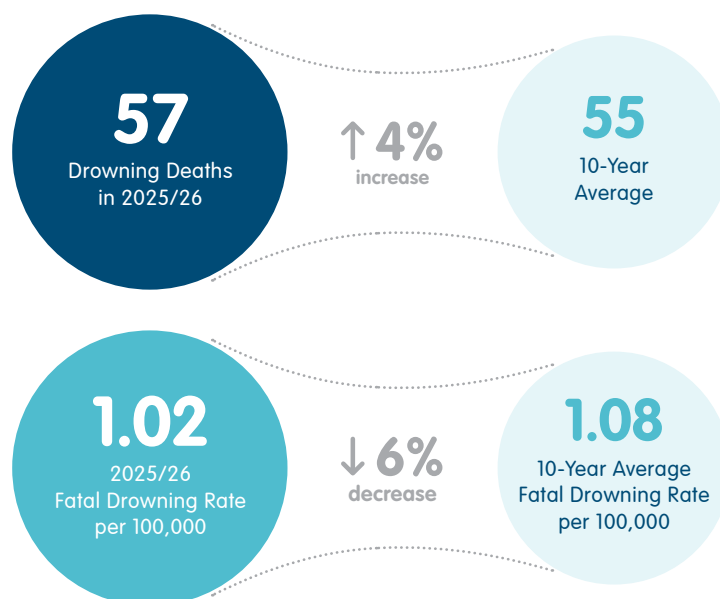


> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: ADULTS AGED 35-49 YEARS

Drowning deaths in the 35-49-year age group represented 18% of total drowning deaths in 2025/26. The number of drowning deaths increased by 4% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 1.02 per 100,000 population, also decreased by 6% compared to the 10-year average.

Males accounted for 89% of drowning deaths in this age group. Those aged 47 years recorded the highest number of deaths overall with 10 fatalities. The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (21%). The highest number of drowning deaths occurred at ocean/harbour locations (28%), followed by beaches (23%) and rivers/creeks (23%). In this age group, 14% of drowning deaths occurred 100km or more from where the person lived.

At least 19% of the drowning deaths in this age group involved people that were born overseas, but that number could be higher as 44% of the cases in this age group still had unknown country of birth at time of publication.



Drowning deaths of adults aged 35-49 years by activity, 2025/26

21% Swimming and recreating



12% Watercraft



9% Boating



9% Unintentional fall into water



7% Attempted rescue



7% Rock fishing



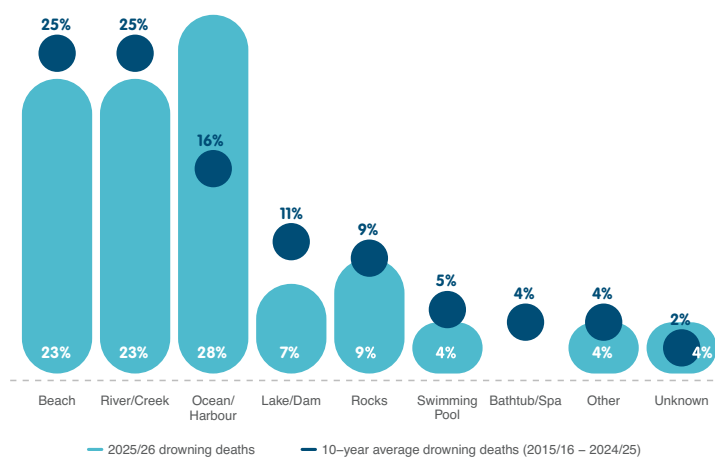
7% Diving



23% Unknown



Drowning deaths of adults aged 34-49 years by location, 2025/26

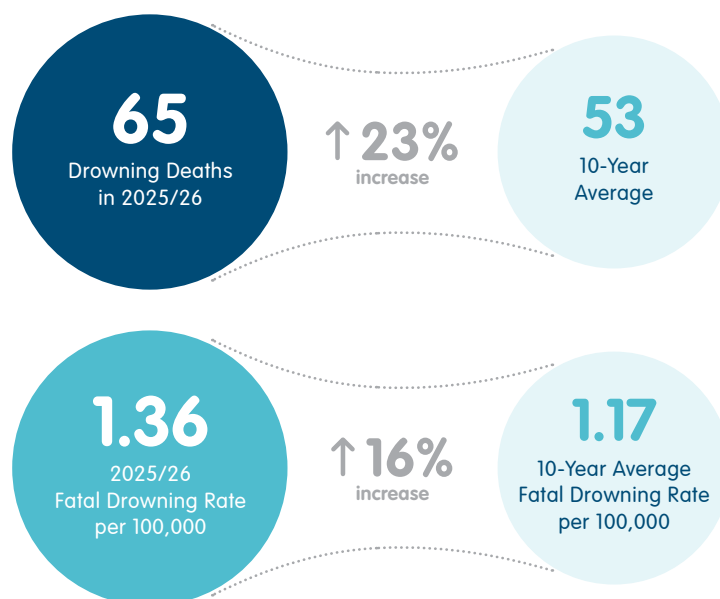


> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: ADULTS AGED 50-64 YEARS

Drowning deaths in the 50-64-year age group represented 21% of total drowning deaths in 2025/26. The number of drowning deaths increased by 23% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 1.36 per 100,000 population also increased by 16% compared to the 10-year average.

Males accounted for 75% of drowning deaths in this age group. Those aged 56 years recorded the highest number of deaths in this age group with 9 drowning fatalities. The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (18%), followed by boating (11%) and diving/snorkelling (11%). Drowning deaths in this age group most frequently occurred at beaches (26%) followed by rivers/creeks (22%). One quarter (25%) of drowning deaths occurred 100km or further from where the person lived, including in their home environment.

At least 22% of the drowning deaths in this age group involved people that were born overseas, but that number could be higher as 38% of the cases in this age group still had unknown country of birth at time of publication.



Drowning deaths of adults aged 50-64 years by activity, 2025/26

18% Swimming and recreating



11% Boating



11% Diving/snorkelling



9% Bathing



9% Watercraft



8% Rock fishing



8% Unintentional fall into water



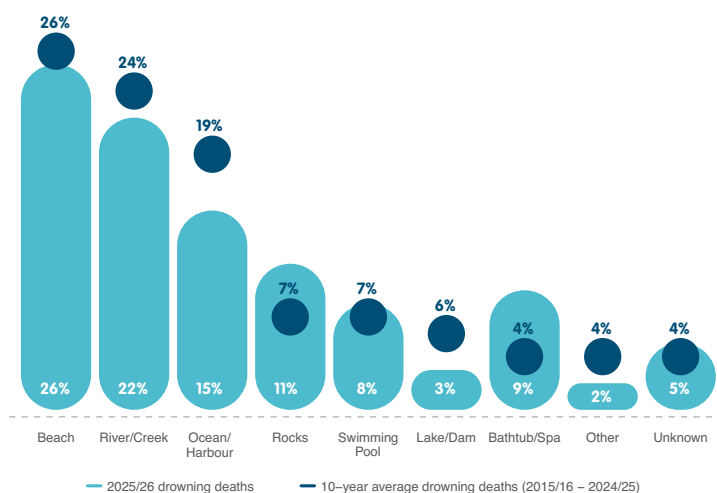
5% Non-aquatic transport



5% Attempted rescue



Drowning deaths of adults aged 50-64 years by location, 2025/26

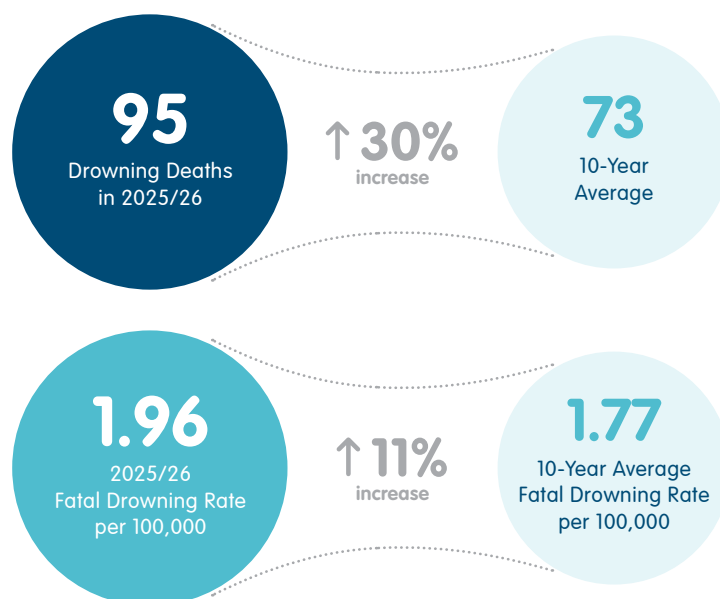


> INSIGHTS BY LIFE STAGES: OLDER PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER

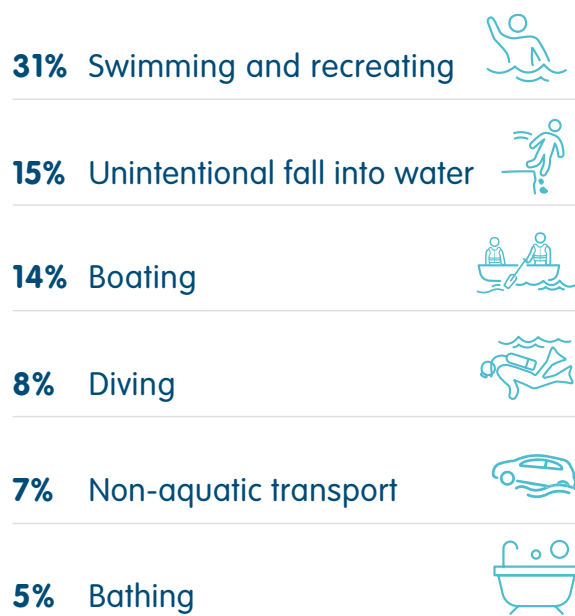
Drowning deaths in this age group represented 30% of total drowning deaths in 2025/26, a proportion that has increased steadily over the last decade from 23% in 2015-26.

The number of drowning deaths increased by 30% when compared to the 10-year average. The crude fatal drowning rate of 1.96 per 100,000 population also increased by 11% compared to the 10-year average. The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 acknowledges people over 65 years as a priority age group for drowning prevention, and identifies areas in which water safety awareness, swimming skills, and campaigns around medical check-ups and fall prevention, need to be implemented to promote and strengthen water safety behaviour.[1]

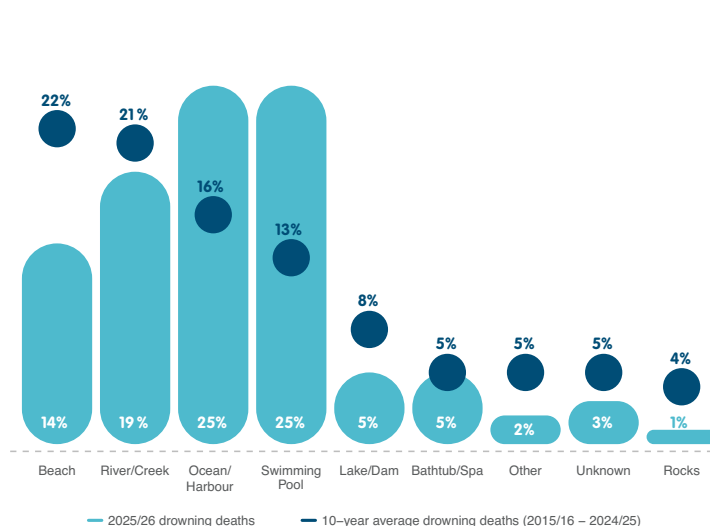
Males accounted for 85% of all drowning deaths of people aged 65+ years. Among people aged 65+ years, the highest number of drowning deaths by age were among people aged 65 years (11 drowning deaths). Drowning deaths in this age group occurred mainly at ocean/harbour (25%) and in swimming pools (25%) followed by rivers/creeks (19%). Swimming and recreating were the leading activity prior to drowning (31%) followed by unintentional falls (15%) and boating (14%). Interestingly, drowning in this age group most commonly occurred during the summer months, and on a Sunday (22%) and Thursday (16%), a departure from patterns observed in other age groups. In this age group, most drowning deaths occurred at home (24%) or within 5km of where the person lived (11%). A pre-existing medical condition was reported in 45% of cases in this age group.



Drowning deaths of older people aged 65+ years by activity, 2025/26



Drowning deaths of older people aged 65+ years by location, 2025/26



736

PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER DROWNED IN AUSTRALIA.

1.77 DROWNING DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION.

26% OF TOTAL DROWNING DEATHS DURING THIS PERIOD.

54%

WERE BETWEEN 65 AND 74 YEARS. 1.71 DROWNING DEATHS PER 100,000

46%

WERE OVER THE AGE OF 75 YEARS. 1.86 DROWNING DEATHS PER 100,000

81%

WERE MALE



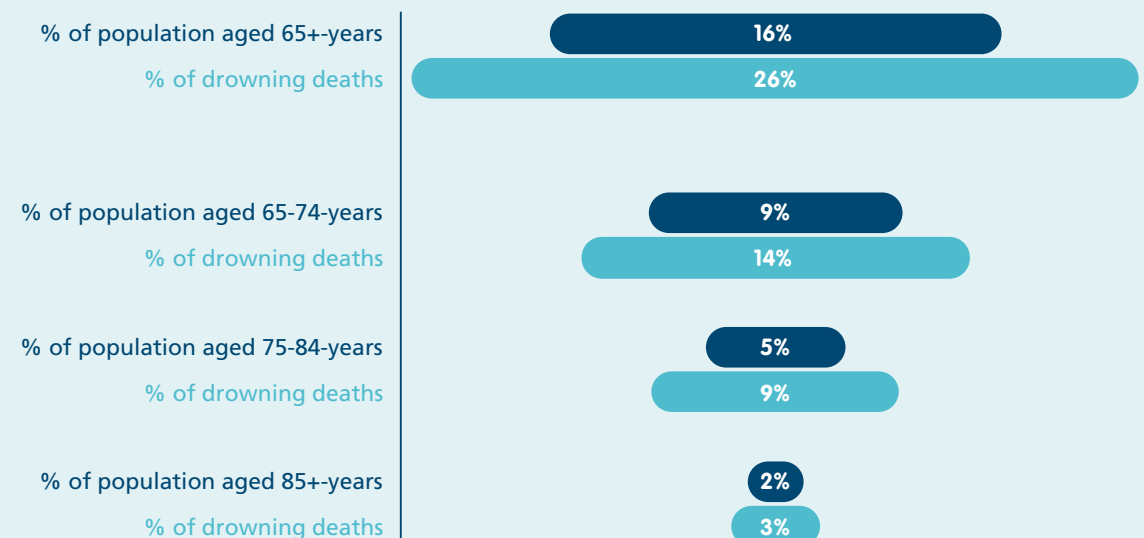
32%

WERE BORN OVERSEAS



OLDER ADULTS ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN DROWNING STATISTICS:

Comparing proportion of older adults in the population to the proportion of all drowning deaths.



> SOCIO-ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

The Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is a score assigned to geographic areas by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. [3] While a simplification of the realities Australians encounter every day, the score summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households to provide a relative measure of disadvantage (lower score) and advantage (higher scores).

People living in disadvantaged areas experienced more drowning deaths and higher fatal drowning rates than those in more advantaged areas. In 2025/26, residents of the most disadvantaged areas (deciles 1-2) accounted for 29% of fatal drowning cases and had a drowning rate twice that of residents in the most advantaged areas (deciles 9-10), who accounted for 15% of cases.

Of note, a greater proportion of children under 10 years who drowned this year were from disadvantaged areas than children in older age cohorts. Specifically, 53% of drowning deaths among children under 10 years of age involved children living in the most disadvantaged areas (deciles 1-2).

Swimming Skills for everyone

Royal Life Saving Australia research reports that people living in lower socio-economic areas, and those in regional areas are less likely to have access to swimming pools and swimming lessons. [6,7]

- > **48% of Year 6 students cannot swim 50 metres and tread water for 2 minutes.**
- > One in ten children aged 5-14 years have never attended swimming lessons in any form, most are from low socio-economic backgrounds and those living in regional locations.
- > Schools in remote locations had to travel further to a swimming pool (25% to a pool 26km or further).
- > 31% of schools did not offer a learn to swim program, over half cited the cost of lessons and one-third cited costs of travel to the pool as barriers to delivering a school swimming program.

This research highlights that the disparities in children's access to swimming and water safety education, particularly for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and living in regional areas, are creating a significant impact on skill development and widen the gap between those who can confidently swim and those who remain at risk. This increases the likelihood of drowning incidents and limits opportunities for safe participation in aquatic activities.

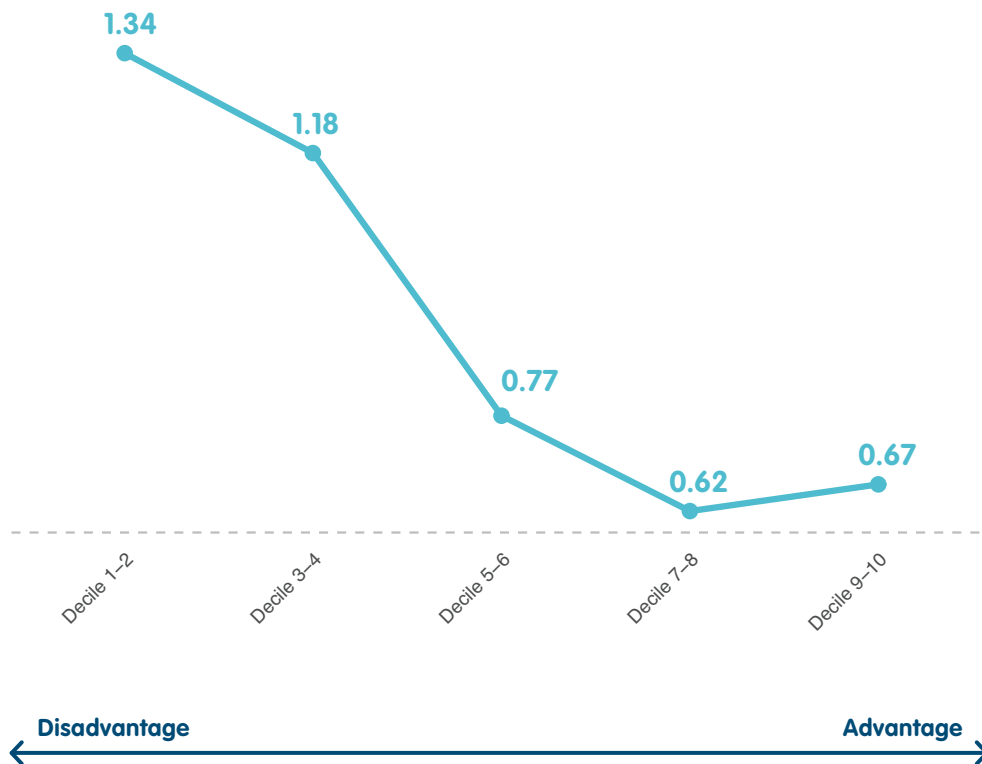
Improving swimming skills for all is a national imperative in the updated Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030.

To read the report: www.royallifesaving.com.au/research-and-policy/research-by-topic/risk-factors

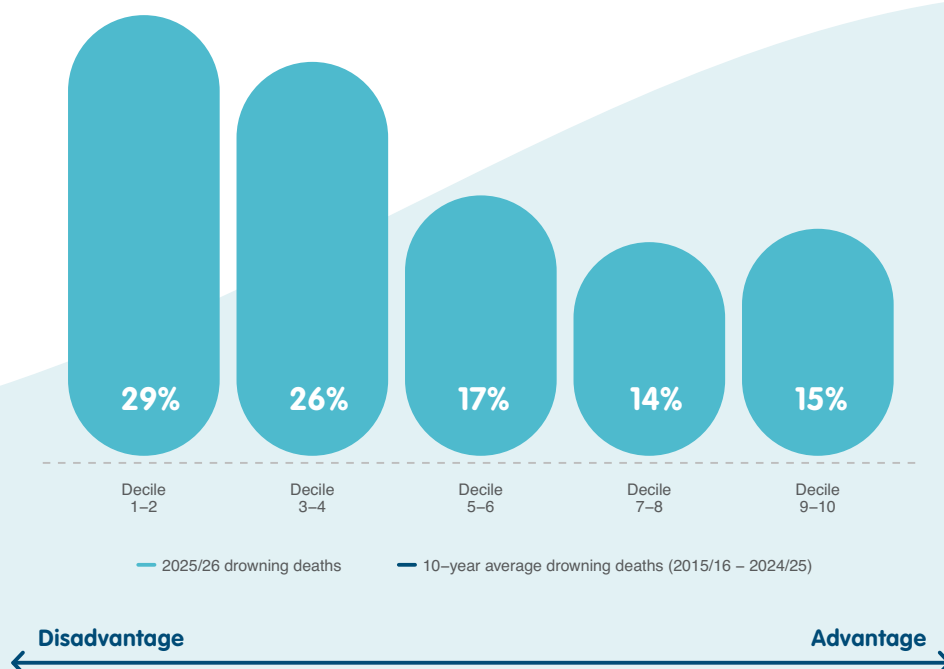
2.1x

PEOPLE RESIDING IN THE MOST DISADVANTAGED AREAS DROWNED AT A RATE 2.1 HIGHER THAN PEOPLE WHO RESIDED IN THE MOST ADVANTAGED AREAS

Crude fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population by IRSAD decile, 2025/26

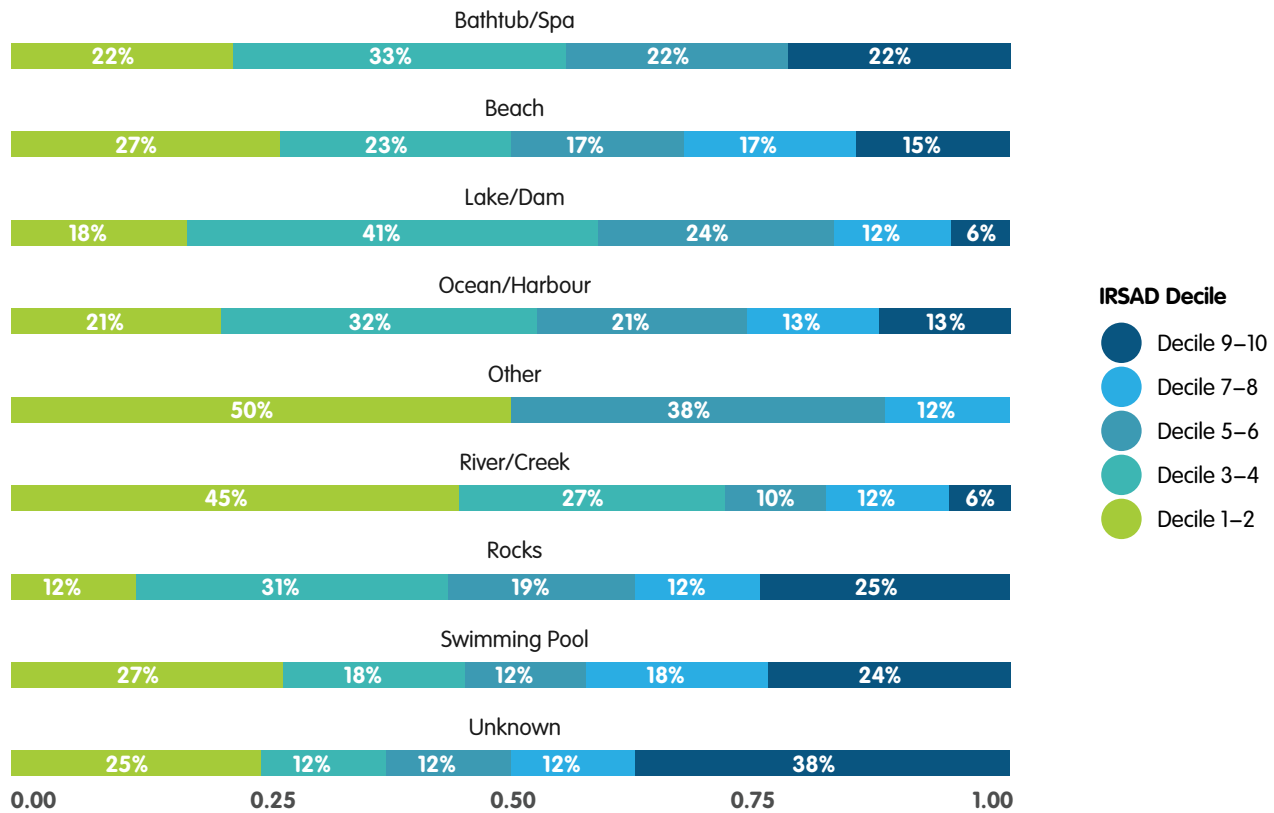


Drowning deaths by IRSAD decile, 2025/26

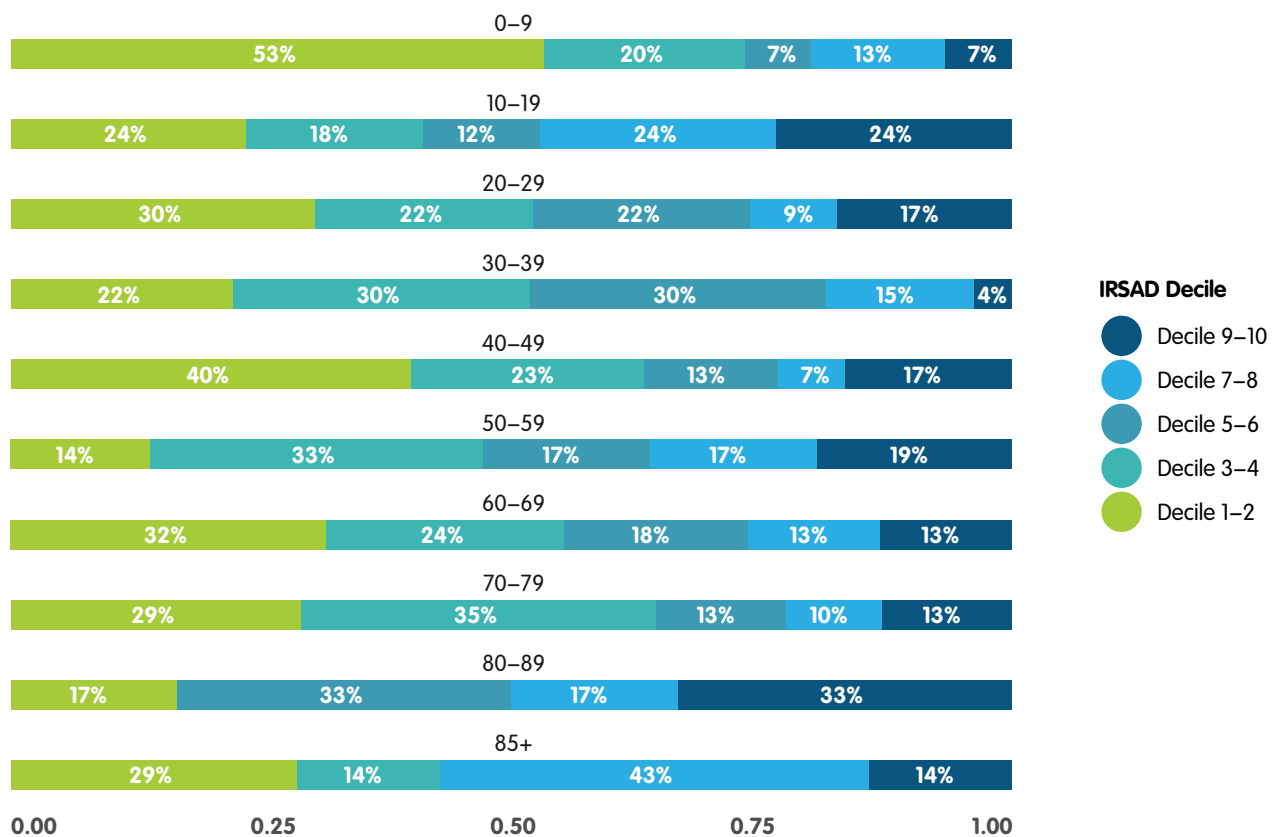


*Note: 13% of fatal drowning incidents are an unknown IRSAD score

Drowning by body of water location and IRSAD decile, 2025/26



Drowning by age group and IRSAD decile, 2025/26

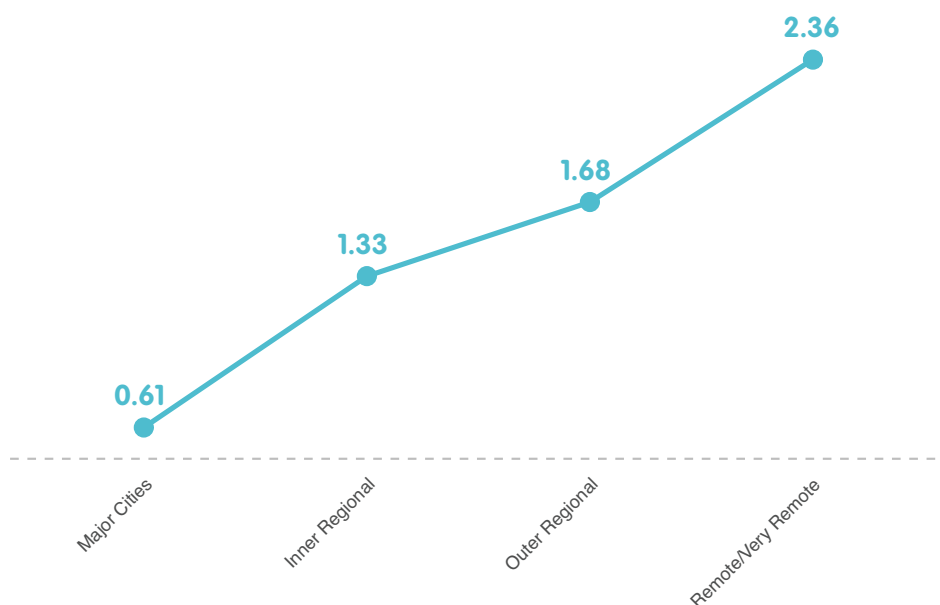


> REMOTENESS OF HOME RESIDENCE

The majority of those who died from drowning in 2025/26 lived in major cities (38%), but people from outside major cities drowned at higher rates. Compared with major cities, the crude fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population was 2.2 times higher for people from inner regional areas, 2.8 times higher for those from outer regional areas, and 3.9 times higher for those from remote and very remote areas.

Crude fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population by residence remoteness classification, 2025/26

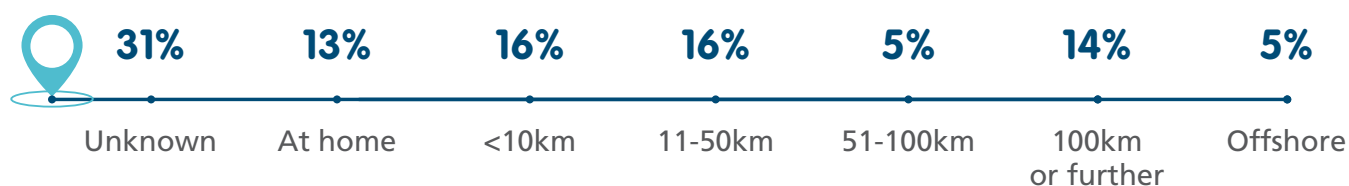
**Note: 2.5% unknown residence remoteness*



> VISITOR STATUS

Most people who drowned were not visitors (29%), that is, they drowned within 10km of where they lived. Visitor status was unavailable for 31% of drowning cases at the time of publication.

2025/26 Drive distance between residence and drowning location



> COUNTRY OF BIRTH

62%

of people who drowned country of birth was known

Of those, 76 people (39%) were born overseas, a 21% decrease from the 10-year average.

The highest number of people who drowned in 2025/26 were born in China, followed by people from the United Kingdom, India, United States of America, New Zealand, and Japan.



China



UK



India



USA



NZ



Japan



➤ SECTION TWO: When and how does drowning happen?



SECTION TWO: When and how does drowning happen?

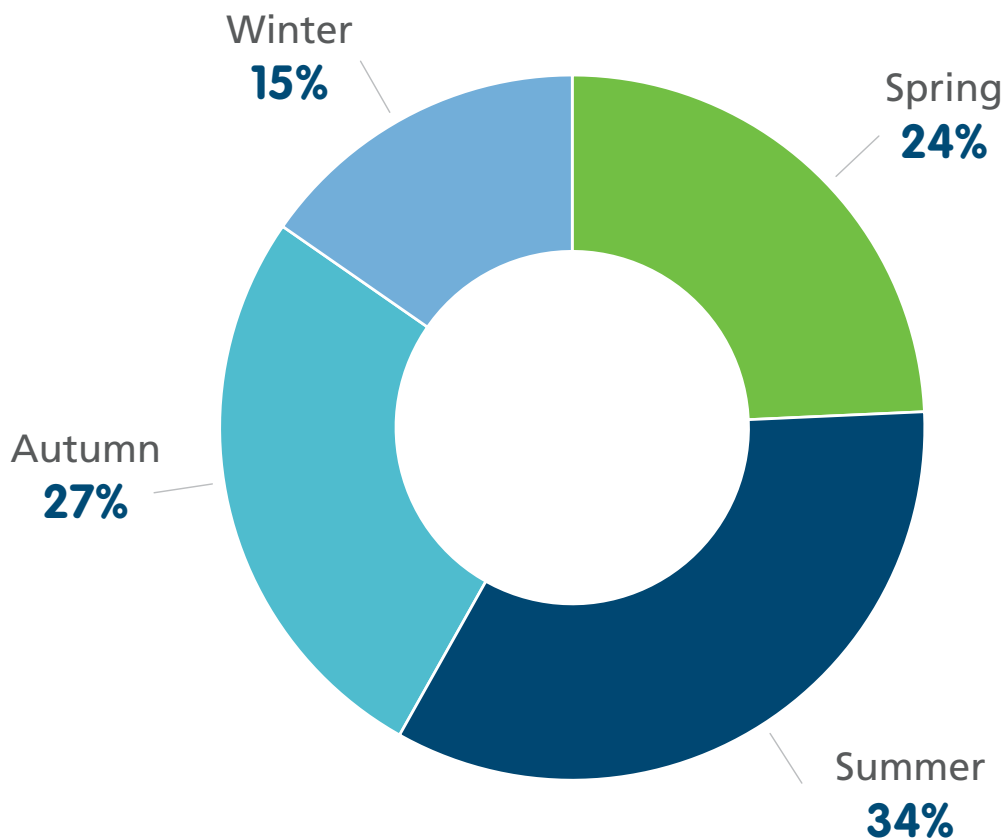
Drowning deaths occurred most frequently during summer, consistent with previous years. However overall peaks in drowning were seen mainly to occur in January (14%), March (12%) and October (12%).

Drowning deaths were distributed evenly across the week, ranging from 11% to 19% of all deaths. Sunday accounted for the highest proportion (19%), while Friday had the lowest (11%).

Compared to the 10-year average, drowning deaths were less concentrated on weekends, with increases in the proportion of drowning deaths occurring from Monday to Thursday, while the proportion occurring from Friday to Saturday decreased.

> SEASON

Percent of 2025/26 drowning deaths by season

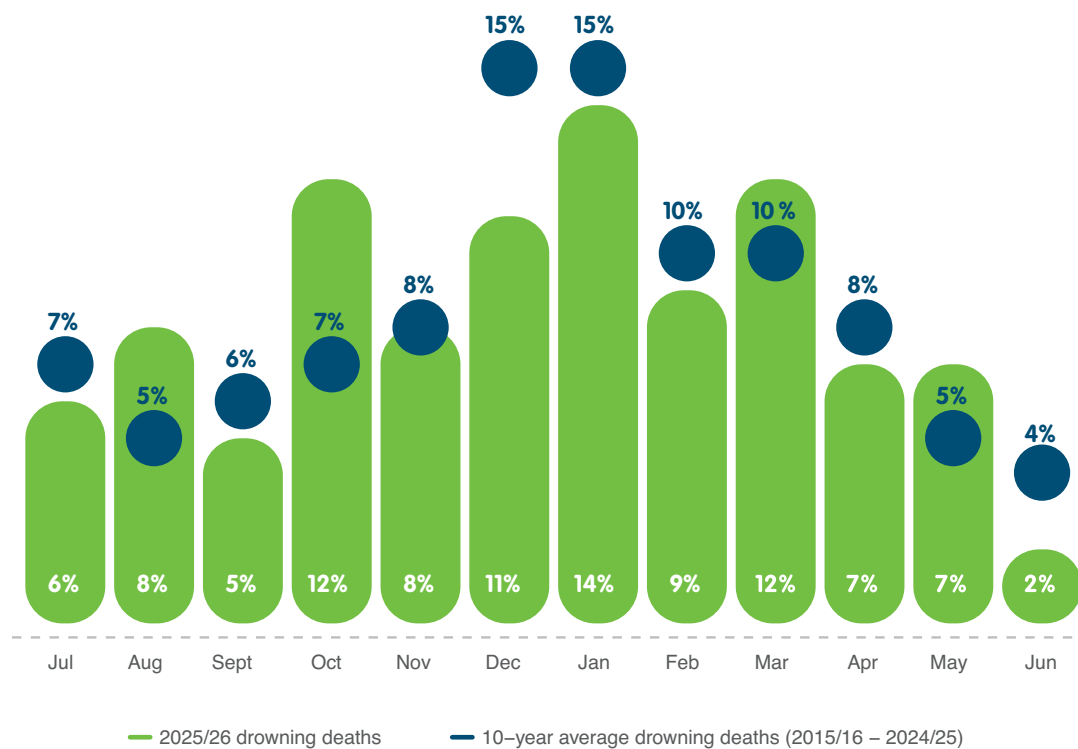


39

DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED
IN THE MONTH OF MARCH,
A **39% INCREASE** ON THE
10-YEAR AVERAGE OF 28.

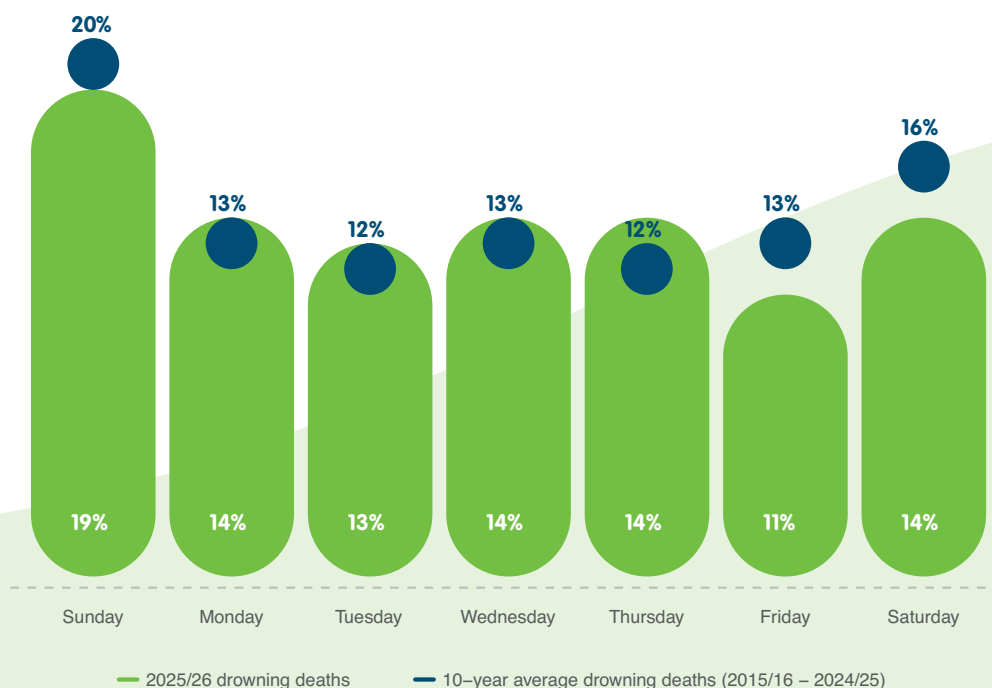
> MONTH

Percent of 2025/26 drowning deaths by month compared to the 10-year average

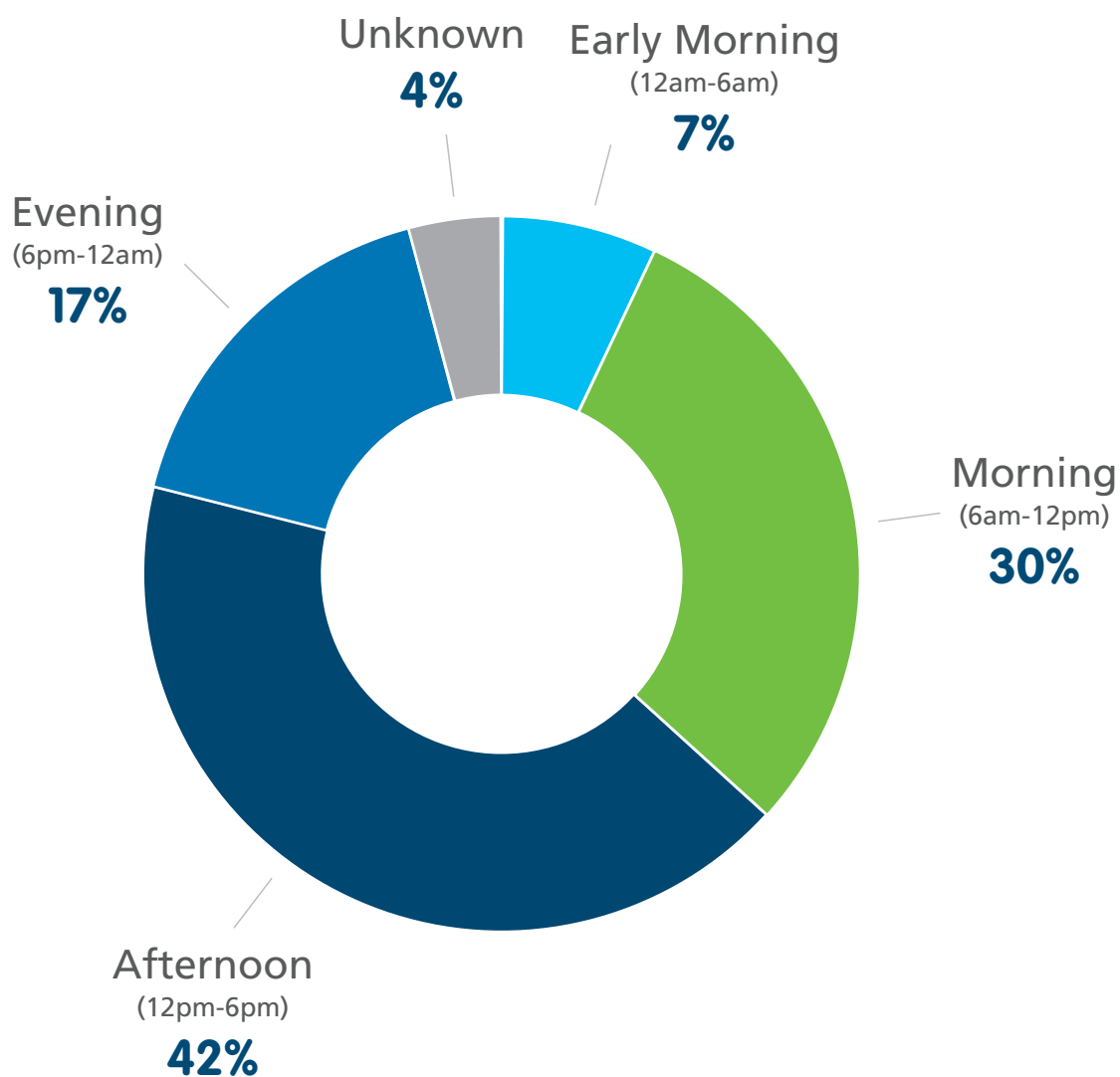


> DAY OF THE WEEK

Percent of 2025/26 drowning deaths by day of the week compared to the 10-year average



2025/26 drowning deaths by time of day



DROWNING DEATHS OCCURRED MOST FREQUENTLY IN THE **AFTERNOON** (12PM TO 6PM), SIMILAR TO PREVIOUS YEARS.

> ACTIVITIES: HOW DOES DROWNING HAPPEN?

Consistent with previous years, swimming and recreating was the leading activity prior to drowning (28%) in 2025/26 for all age groups except for children age 0-4 years.

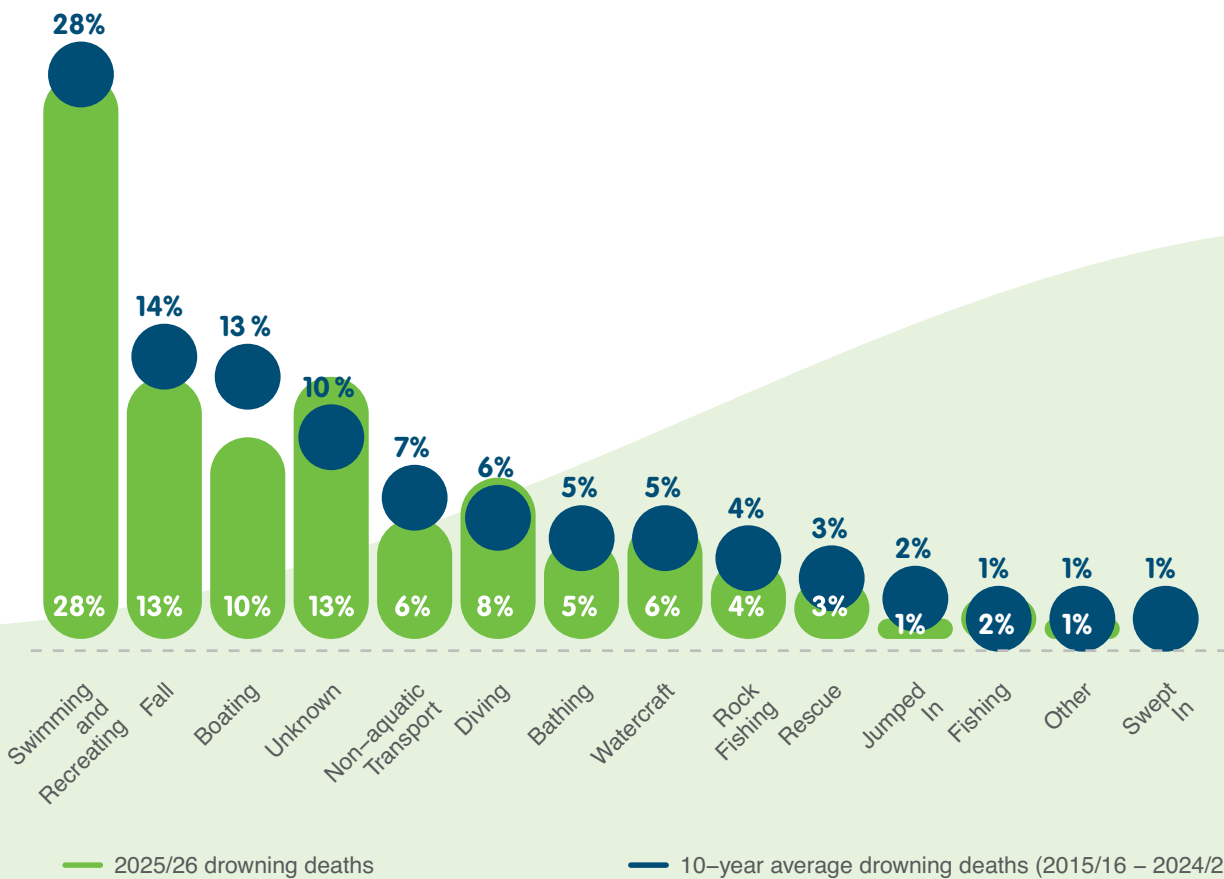
Swimming and water safety skills have been emphasised in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 mid-point review as a national imperative for reducing drowning across all ages. Swimming and water safety skills are an essential measure to preventing drowning, however, ensuring the accessibility of swimming and water safety education programs for all communities is a continued challenge.

Young people and adults need to consider their ability and skills when participating in aquatic activities, and need to be aware of the environments that they are swimming in. Refreshing skills in a pool environment before heading to the open water may be one way to increase awareness of current skills.

Falls into water were the second leading activity prior to drowning (13%), followed by boating (10%). Children 0 - 9 years made up 28% of all fall-related drowning deaths in 2025/26. This reinforces the importance of active supervision around water especially as young children become more mobile. In addition to, barriers preventing access to water such as compliant pool fencing. Of concern, is people aged 65 years and over who also made up 35% of people who drowned from an unintentional fall into water, which may be linked to medical conditions and limited mobility as people age.

Boating was the third leading activity associated with 10% of drowning deaths this year and represented an 11% decrease from the 10-year average. Ten drowning deaths involving boating occurred as part of multiple-fatality incidents. People aged 65+ years accounted for 34% of boating-related drowning deaths. Almost a third (30%) of drowning deaths associated with boating occurred as part of a multiple fatality drowning event.

2025/26 drowning deaths by activity category





> SECTION THREE: Where do people drown?

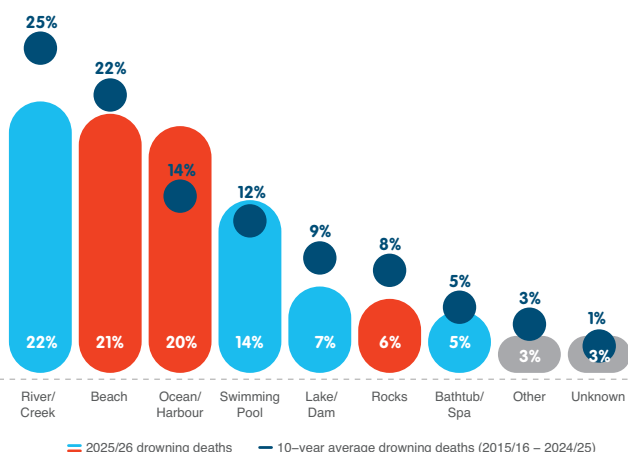


SECTION THREE: Where do people drown?

Understanding where drowning events happen, and who drowns at those locations, is critical for prevention efforts. The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 underscores the need to prioritise high-risk drowning locations and identify specific water safety strategies tailored to each location.

Drowning numbers were found to decrease in all body of water locations this year, except for ocean/harbours (55% increase from the 10-year average), beaches (5% increase from the 10-year average) and swimming pools (33% increase from the 10-year average). The highest number of drowning deaths in 2025/26 occurred at river/creek (22%) followed by beaches with 21% of cases.

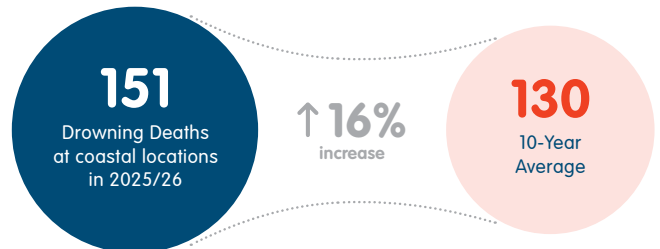
Percent of 2025/26 drowning deaths by location compared to the 10-year average



COASTAL LOCATIONS

*Includes beaches, ocean/harbour, rocks, and coastal rock pools

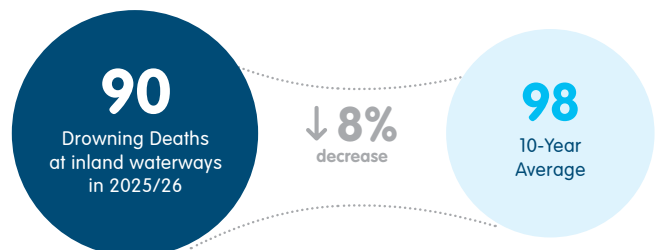
48% of 2025/26 Drowning Deaths



INLAND WATERWAYS

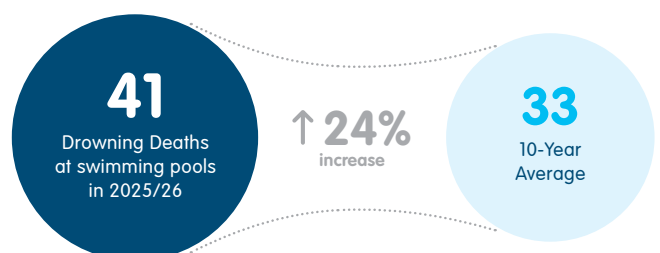
*Includes rivers/creeks and lakes/dams

29% of 2025/26 Drowning Deaths



SWIMMING POOLS

13% of 2025/26 Drowning Deaths



KEY 2025/26 INSIGHTS: COASTAL DROWNING

89%

of coastal drowning deaths were male

19%

were adults aged 45-54 years

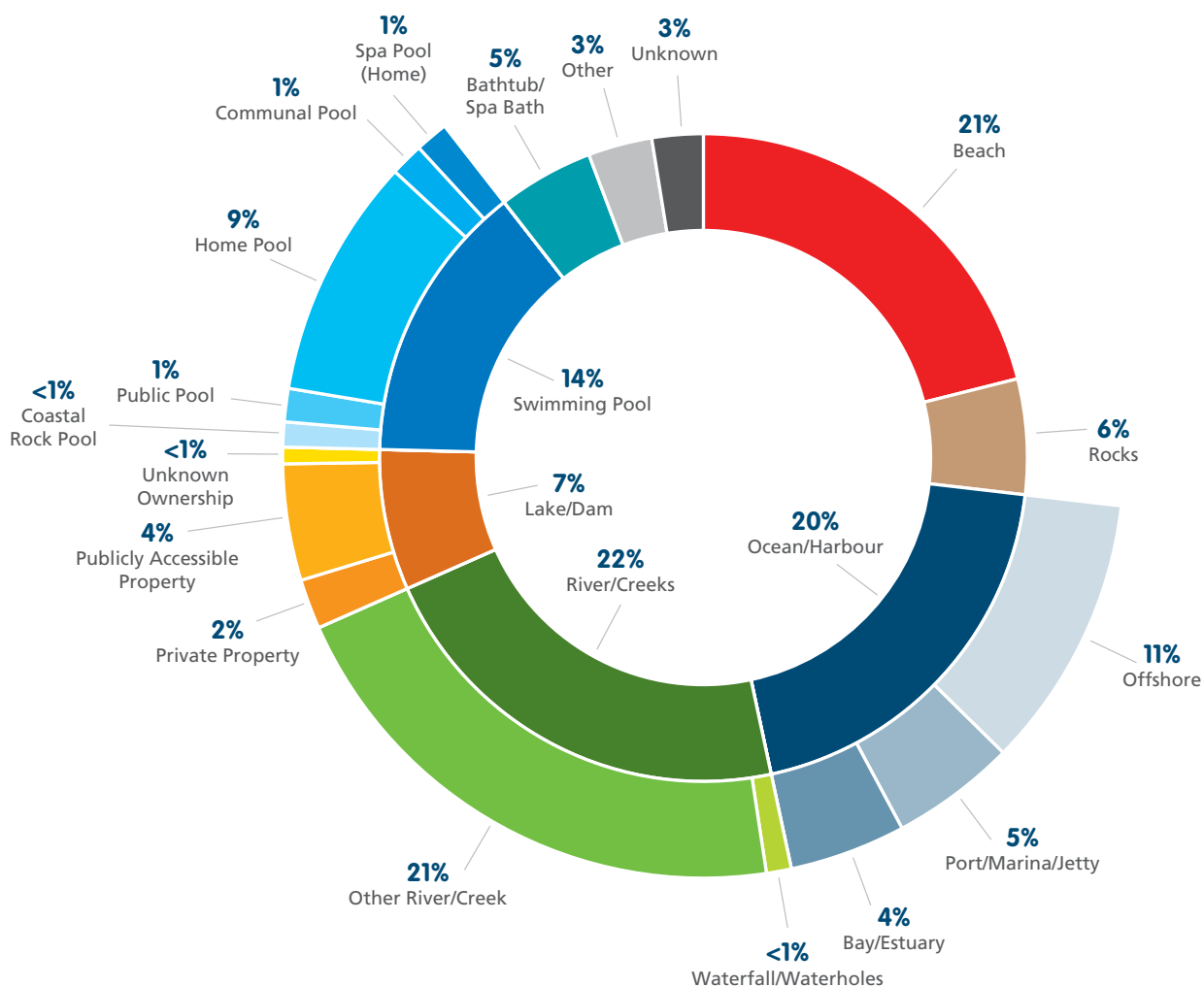
38%

occurred during summer

65%

more than 1km from SLS service

Drowning location breakdown by body of water



KEY 2025/26 INSIGHTS: INLAND DROWNING

86%

of inland drowning deaths were male

18%

were adults aged 20-29 years

34%

occurred during summer

25%

more than 100km from home

> BEACHES

21%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT BEACHES

66

Drowning Deaths
in 2025/26

↑ 5%
increase

63

10-Year
Average



This year, beaches recorded 66 drowning deaths, a 19% decrease from last year and a 5% increase from the 10-year average. Eighty per cent were male, and 21% were aged between 45-54 years. People born overseas represented 39% of beach drowning deaths.

Rip currents are known to have contributed to 47% of beach drowning deaths, but could be higher with rip involvement unknown for 15% of cases.

January reported the highest number of beach drowning deaths (21%), which was 4% above average. This year, drowning at beaches most frequently occurred on a Wednesday (21%). Over half (61%) of beach drowning deaths occurred in the afternoon (12pm to 6pm).

Beach drowning deaths most frequently occurred in a major city (51%) and over a 100km drive from home (17%), indicating that people are travelling further to beaches and to highly populated areas.

This year, those who drowned at beaches were evenly distributed across all areas of socio-economic advantage / disadvantage.

80%

Male



38%

Summer



39%

Born overseas



14%

Alcohol & drugs



58%

>1km from
SLS service

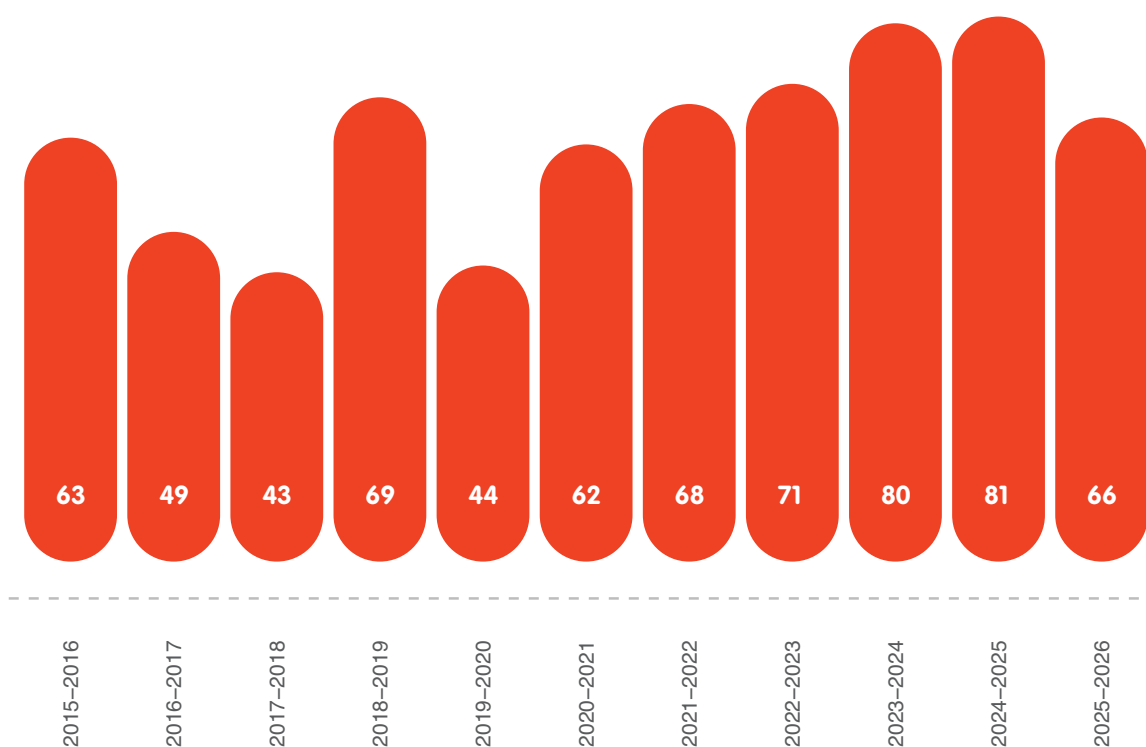


47%

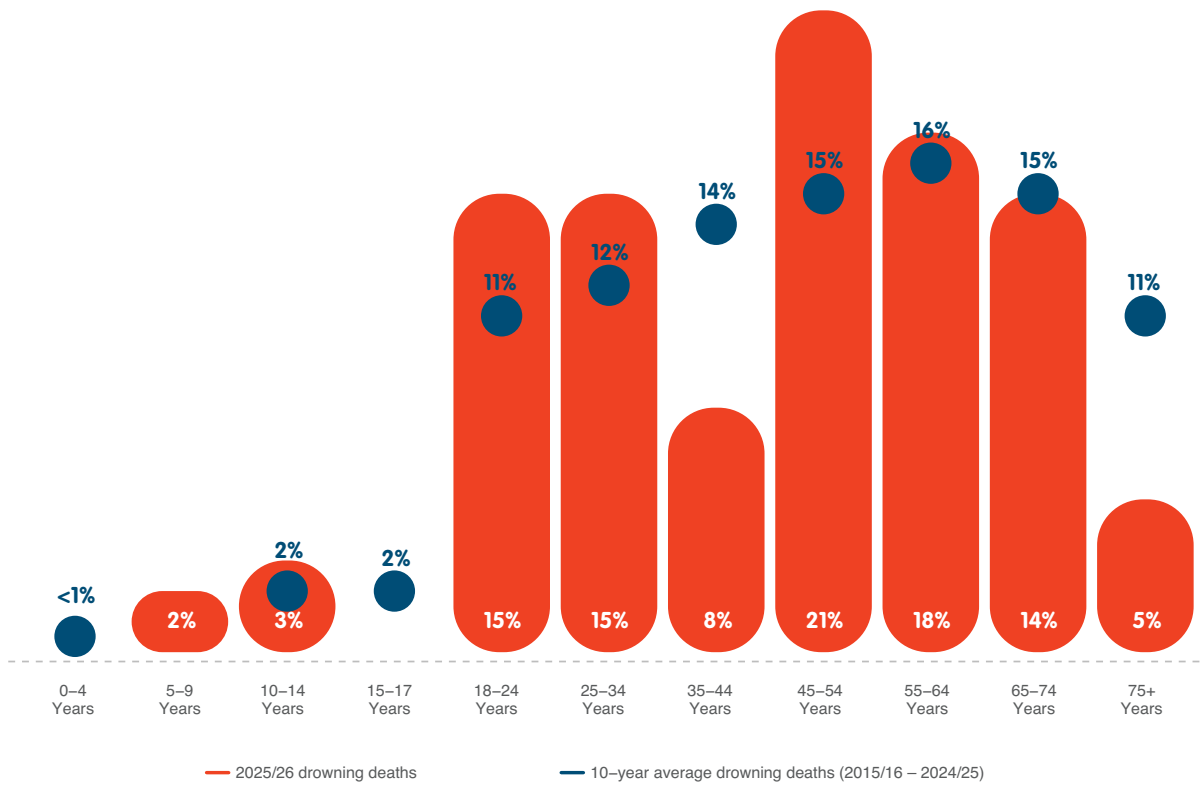
Rip current
-related



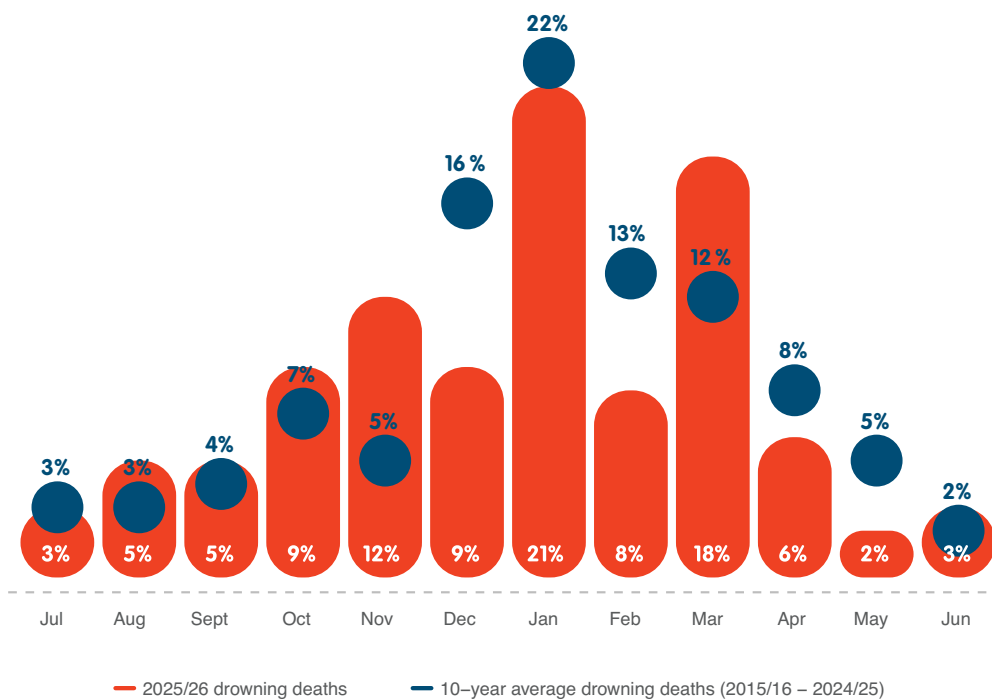
Drowning deaths at beaches by financial year



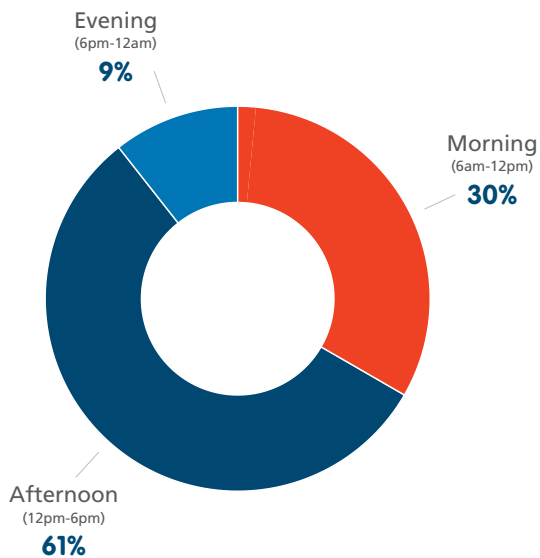
Drowning deaths at beaches by age group, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at beaches by month, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at beaches by time of day, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at beaches by activity (top 5), 2025/26

52% Swimming and recreating



14% Watercraft



14% Diving/Snorkelling



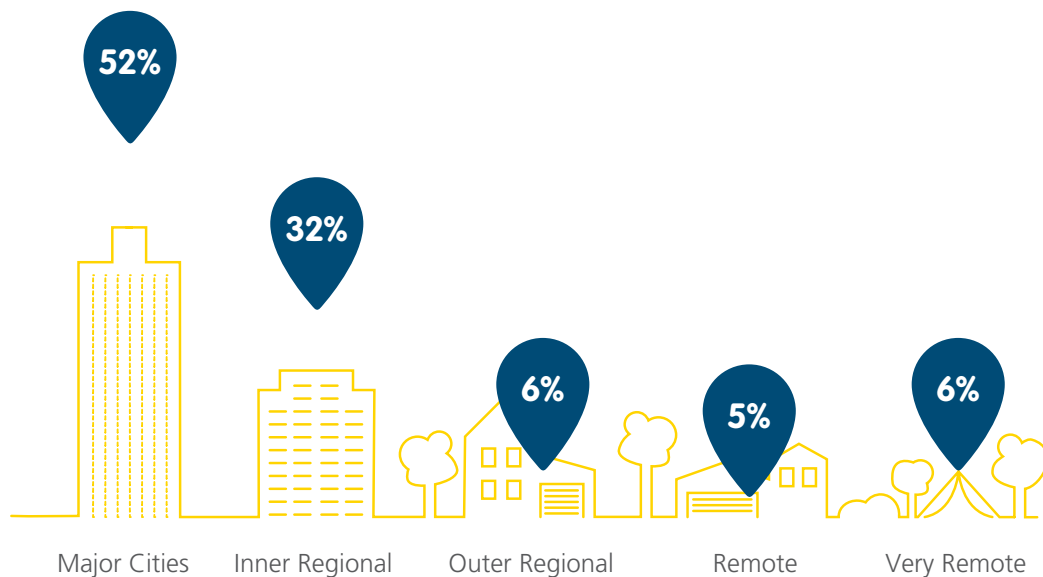
5% Attempted rescue



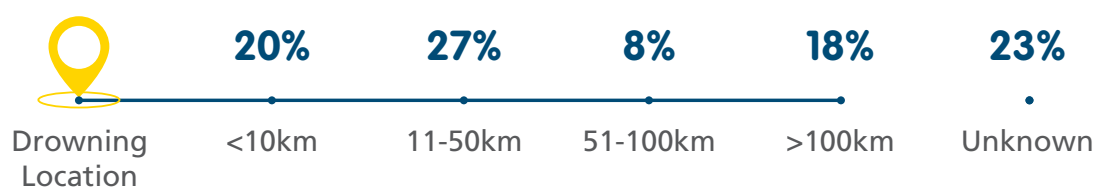
5% Fishing



Remoteness classification of beach drowning locations, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and beach drowning location, 2025/26



> OCEAN/HARBOUR

20%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT OCEAN/HARBOURS

62

Drowning Deaths
in 2025/26

↑ 55%
increase

40

10-Year
Average

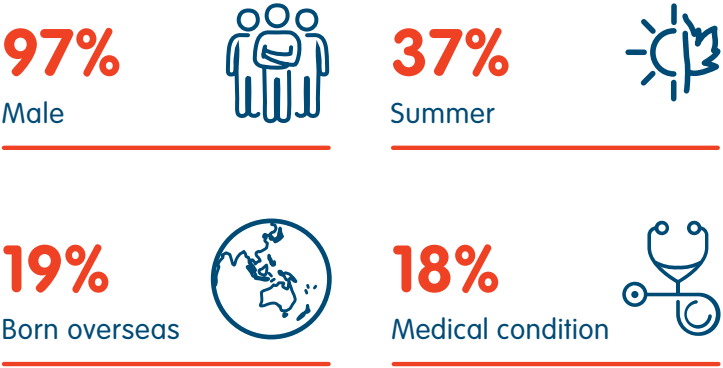


Ocean and harbour locations encompass various coastal waterways including bays, offshore water, ports, marinas and jetties. Each enable a variety of recreation options and carry their own unique risk and prevention profiles.

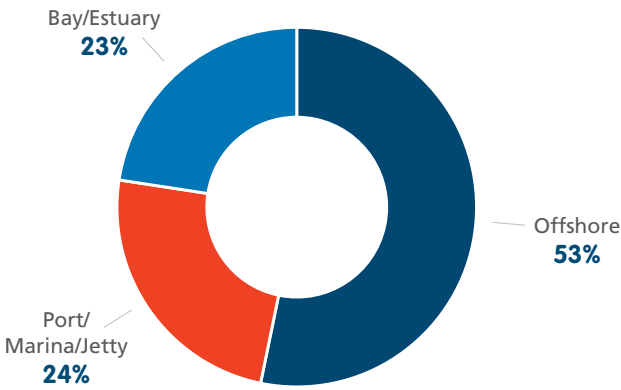
There were 62 drowning deaths that occurred at ocean/harbour, a 59% increase from last year, and 55% increase from the 10-year average. The leading activity prior to drowning was boating (47%) followed by diving (21%). Over a third of all drowning deaths in ocean/harbour locations were of people aged 65+ years (39%).

The drowning deaths that occurred in ocean/harbour category were most frequently near major cities (31%), during summer (37%) and autumn (32%), and occurred in the afternoon (12:00 pm to 6:00 pm) (34%). The number of ocean/harbour drowning deaths was highest in the month of December (n=10, 16%, 100% increase from the 10-year December average).

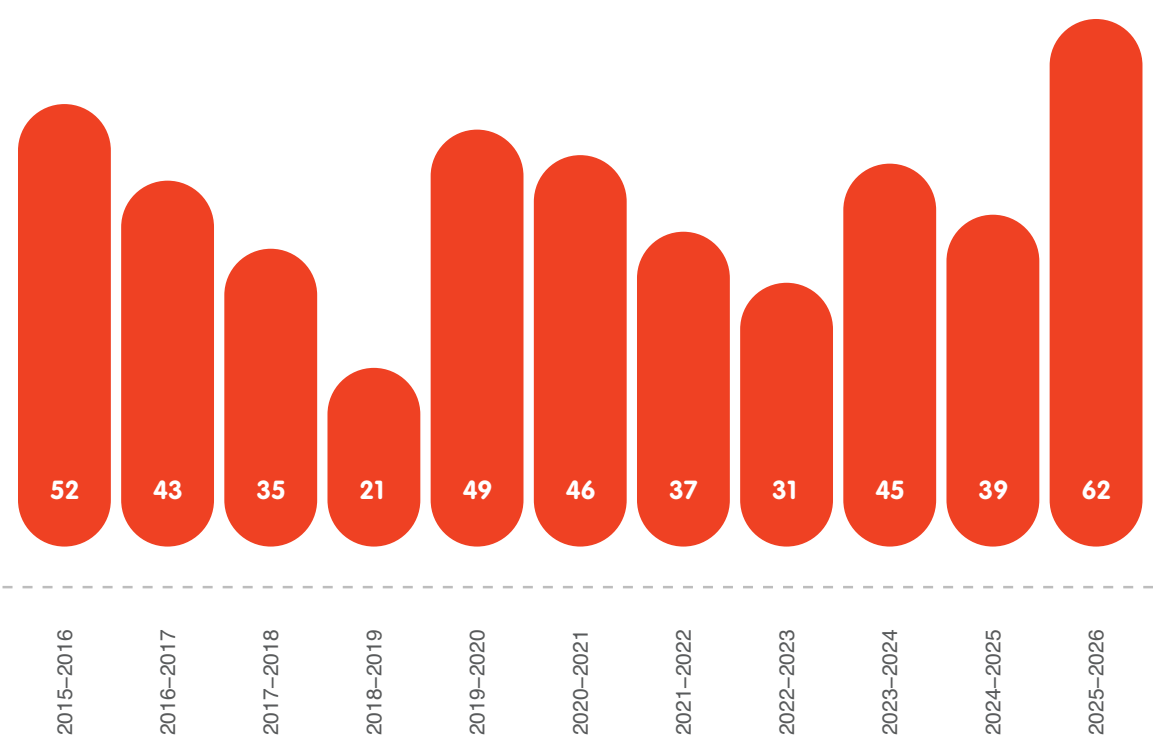
Those who drowned at ocean/harbour locations tended to come from disadvantaged areas: 13% of ocean/harbour related drowning cases involved people who resided in locations with IRSAD Decile scores 1 or 2, compared to 8% of people who resided in areas with IRSAD Decile scores 9 or 10.



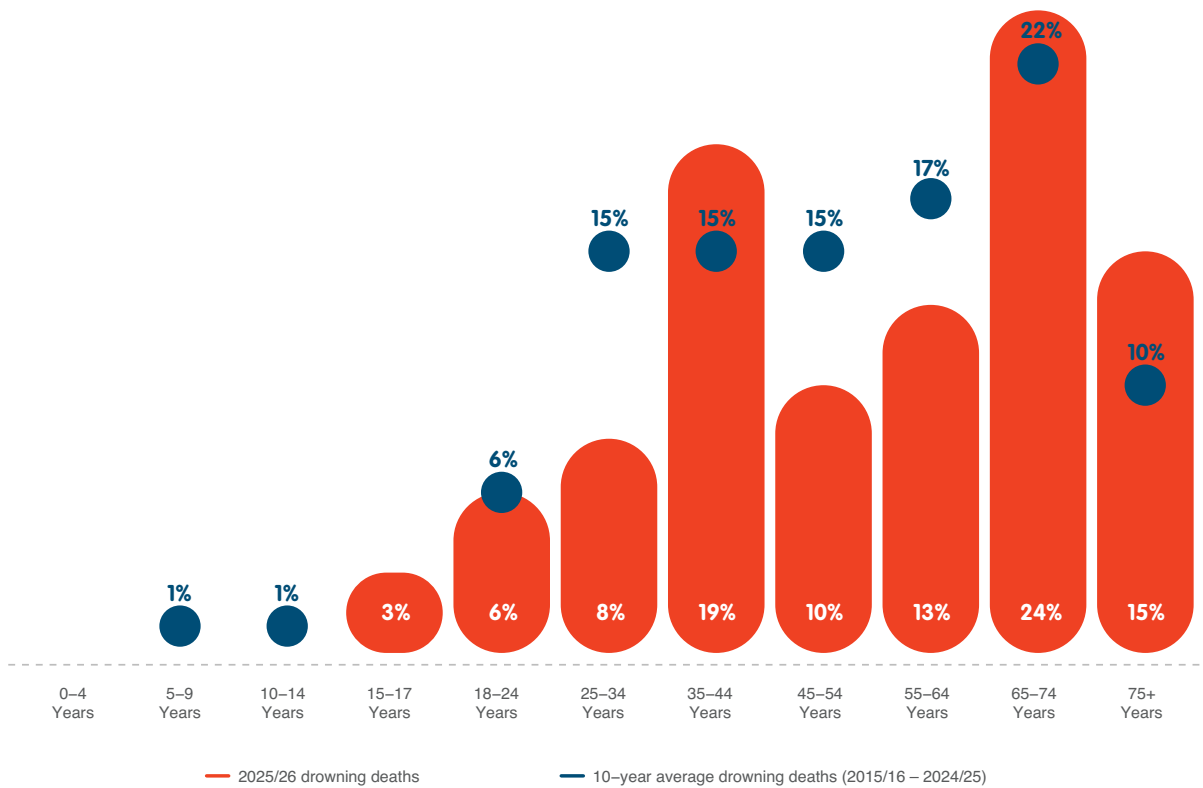
Proportion of drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations, 2025/26



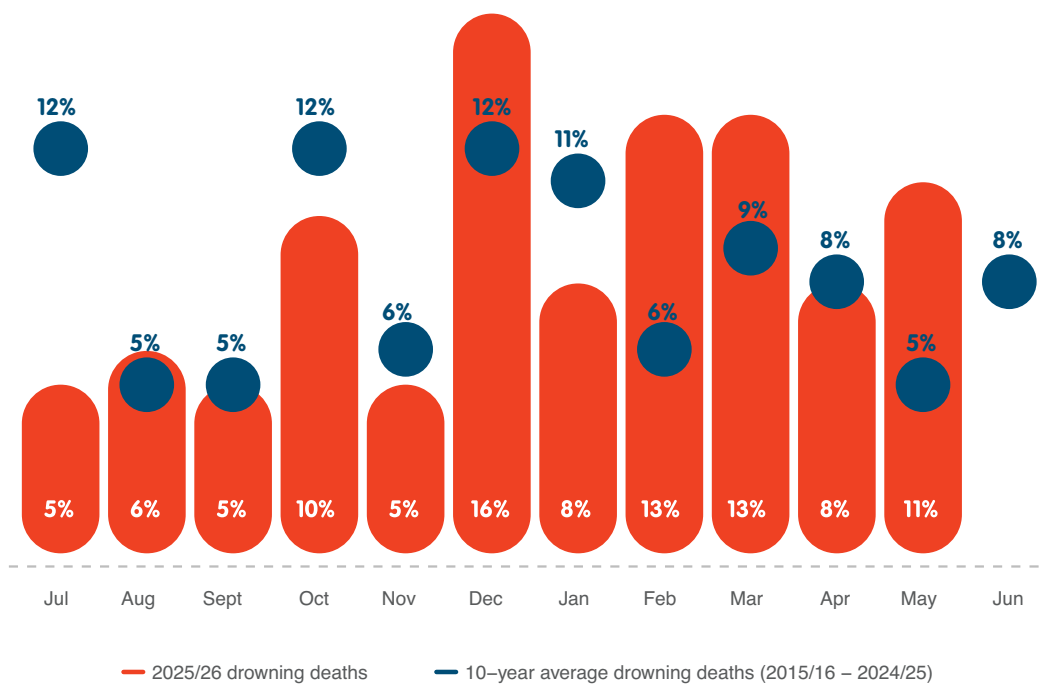
Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour by financial year



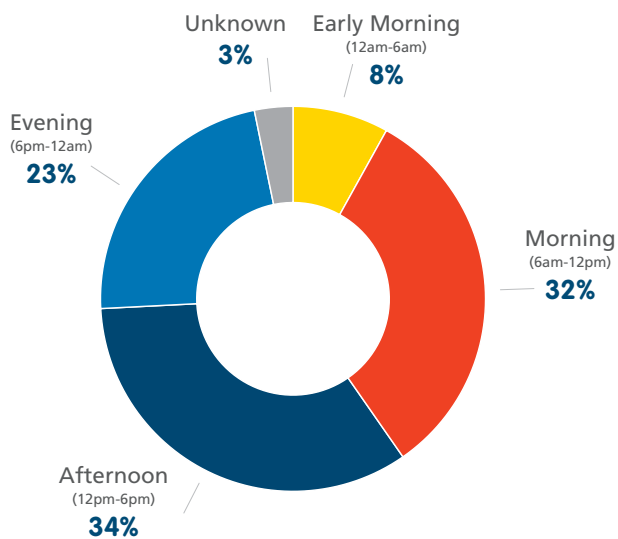
Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations by age group, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations by month, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations
by time of day, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at ocean/harbour locations
by activity (top 5), 2025/26

47% Boating



21% Diving/Snorkelling



6% Unintentional fall into water



5% Attempted rescue

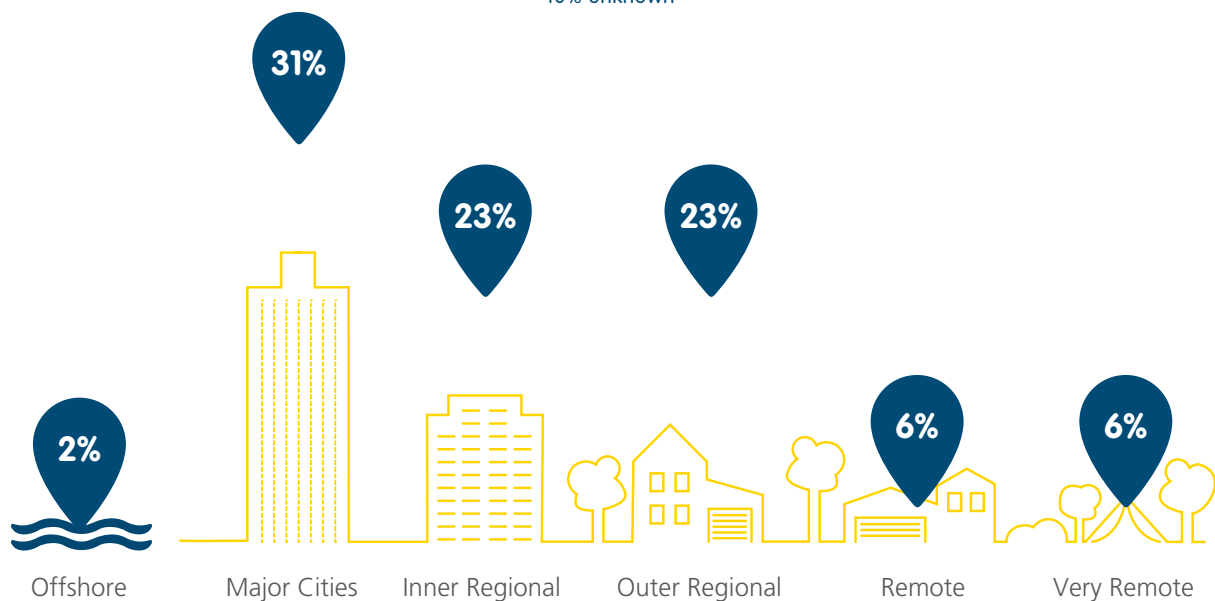


8% Unknown

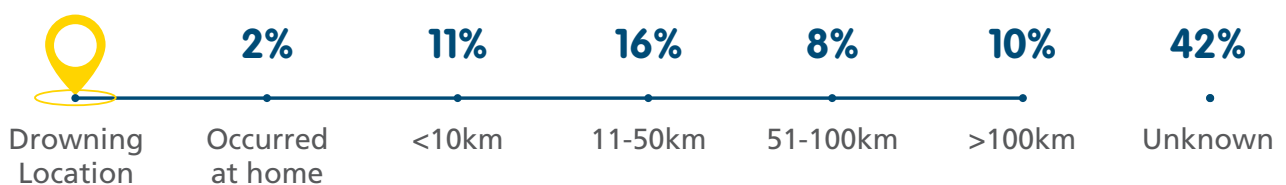


Remoteness classification of ocean/harbour drowning locations, 2025/26

*10% unknown



Drive distance between residence and ocean / harbour drowning location 2025/26



6%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT ROCKS

18

Drowning Deaths
in 2025/26

↓ 22%
decrease

23

10-Year
Average



Rock locations include rocky land formations and cliffs. These locations present environmental challenges that can pose risks when not prepared for the conditions, or when not wearing appropriate safety equipment such as a lifejacket.

In 2025/26, drowning deaths that occurred at rock locations represented 6% of all drowning deaths, a 42% decrease from last year, and a 22% decrease from the 10-year average.

Rock fishing was the leading activity prior to drowning (67%) followed by an unintentional fall (11%) by a wave overtopping the rocks. Unlike other locations, drowning fatalities most frequently occurred in autumn (50%), and mostly on weekend days (Saturday and Monday; 28% each). Most drowning deaths occurred in regional areas (44%) and major cities (39%), where people would drive more than 50km from their home (50%). Those confirmed born overseas represented 44% of drowning cases at rocks and the highest age group was between 45-54-years (39%).

Education, awareness and legislative approaches that promote positive behaviour changes where lifejacket usage increases, are important to decrease drowning rates at rock locations.

94%

Male



50%

Autumn



44%

Born overseas

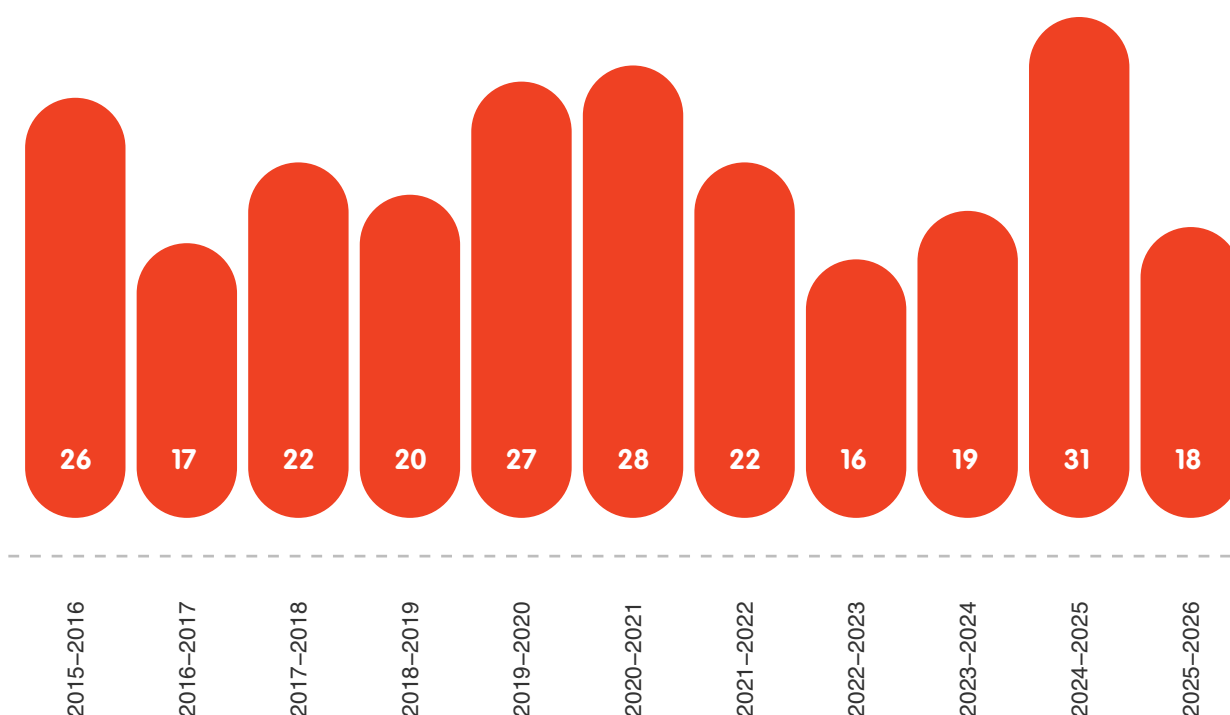


44%

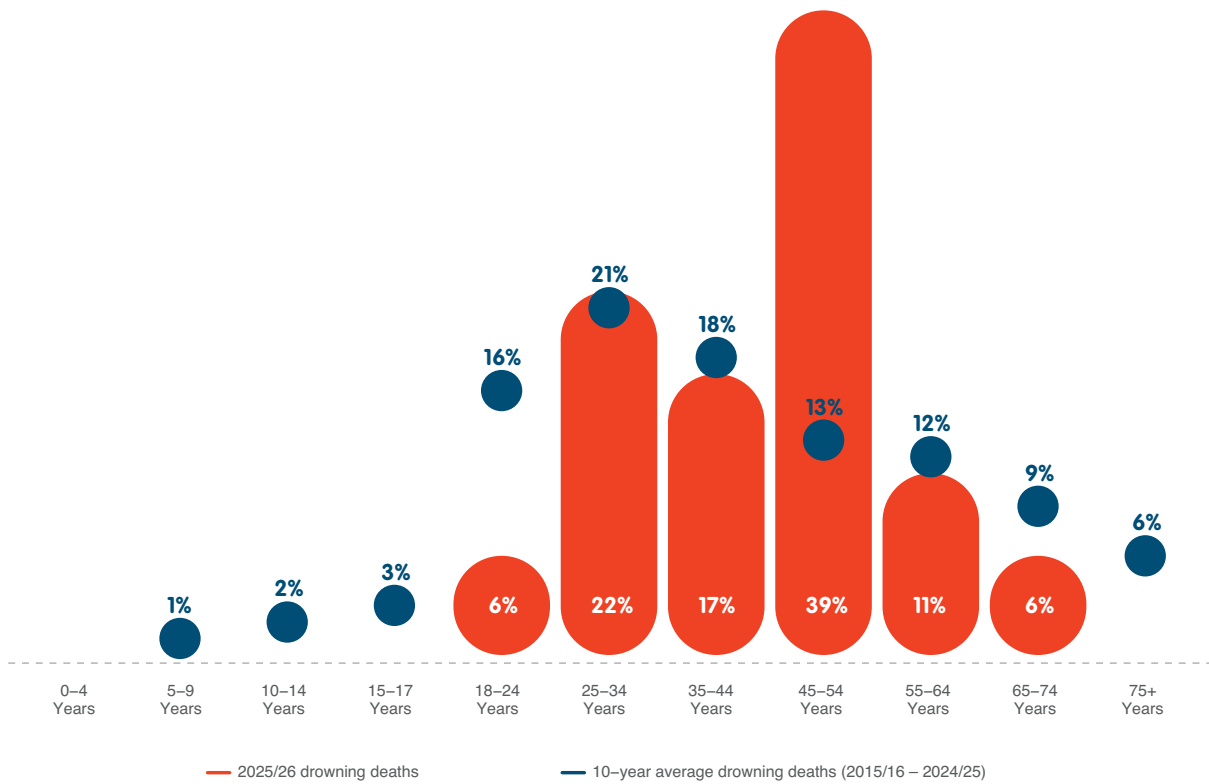
Washed in by waves



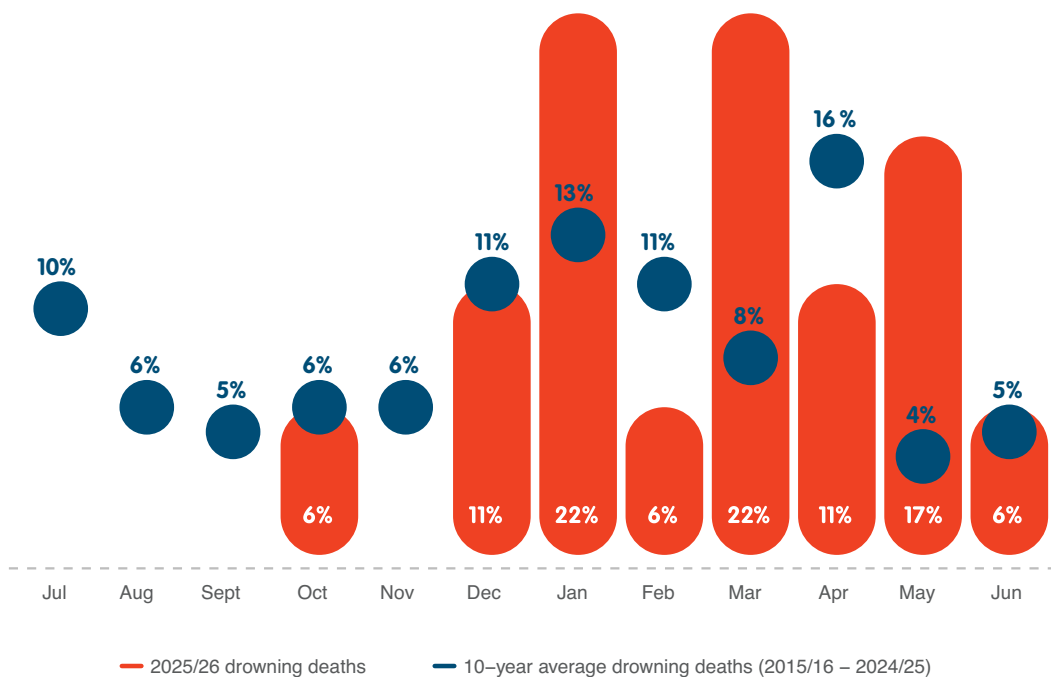
Drowning deaths at rocks by financial year



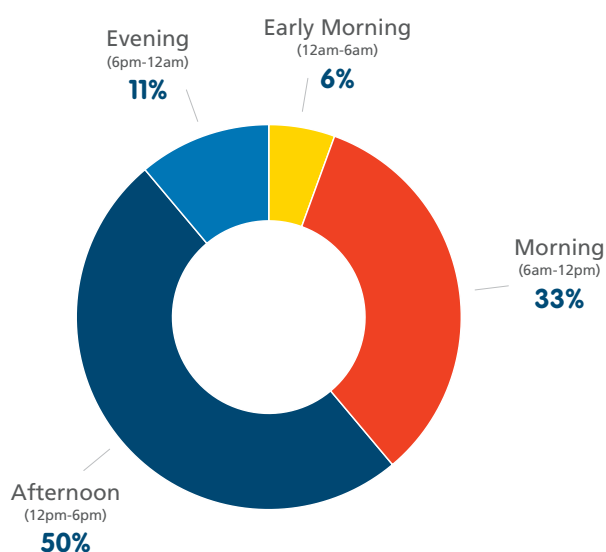
Drowning deaths at rocks by age group, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at rocks by month, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at rocks by time of day, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at rocks by activity (top 5), 2025/26

67% Rock fishing



11% Unintentional fall into water



6% Swept in



6% Diving/Snorkelling



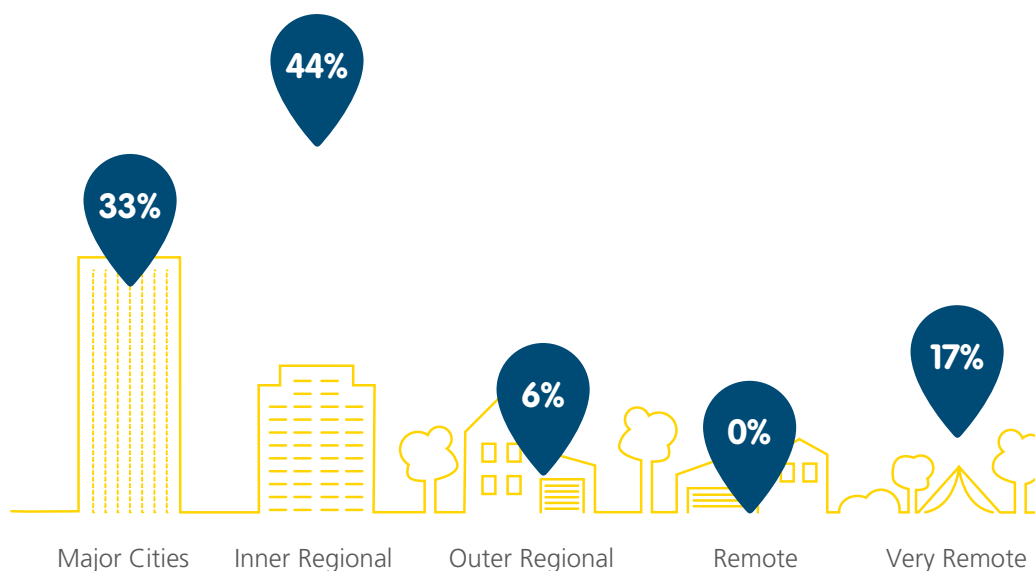
6% Boating



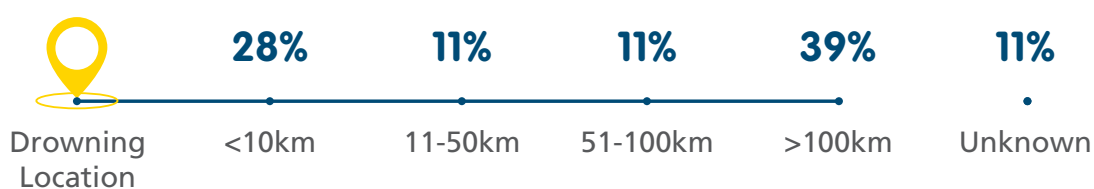
6% Unknown



Remoteness classification of rocks drowning locations, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and rocks drowning location 2025/26

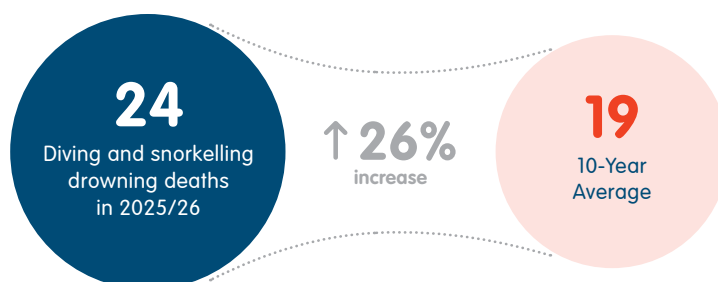


> RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: 5-Year Analysis Diving and Snorkelling

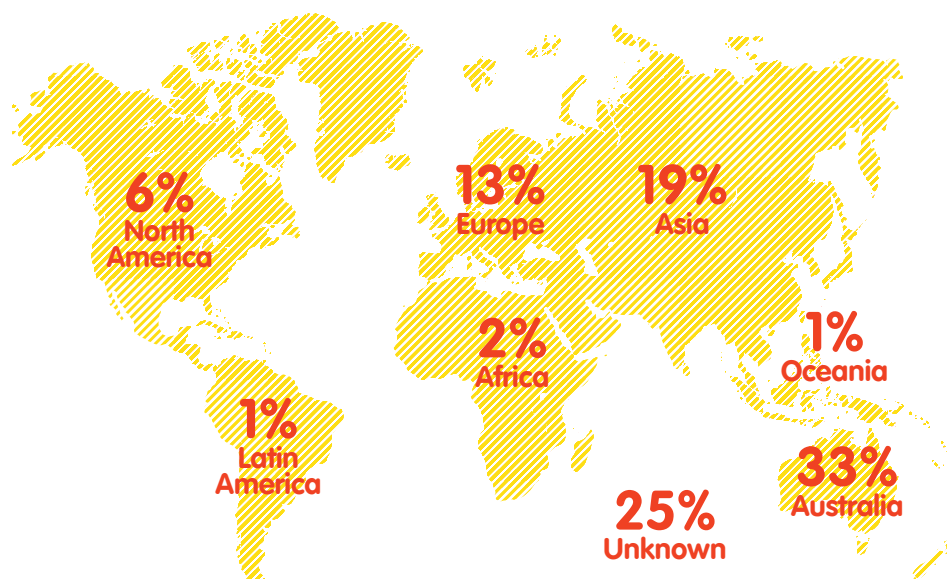
Diving and snorkelling are popular activities commonly used to explore and enjoy our beautiful waterways. Unfortunately, being situated in and under the water means that when unexpected incidents occur, assistance is often some distance away which can lead to loss of life.

Since 2021, 107 diving and snorkelling drowning deaths have been recorded accounting for 6% of the national drowning burden. Snorkelling comprised 71% of incidents, of which 15% involved freediving. Twenty four percent of divers were using SCUBA and 5% surface-supplied breathing apparatus. Twenty two percent of all divers and snorkellers were spearfishing or gathering seafood when they drowned.

Queensland (26%) and Western Australia (25%) recorded the highest diving and snorkelling burden, with 15% occurring on the Great Barrier Reef. Most diving and snorkelling incidents occur away from lifesaving services (75%). Older participants aged 55+ years (53%) or those with pre-existing cardiac conditions (26%) were highlighted as high-risk groups.



Diving and snorkelling drowning deaths by birth continent, 2021/22-2025/26



Top 5 countries of birth



33% Australia



8% China



6% America

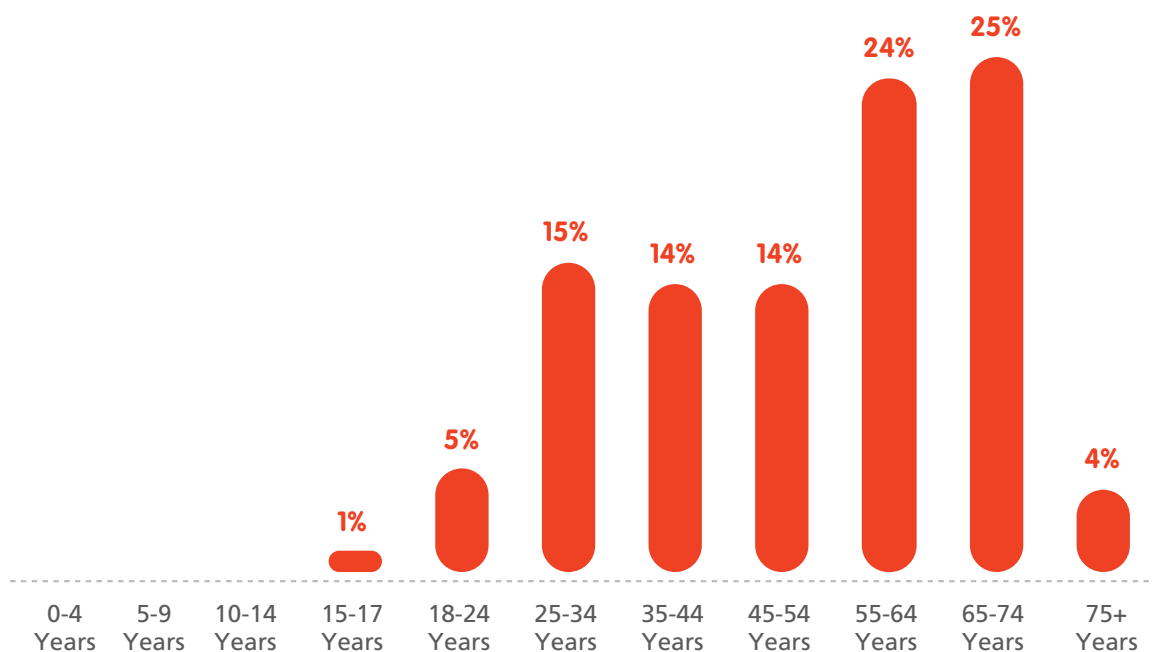


4% United Kingdom

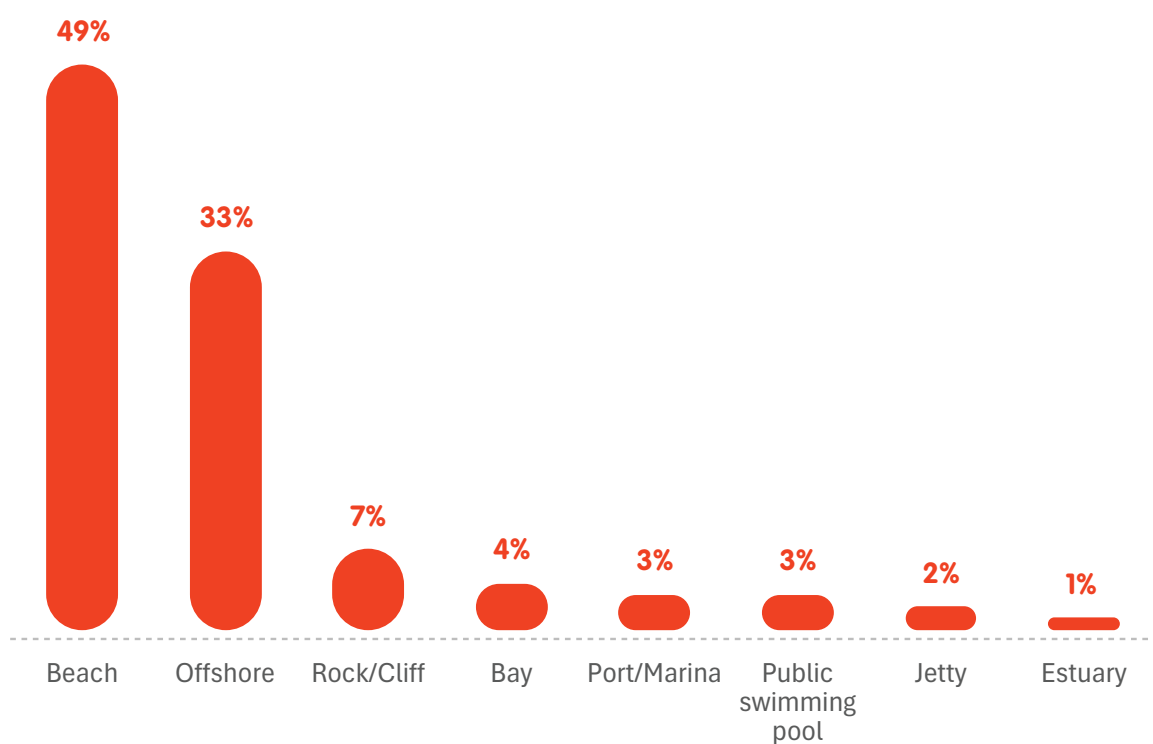


3% South Korea

Diving and snorkelling drowning deaths by age group, 2021/22-2025/26



Diving and snorkelling drowning deaths by water body type, 2021/22-2025/26



22%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT RIVER/CREEK

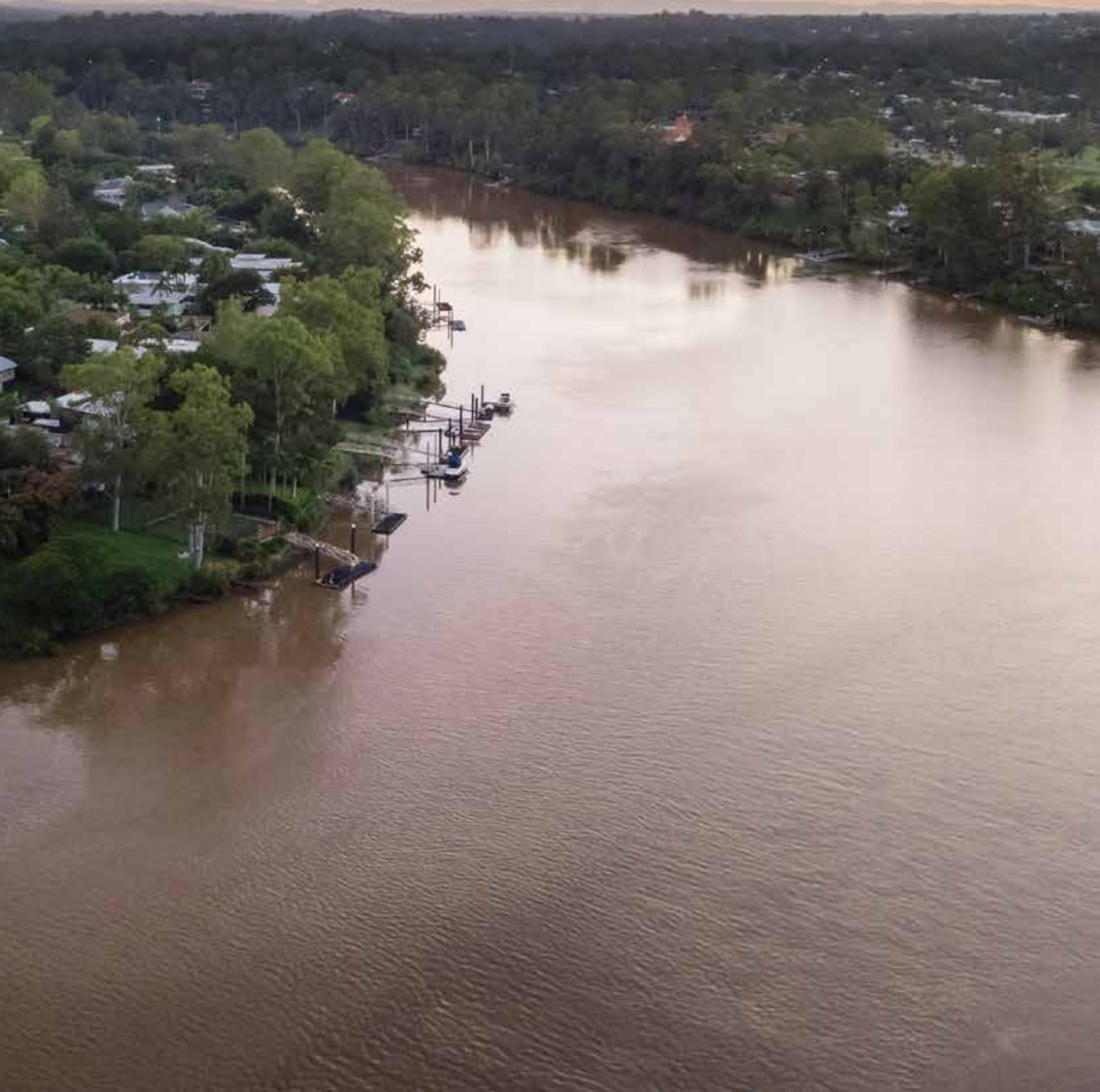
68

Drowning Deaths
in 2025/26

↓ 7%
decrease

73

10-Year
Average



Rivers/creeks were the leading drowning location this financial year (2025/26), representing 22% of drowning deaths; a 33% decrease from last year and a 7% decrease from the 10-year average. Men continue to account for the majority of drowning deaths at rivers/creeks, 84% this financial year.

Drowning deaths were the highest in the 65-74-year age group (19%) followed by 25-34-years (16%). Most (67%) river/creek drowning deaths occurred in regional or remote locations, and in 28% of deaths, the person travelled more than 50km from their home residence. However, 18% occurred less than 10km from their home.

Almost a third of drowning deaths at rivers/creeks occurred in the summer (29%) and either occurred on a Wednesday (19%), Sunday (16%), Monday (15%) or Thursday (15%), the highest month of drowning at river/creek was in the month of January (13%).

Compared to other bodies of water, those who drowned at rivers/creeks tended to come from disadvantaged areas: 32% of people who drowned in a river/creek related drowning cases resided in IRSAD Decile 1-2 locations, compared to 4% of people who lived in Decile 9 -10 locations.

84%

Male



29%

Summer



24%

Born overseas

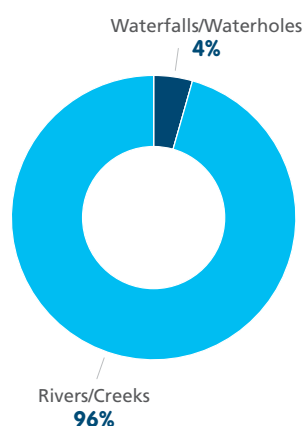


19%

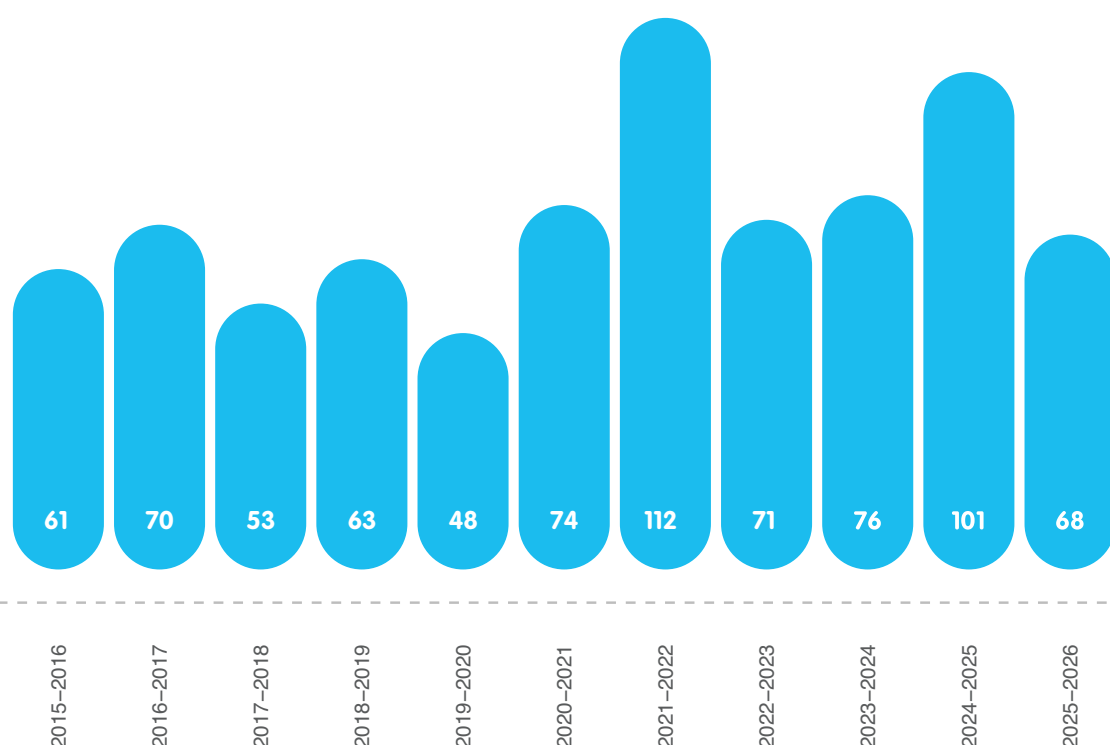
Alcohol involved



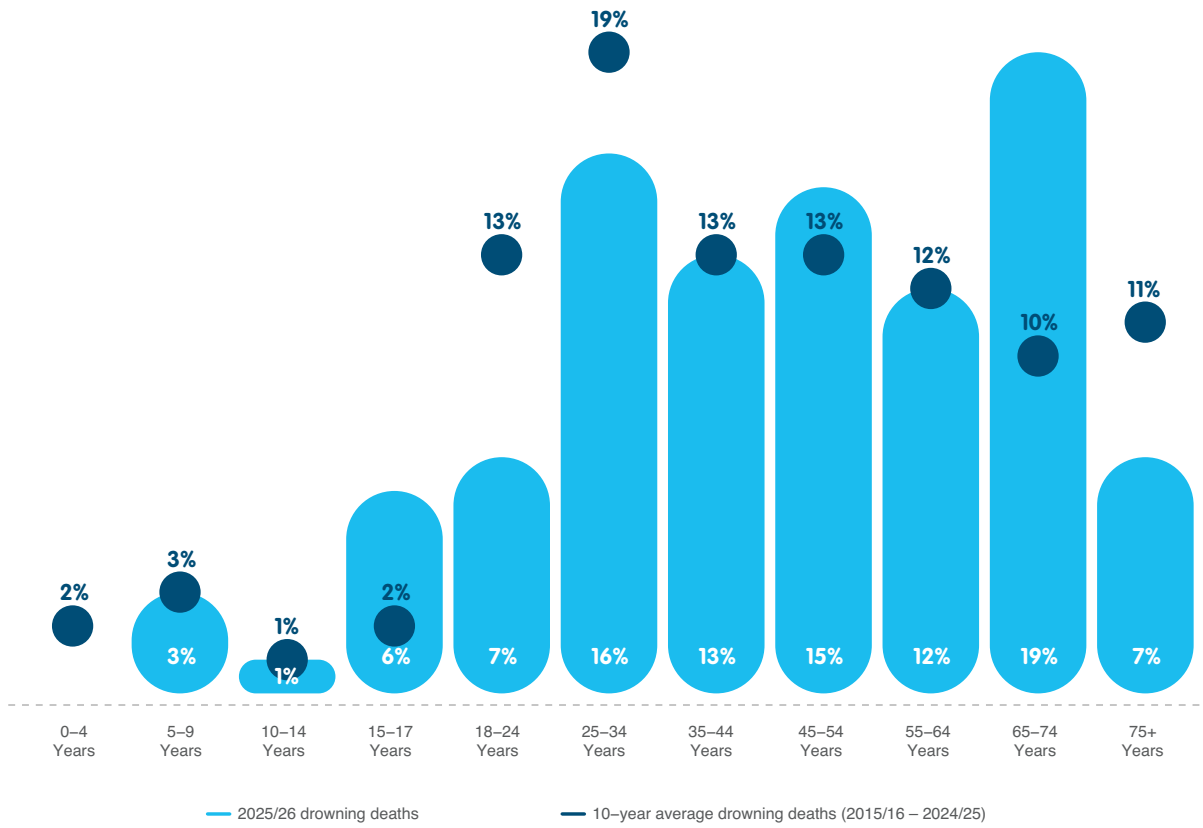
Proportion of drowning deaths at river/creek locations, 2025/26



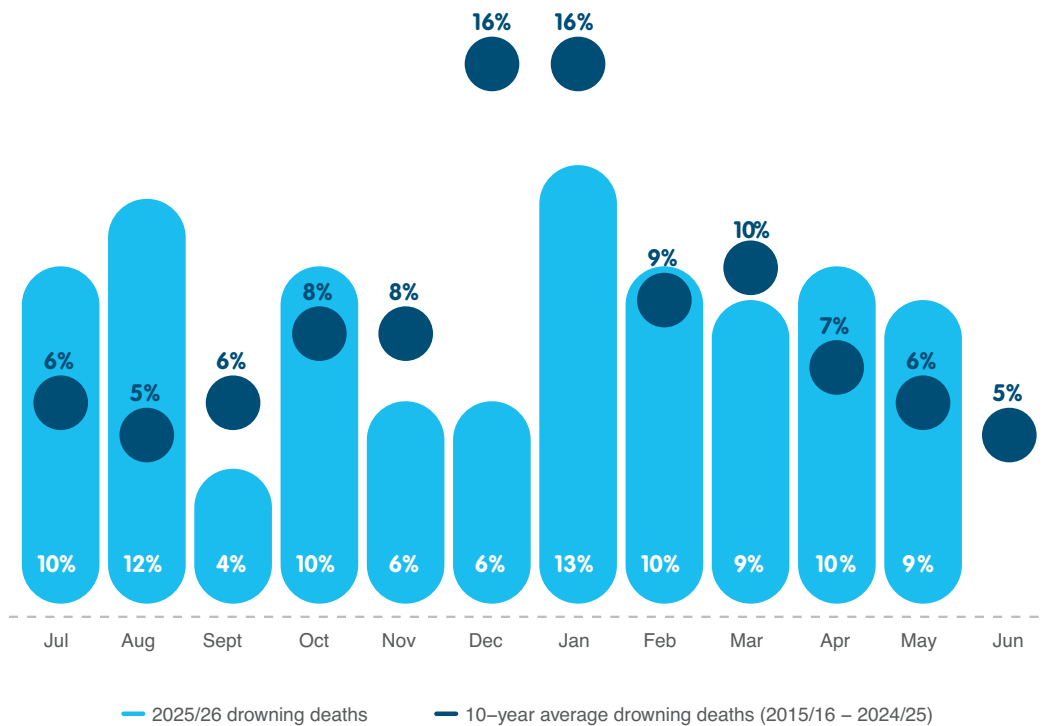
Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by financial year



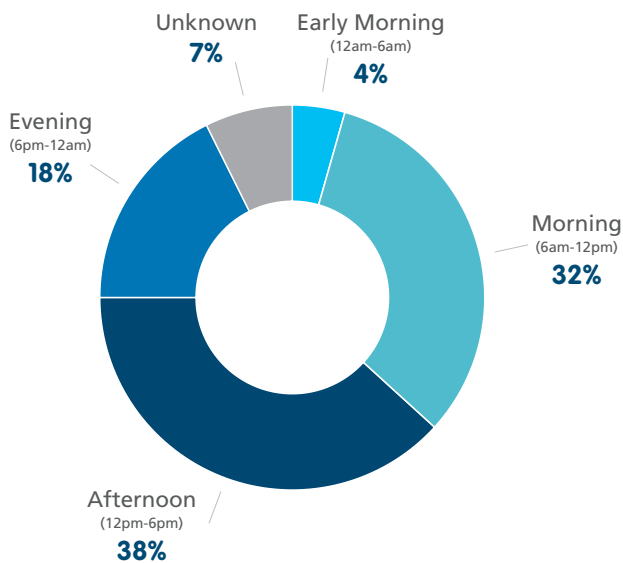
Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by age group, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by month, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by time of day, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at rivers/creeks by activity (top 5), 2025/26

26% Swimming and recreating



21% Non-aquatic transport



13% Unintentional fall into water



7% Watercraft



4% Attempted rescue

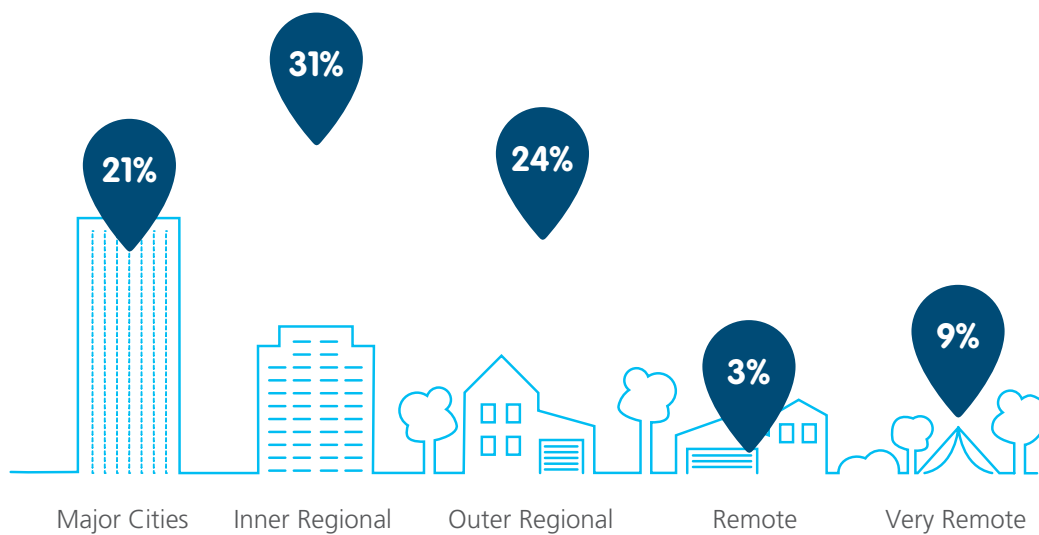


19% Unknown

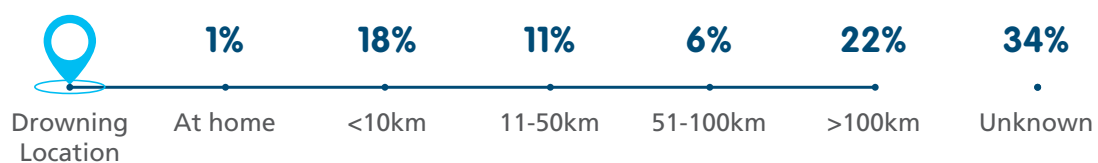


Remoteness classification of rivers/creeks drowning locations, 2025/26

13% unknown



Drive distance between residence and rivers/creeks drowning location, 2025/26



> LAKES/DAMS

7%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT LAKES/DAMS

22

Drowning Deaths
in 2025/26

↓ 12%
decrease

25

10-Year
Average



Lakes/dams represented 7% of drowning deaths this financial year (2025/26); a 4% decrease from last year, and a 12% decrease from the 10-year average. Most drowning deaths at lakes/dams occurred among two age groups: young adults aged 15-24-years (27%) and older adults aged 65+-years (23%).

The leading activity prior to drowning at lakes/dams was swimming and recreating (36%) followed by an unintentional fall into water (23%). The highest number of drowning deaths occurred in the summer (50%), occurring in the month of February (23%), followed by January (18%).

Almost a third of drowning deaths at lakes/dams occurred either at home or close to home (0-5km from home) (32%), although 9% travelled 100km or further from their home to the lake/dam location; 63% of drowning deaths occurred in regional areas.

91%

Male



50%

Summer



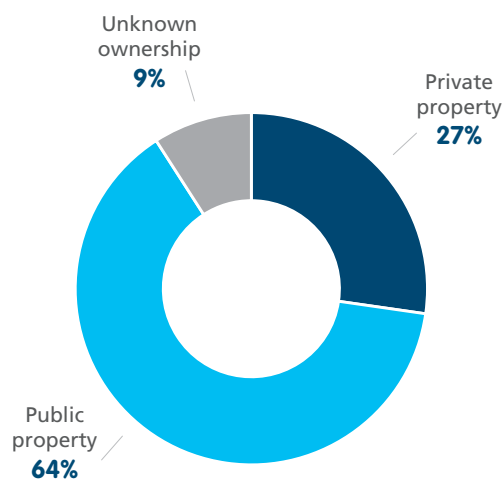
14%

Born overseas

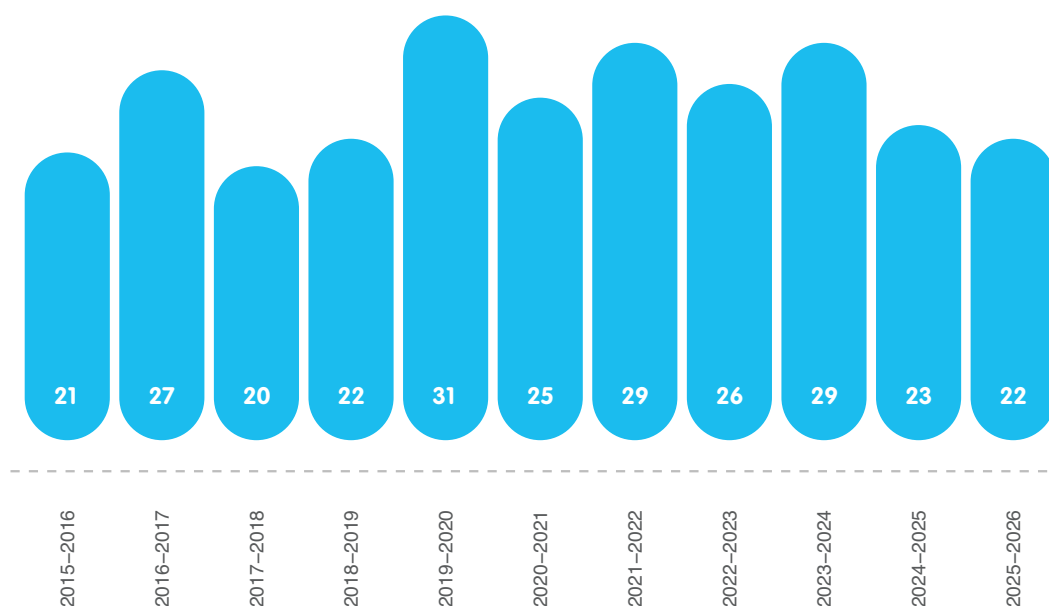


Drugs including prescription medications were reported in **23%** of drowning cases

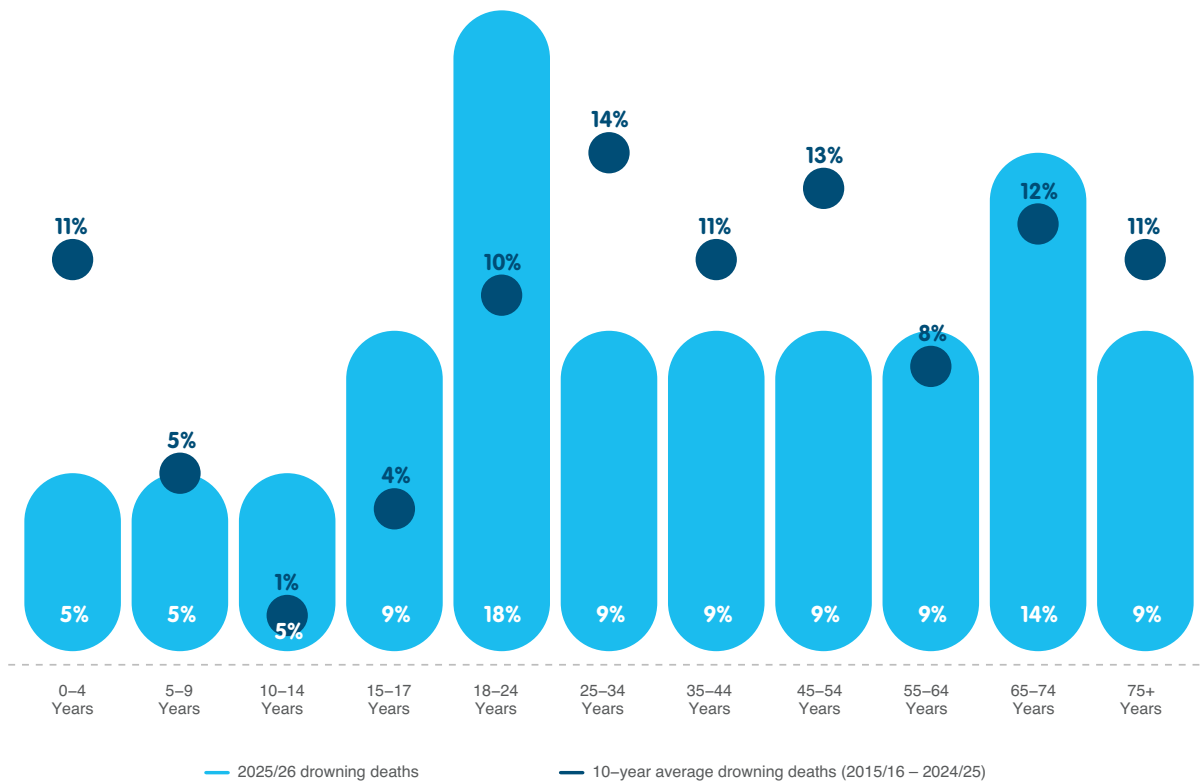
Proportion of drowning deaths at lakes/dams locations, 2025/26



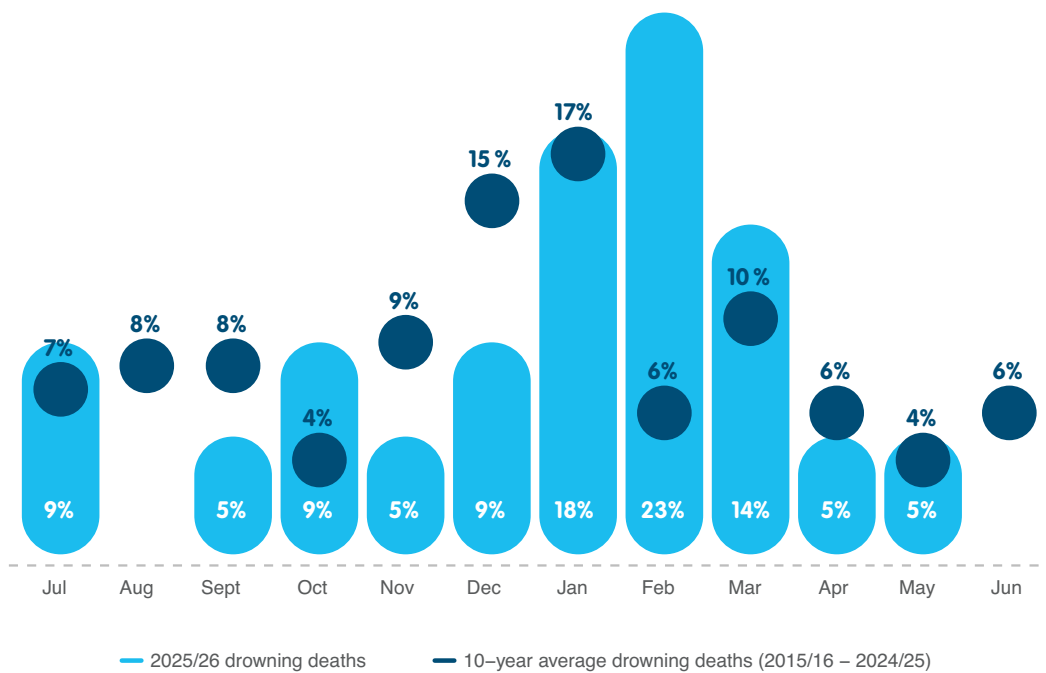
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by financial year



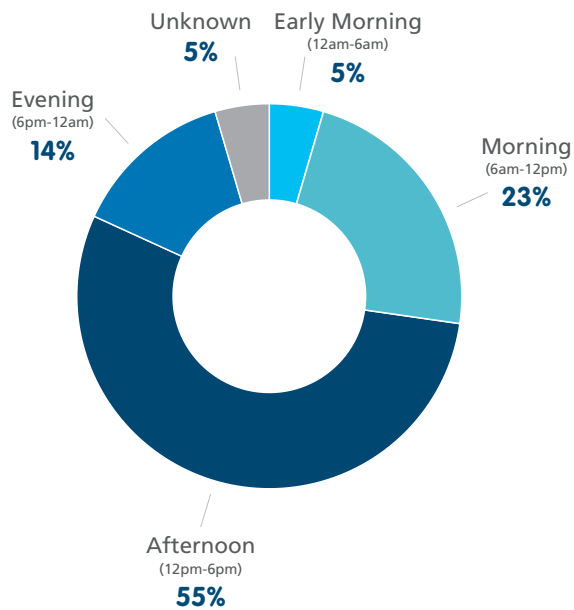
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by age group, 2025/26



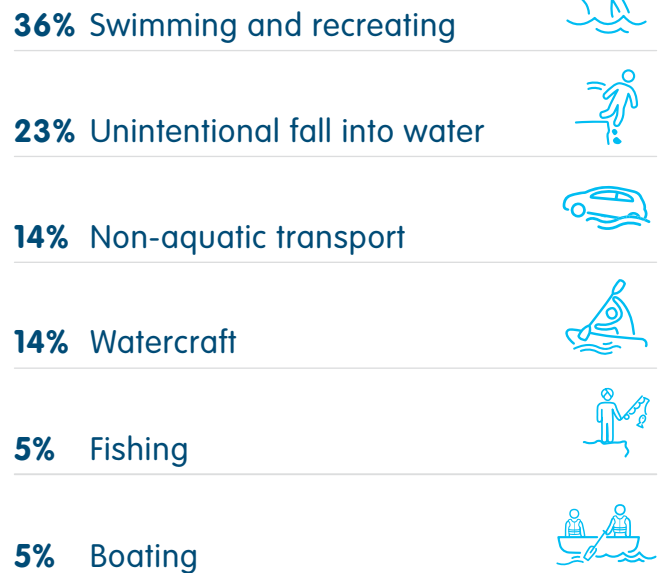
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by month, 2025/26



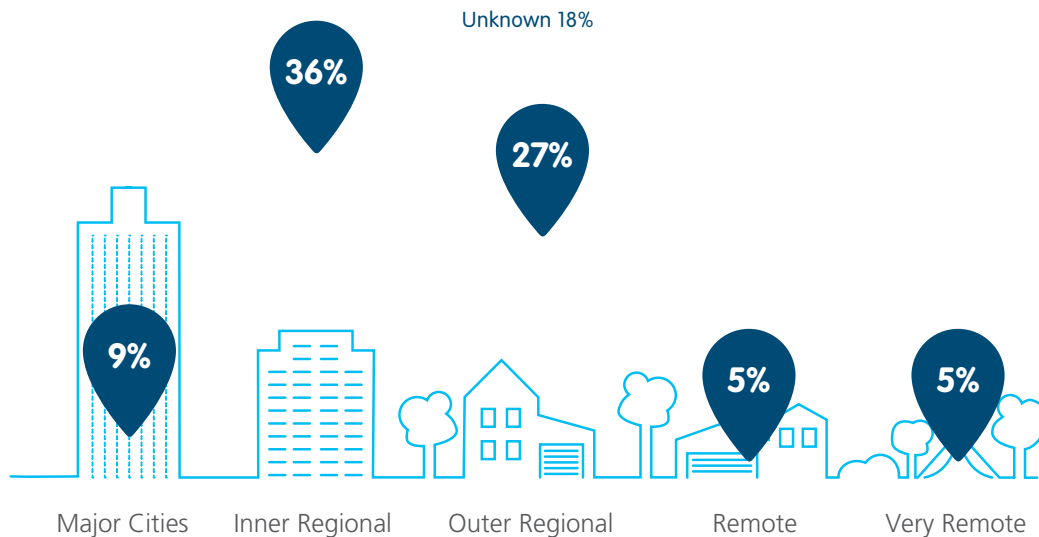
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by time of day, 2025/26



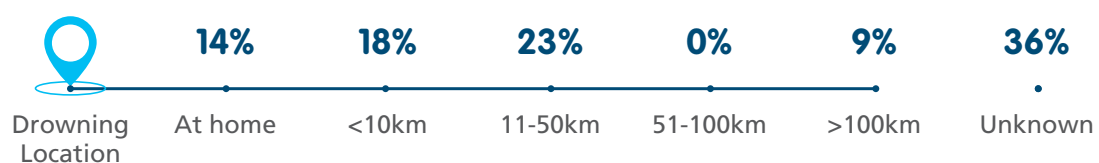
Drowning deaths at lakes/dams by activity (top 5), 2025/26



Remoteness classification of lakes/dams drowning locations, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and lakes/dams drowning location, 2025/26



> SWIMMING POOLS

14%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED AT SWIMMING POOLS

44

Drowning Deaths
in 2025/26

↑ 33%
increase

33

10-Year
Average



Swimming pools represented 14% of drowning deaths this financial year, a 26% increase from last financial year (2024/25). The highest age groups were 65+-year (55%) and 0-4-year (14%) age groups.

The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (57%) followed by an unintentional fall into water (34%). Two thirds (66%) of drowning deaths occurred in a home swimming pool and during the spring (48%), in the month of October (23%) followed by summer in December (20%).

**Note: Home pools are primarily single-dwelling domestic pools. Communal pools include hotels, motels, resorts, holiday apartment complexes, and public pools include council owned pools, school and university pools, rock pools and commercial learn to swim centres.*

70%

Male



48%

Spring



18%

Born overseas

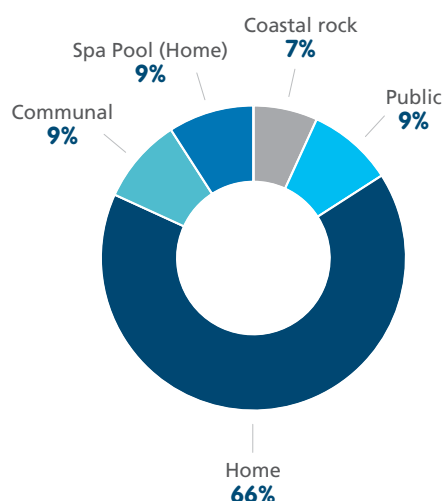


75%

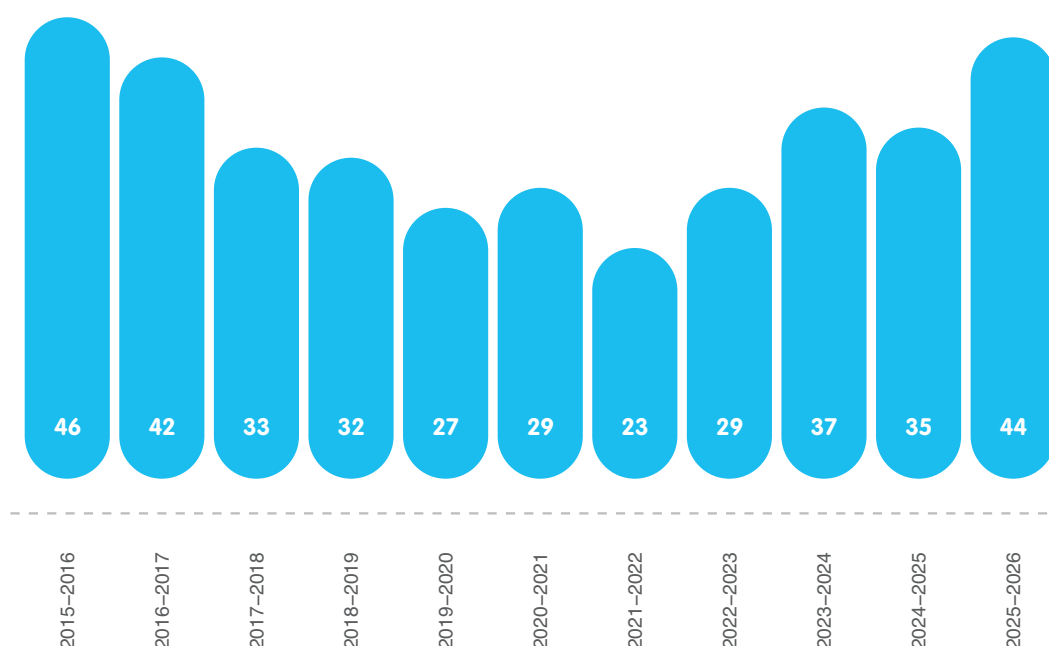
Private pool



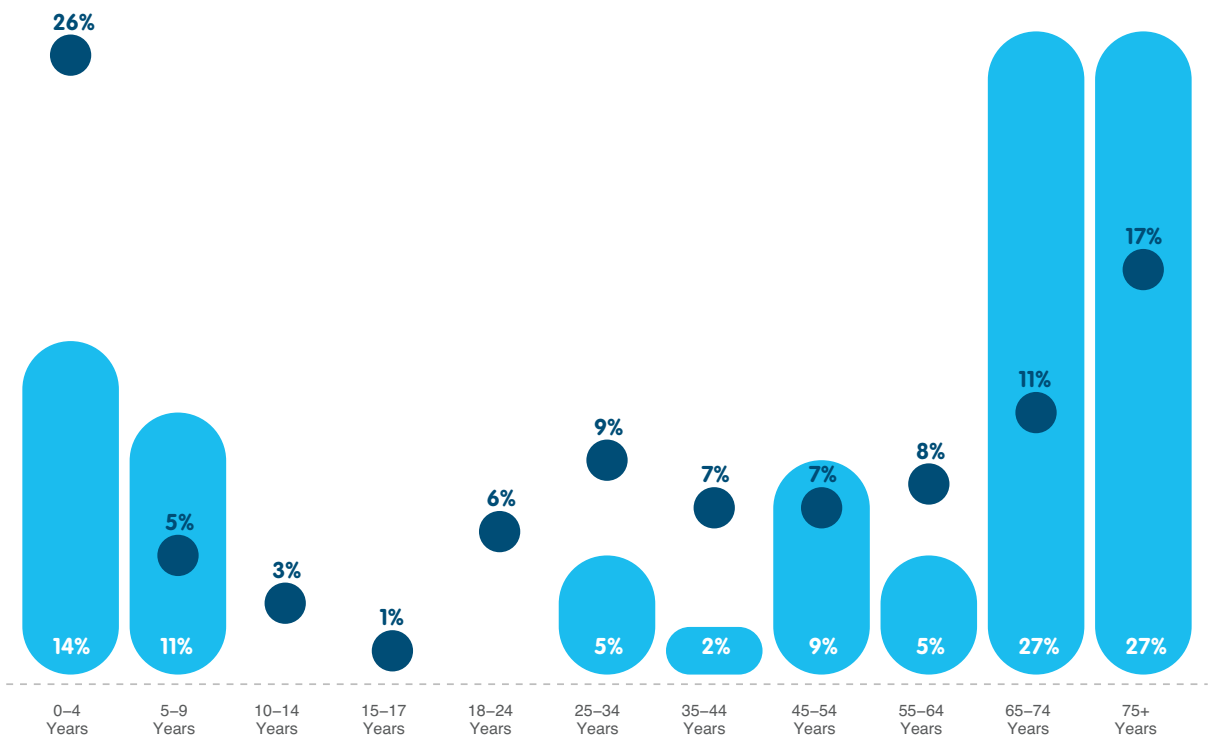
Proportion of drowning deaths at swimming pool locations, 2025/26



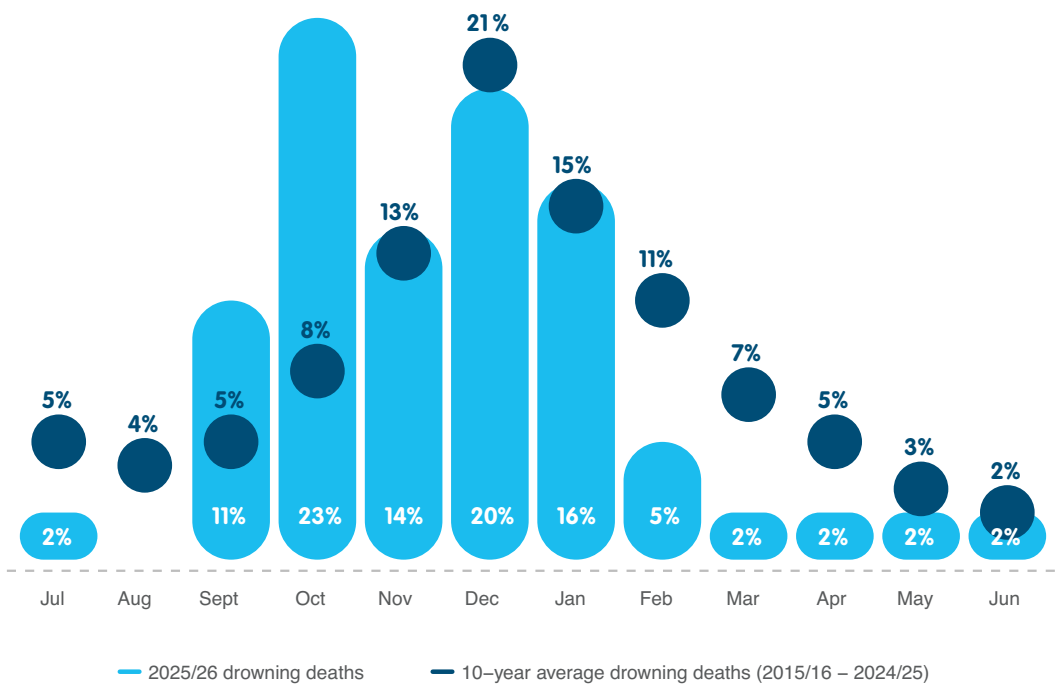
Drowning deaths at swimming pools by financial year



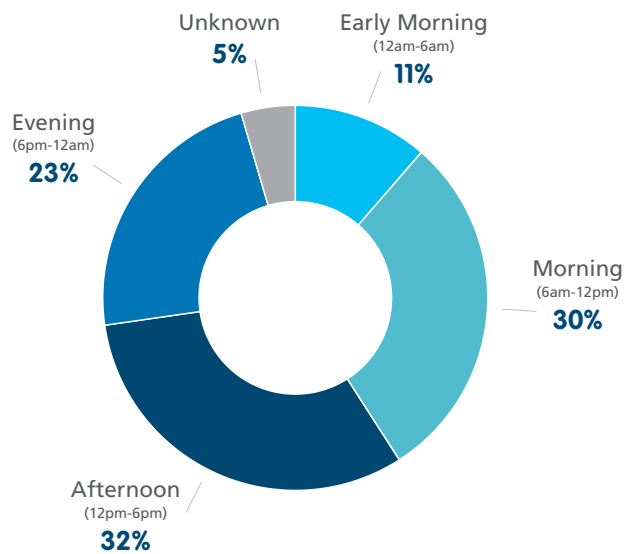
Drowning deaths at swimming pools by age group, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at swimming pools by month, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at swimming pools by time of day, 2025/26



Drowning deaths at swimming pools by activity (top 3), 2025/26

57% Swimming and recreating



34% Unintentional fall into water

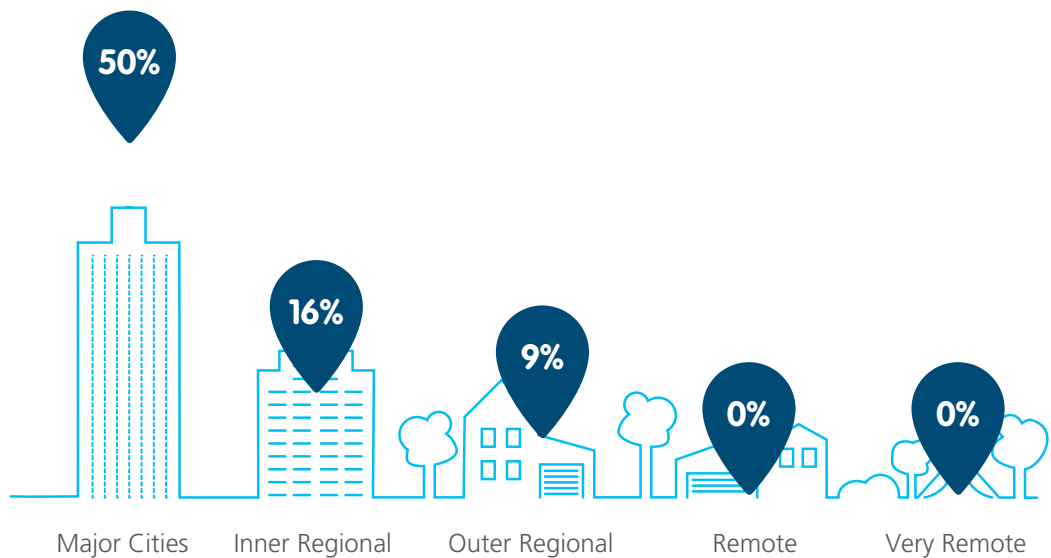


9% Unknown

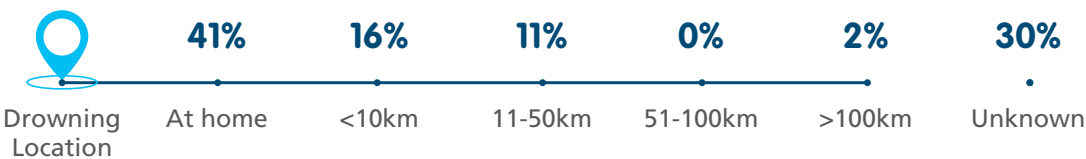


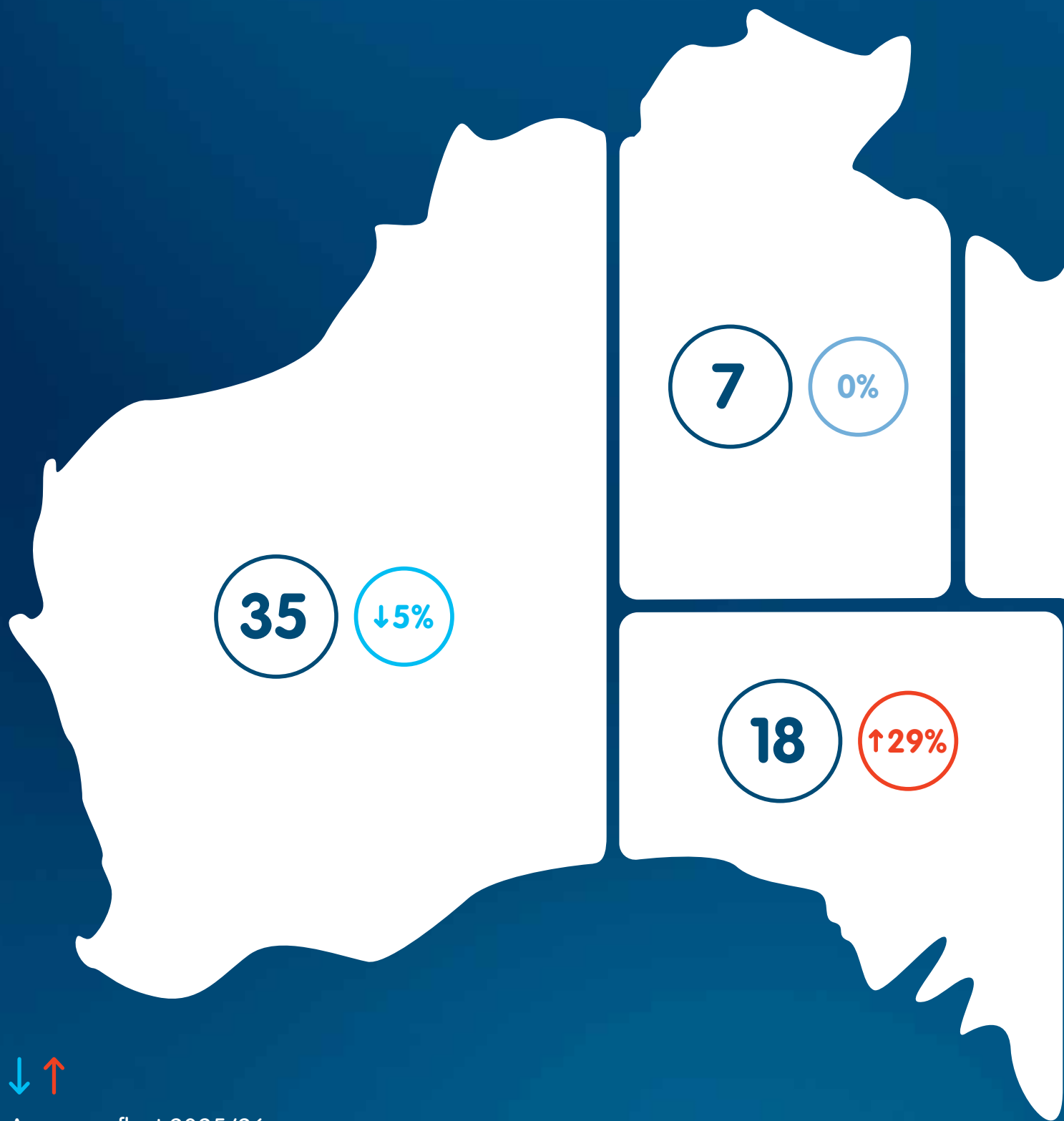
Remoteness classification of swimming pool drowning locations, 2025/26

Unknown 25%



Drive distance between residence and swimming pools drowning location, 2025/26



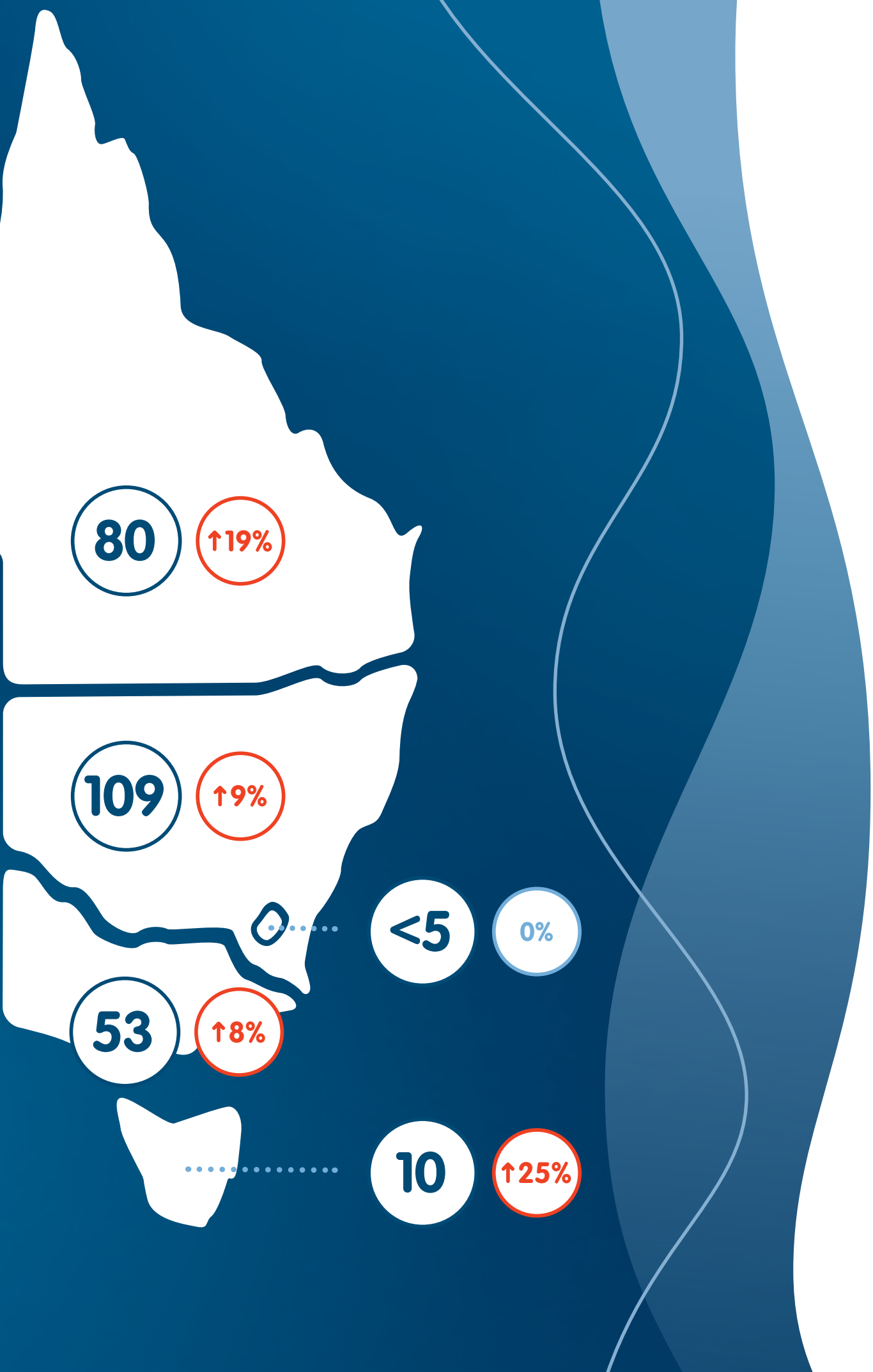


Arrows reflect 2025/26 progress against the 10-year average.

New South Wales recorded the most unintentional drowning deaths (109), a 9% increase in unintentional fatal drowning from the 10-year average.

Queensland recorded the second largest number of unintentional drowning deaths (80).

All states except **Australian Capital Territory**, **Northern Territory**, and **Western Australia** recorded an increase in drowning deaths in 2025/2026 compared to the 10-year average.



➤ DROWNING RATES AMONG AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTS BY REGION, 2015/16 - 2025/26

Residential Drowning Rates

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of region in Australia. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.

Further details are provided in the following pages with breakdowns by each state.

See the Methods Section on page 96 for additional information.

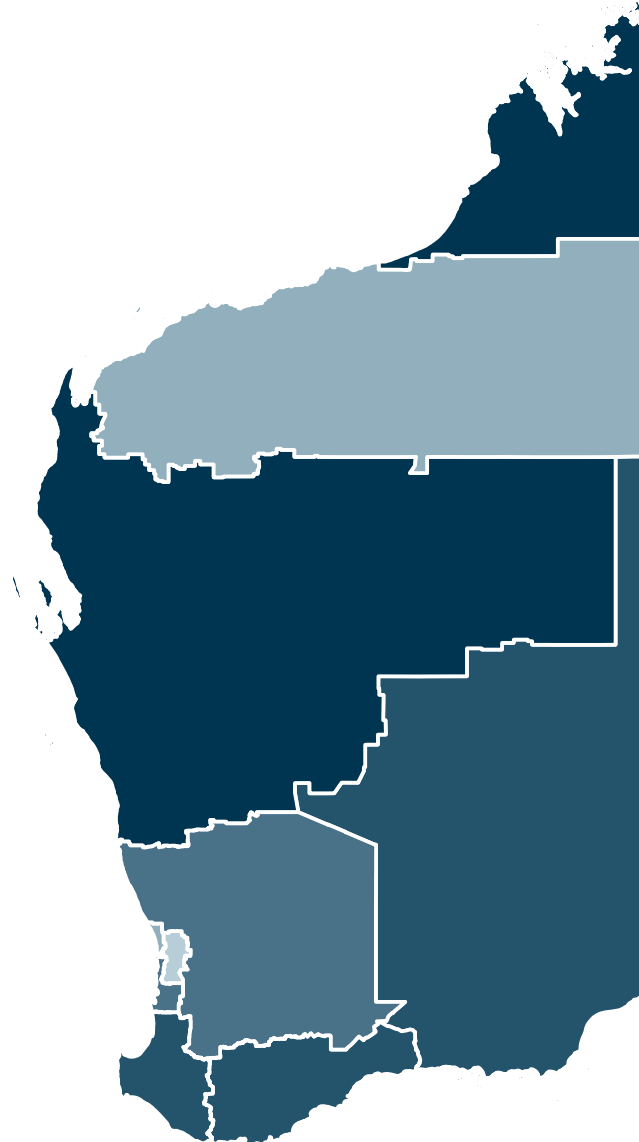
TOP 10 REGIONS WITH THE HIGHEST DROWNING RATES

Region	State	Rate/100k
Torres and Cape	QLD	6.07
Kimberley	WA	4.17
North West QLD *	QLD	3.23
South East TAS	TAS	3.07
Big Rivers *	NT	2.82
Top End *	NT	2.76
Mid North Coast NSW	NSW	2.56
Cairns and Hinterland	QLD	2.52
Midwest WA	WA	2.39
Far West NSW *	NSW	2.31

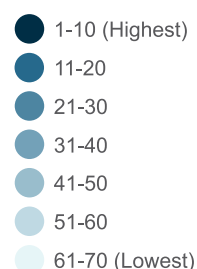
TOP 10 METRO REGIONS WITH THE HIGHEST DROWNING RATES

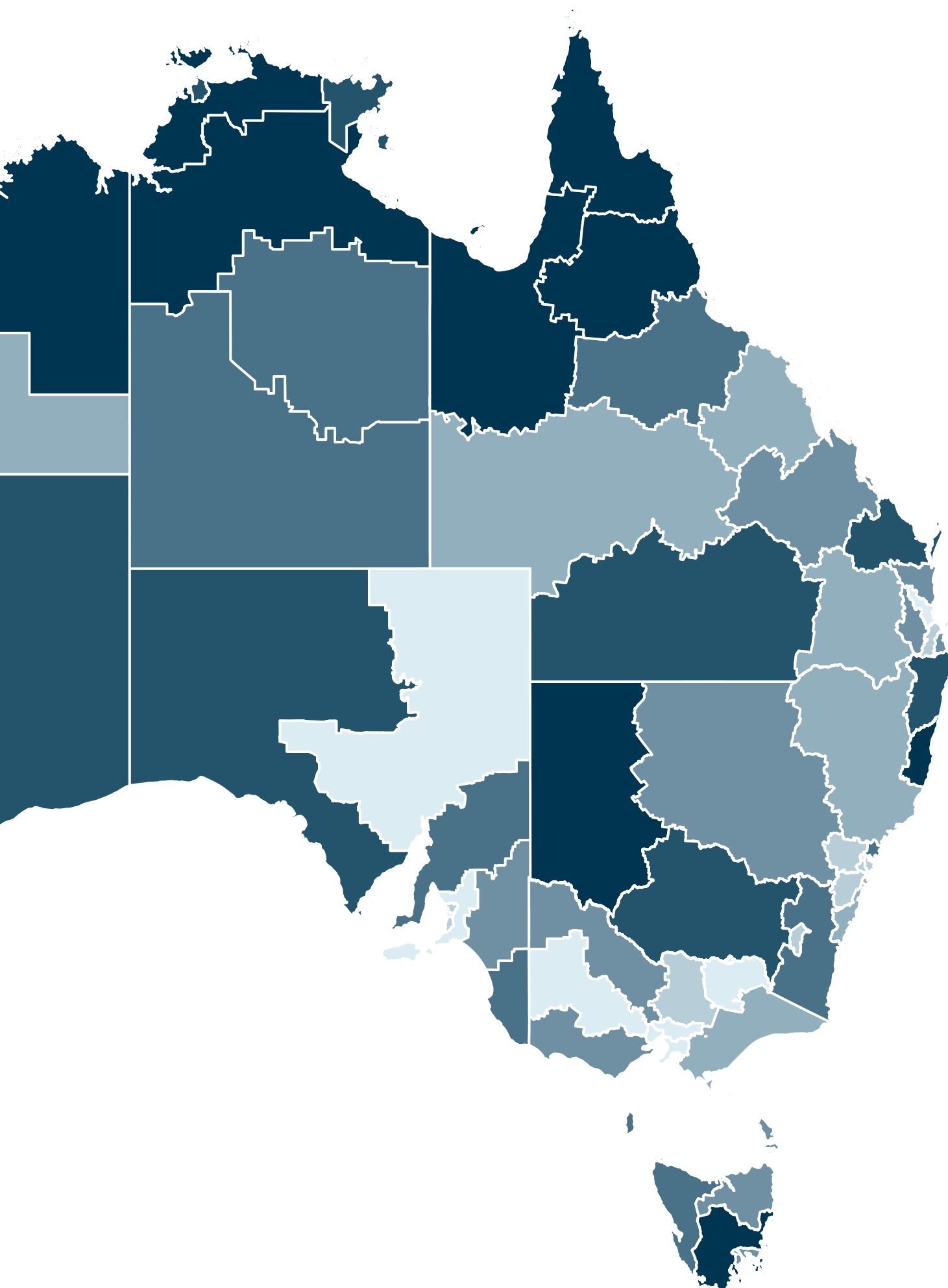
Region	State	Rate/100k
Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield	NT	1.86
South Perth	WA	1.27
Gold Coast	QLD	1.23
Sunshine Coast	QLD	1.21
Hobart	TAS	1.21
West Moreton	QLD	1.15
Sydney	NSW	1.03
South Eastern Sydney	NSW	0.95
Nepean Blue Mountains	NSW	0.90
North Perth	WA	0.89

*Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution



National Rank





> AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

There were less than 5 unintentional drowning deaths in the ACT between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026. There was one drowning death recorded in ACT the previous year (2024/25).

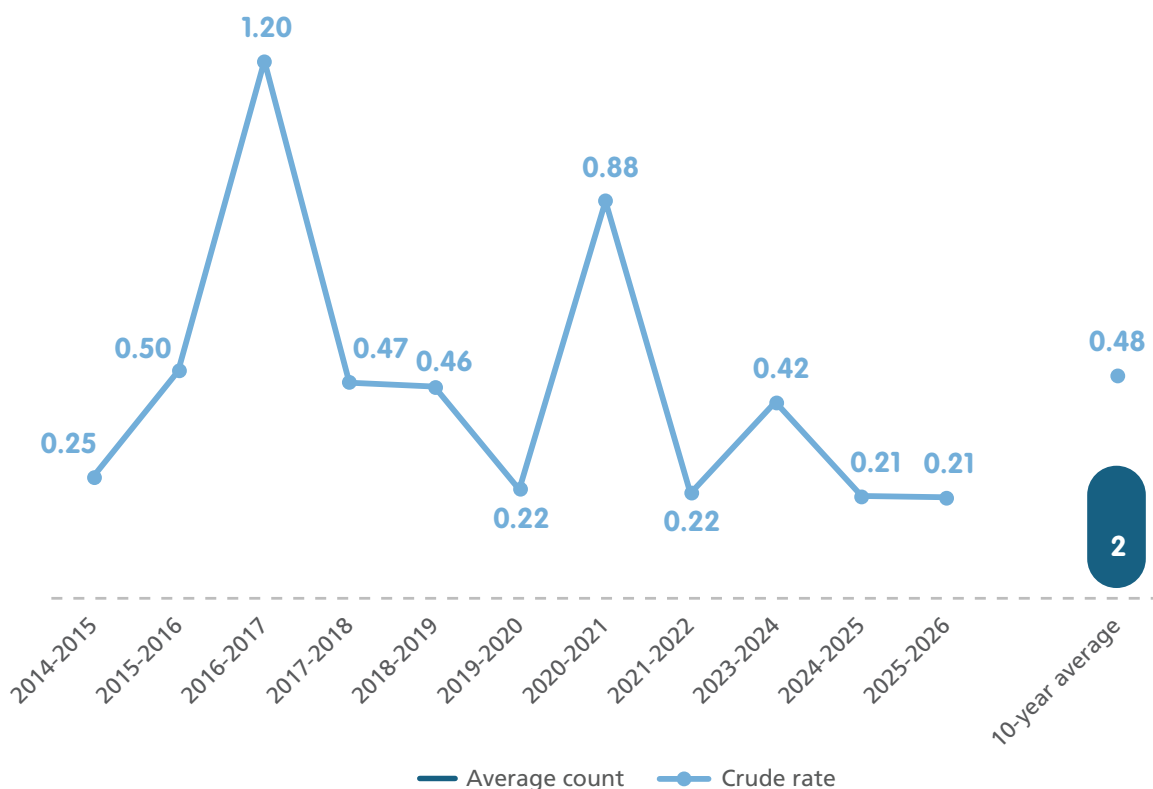
In the last 10 years, between July 2014/15 and June 2024/25, there have been 20 drowning deaths in the ACT with an annual cumulative crude drowning rate of 0.48 drowning incidents per 100,000 people.

Due to privacy concerns we are not able to show the number of drowning deaths that occurred in the ACT in the 2025/26 financial year.

Over the past 10-years:

- > **85%** were males
- > Highest number of drowning deaths occurred in the 18-24 year (**25%**) and the 65+-year (**25%**) age groups
- > **70%** occurred in rivers/creeks
- > **55%** of drowning deaths occurred while swimming and recreating
- > Alcohol was present in **20%** of drowning incidents
- > **30%** of drowning cases reported drugs, most of which were prescription medications
- > **55%** had a pre-existing medical condition

10-year snapshot of drowning rates in the ACT



> ACT CASE STUDY

ACT Swimming & Water Safety Program: Increasing Access to Swimming and Water Safety Education

The ACT Swimming & Water Safety Program continues to provide vital swimming and water safety education to year 2 school-aged children across the ACT. Delivered by Royal Life Saving ACT in partnership with the ACT Education Directorate, the program incorporates the Swim and Survive program to support students to develop the essential skills, knowledge, and confidence required to safely participate in aquatic environments.

In 2025, the program reached 2,100 students across 46 schools, supporting inclusive participation for students from diverse backgrounds and abilities. This included 158 students with English as a Second Language, 38 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, and 52 students with disability, ensuring the program reached students who may experience additional barriers to accessing swimming and water safety education.

Through Swim and Survive swimming lessons and water safety activities, students developed skills aligned with the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework benchmarks, including water confidence, survival skills, safe decision-making, and an understanding of their personal aquatic capabilities.

The continued success of the ACT Swimming & Water Safety Program highlights the importance of collaboration between Royal Life Saving ACT, the ACT Education Directorate and participating schools. By combining the Swim and Survive program with inclusive delivery approaches, the initiative continues to improve access to quality swimming and water safety education, helping students build safer behaviours around water and develop skills that support lifelong participation in aquatic activities.



> NEW SOUTH WALES

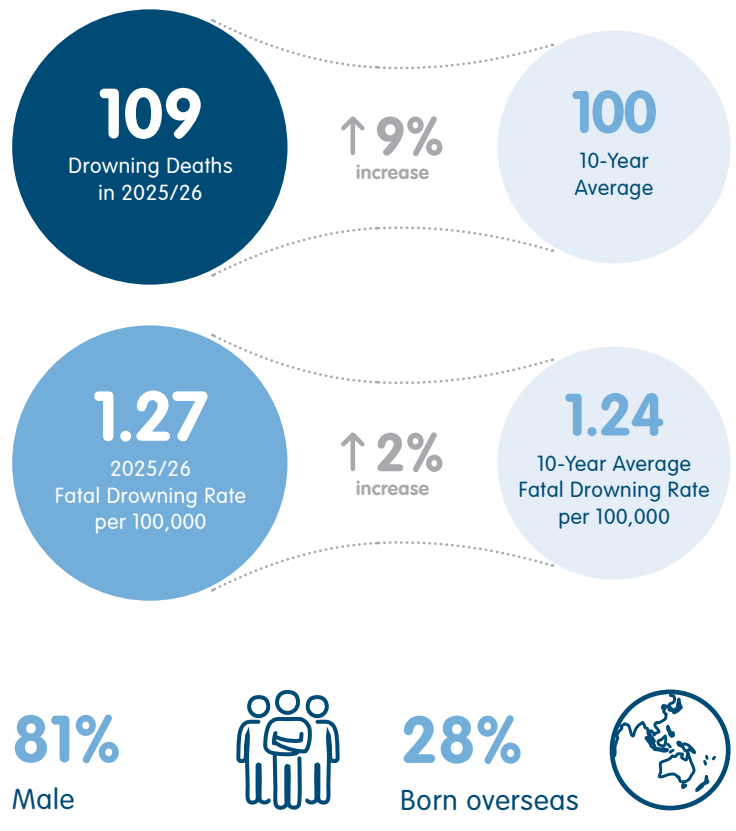
There were 109 drowning deaths that occurred in NSW between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

The drowning rate of 1.27 per 100,000 population increased by 2% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

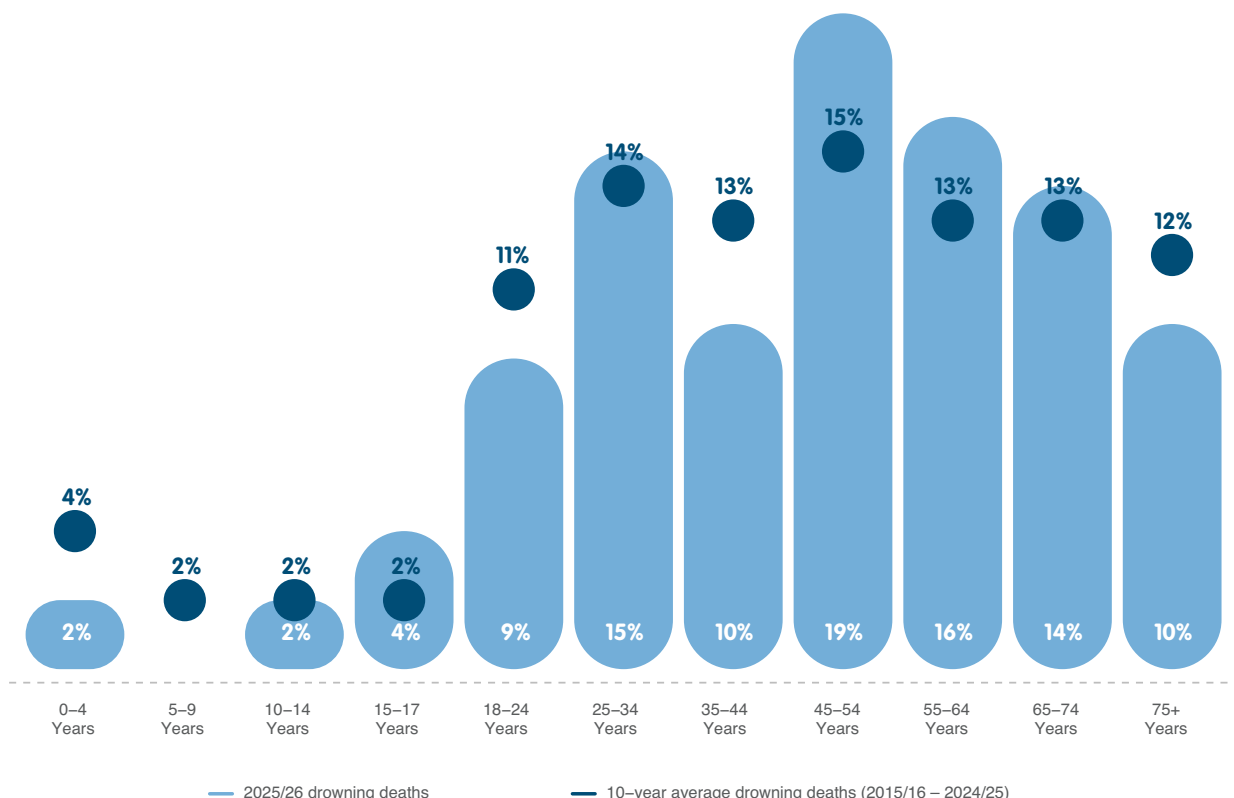
Those aged 45-54-years in NSW had the highest number of drowning deaths (19%) and reported the highest crude drowning rate (2.03 per 100,000) of any age group.

People who lived in disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 1-4) accounted for 46% of the total drowning deaths in NSW whereas, people who lived in the most advantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 9-10) accounted for 23% of all drowning deaths. The months of January, March, May and August had more drowning fatalities compared to the 10-year average.

Drowning deaths in NSW mainly occurred at beaches (25%), followed by rivers/creeks (19%). The most common activity being swimming and recreating (22%).

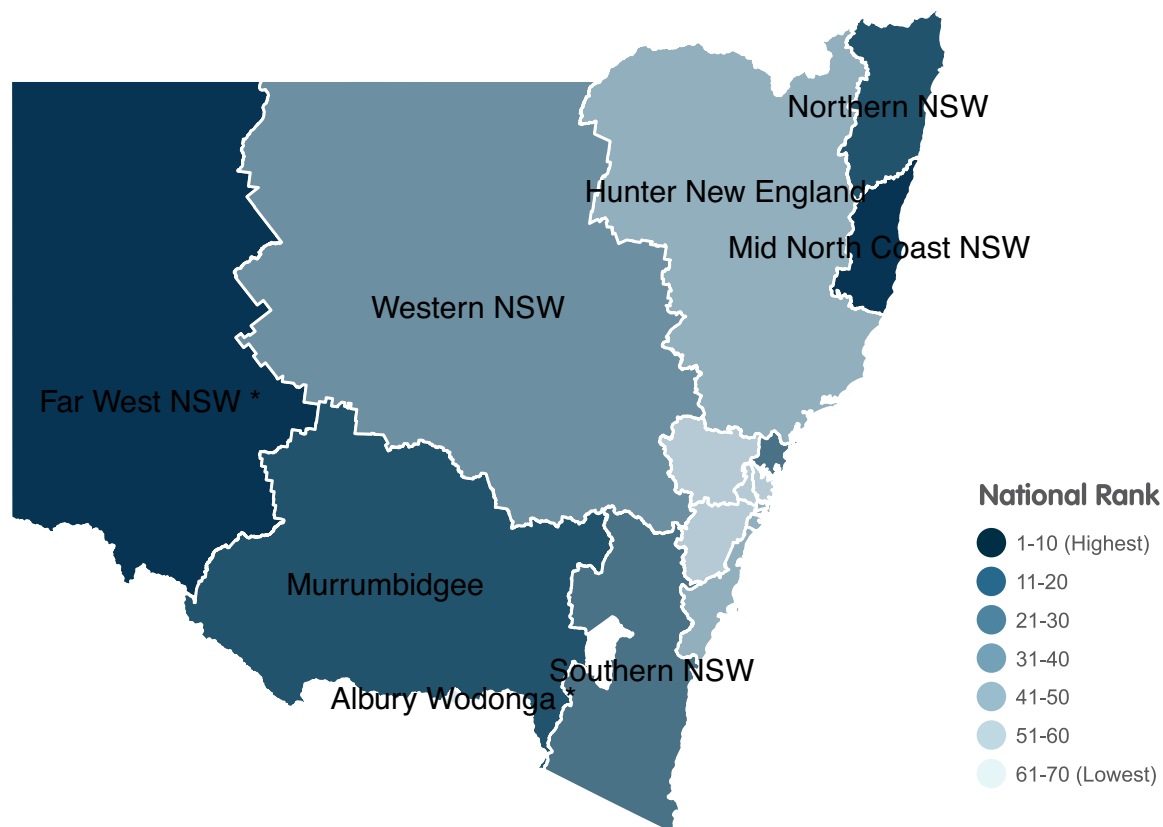


New South Wales drowning deaths by age group, 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by NSW region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

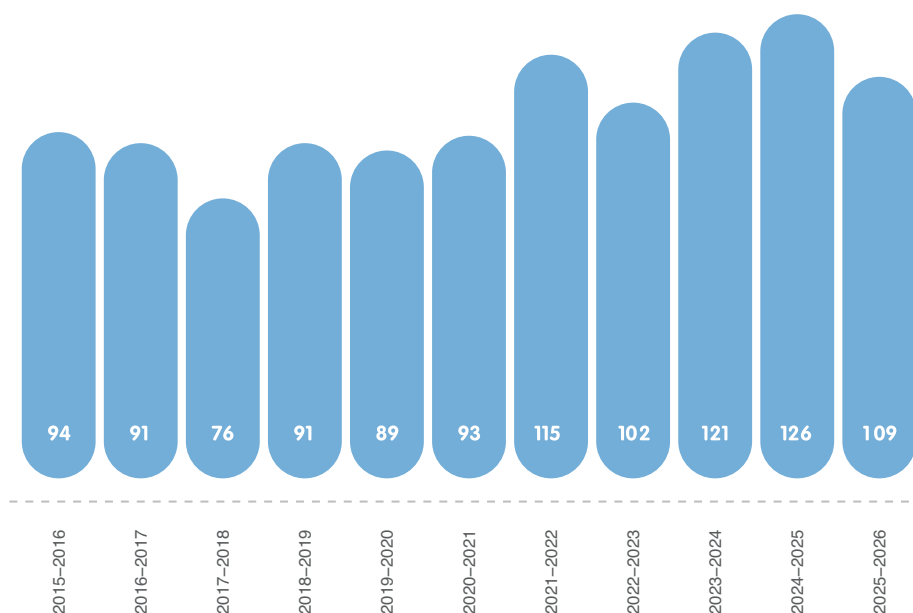
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each NSW region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



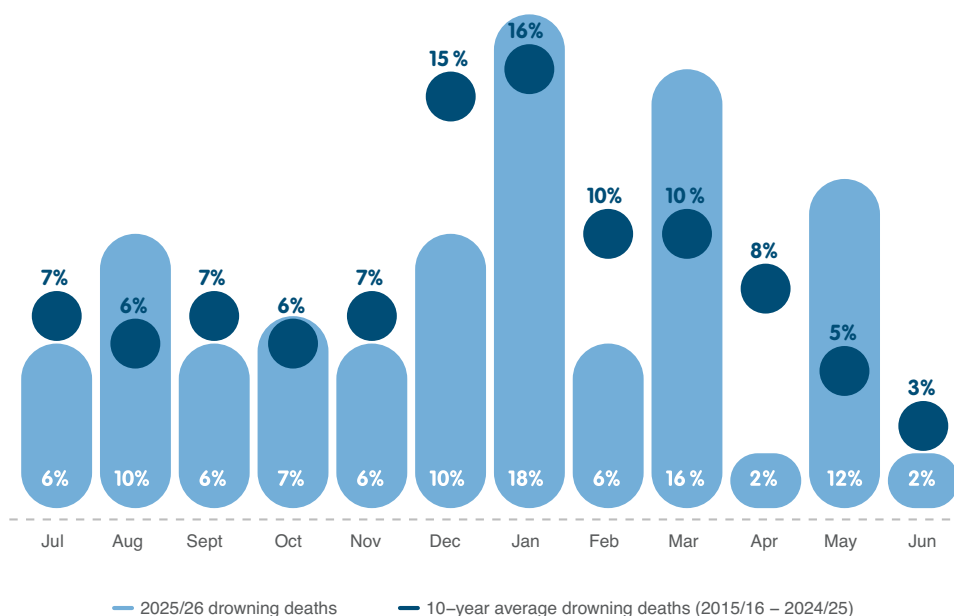
Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
Mid North Coast NSW	2.56	7
Far West NSW *	2.31	10
Northern NSW	2.30	11
Murrumbidgee	1.74	20
Central Coast NSW	1.43	24
Southern NSW	1.38	26
Western NSW	1.16	38
Illawarra Shoalhaven	1.07	43
Sydney	1.03	44
South Eastern Sydney	0.95	46
Hunter New England	0.94	48
Nepean Blue Mountains	0.90	50
Western Sydney	0.85	54
Northern Sydney	0.84	55
South Western Sydney	0.82	57
Albury Wodonga *	0.55	66

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

New South Wales drowning deaths by financial year, 2015/16 to 2025/26



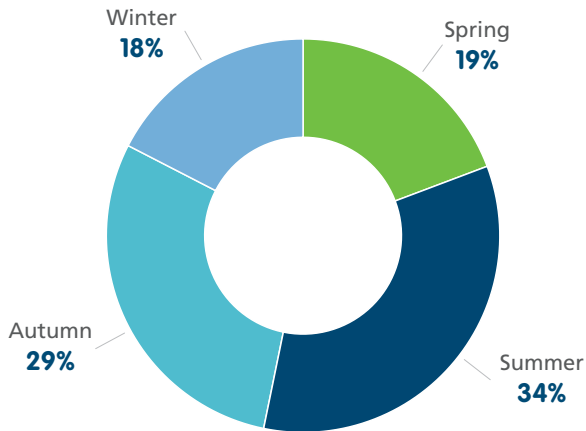
New South Wales drowning deaths by month, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and drowning location, 2025/26



New South Wales drowning deaths by season, 2025/26



New South Wales drowning deaths by activity, 2025/26

22% Swimming and recreating



12% Boating



10% Rock fishing



7% Unintentional fall into water



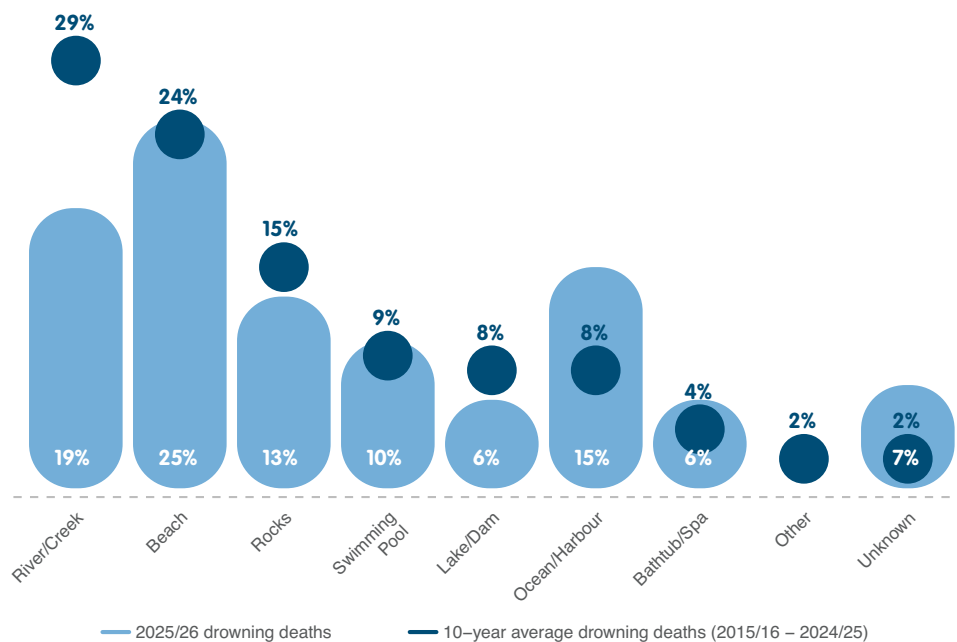
6% Bathing



24% Unknown



New South Wales drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



Risk Factors

12% *Includes both prescription medication and illicit drugs
of cases drugs were recorded



9%
of cases alcohol was recorded



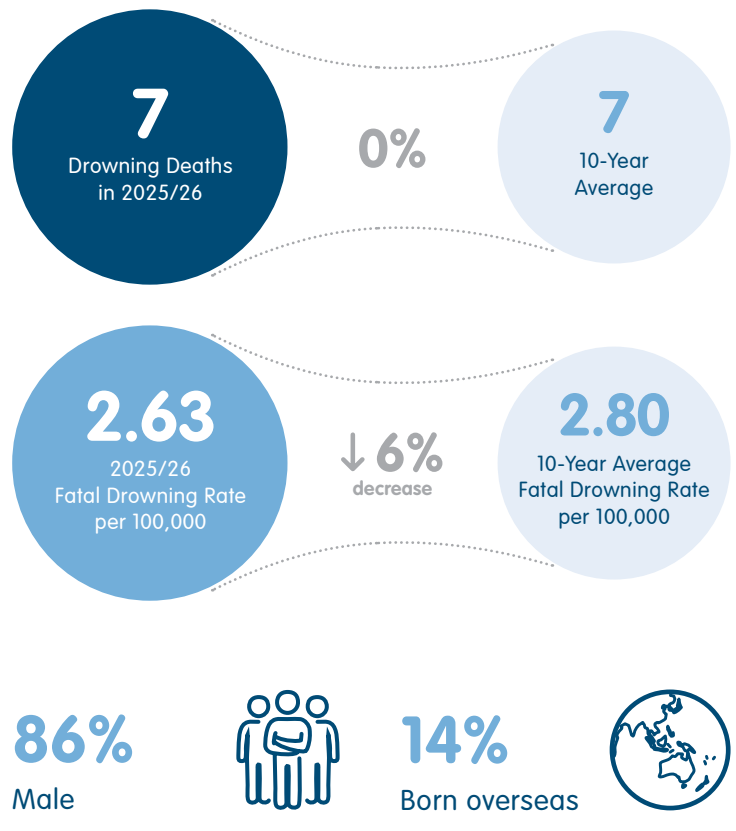
> NORTHERN TERRITORY

There were 7 drowning deaths that occurred in the NT between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

The 2025/26 fatal drowning rate of 2.63 deaths per 100,000 population decreased by 6% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

Highest number drowning deaths in NT occurred among those aged 35-44 years (29%). However, the highest drowning rate occurred in those age 65-74-years (6.08 drowning deaths per 100,000 population).

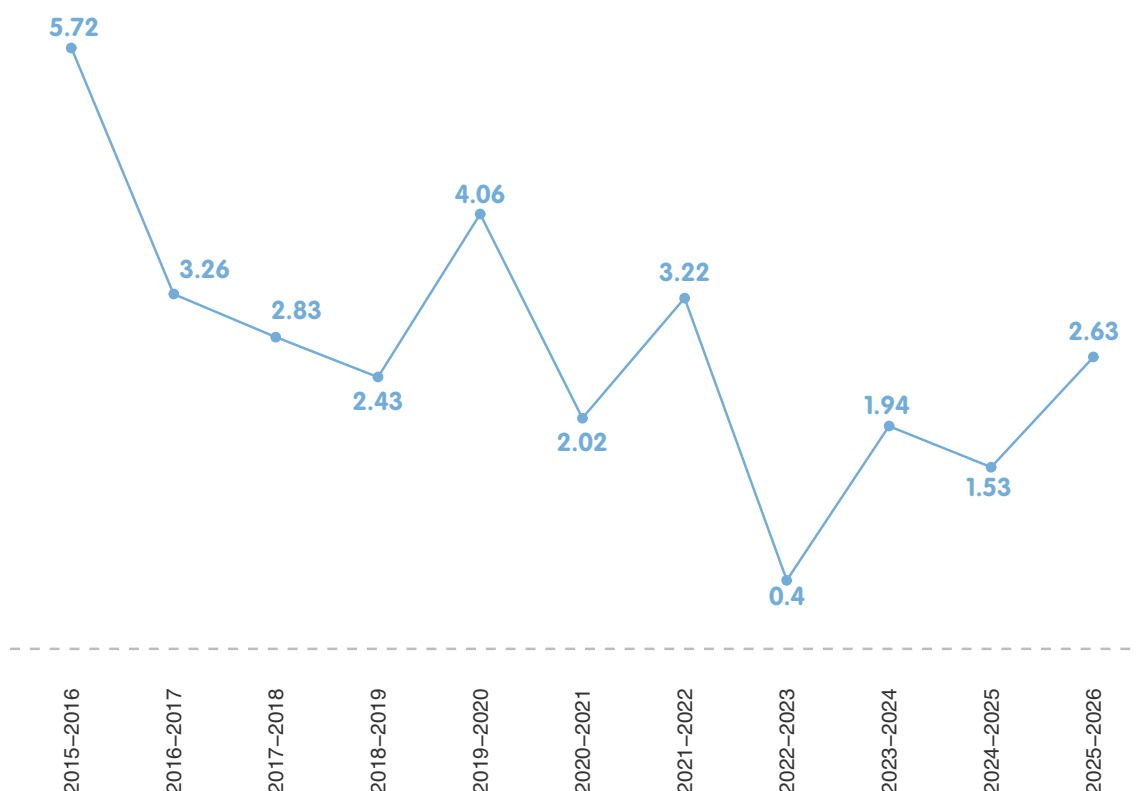
Drowning deaths in NT mainly occurred at rivers/creeks (57%), while swimming and recreating (71%).



29%

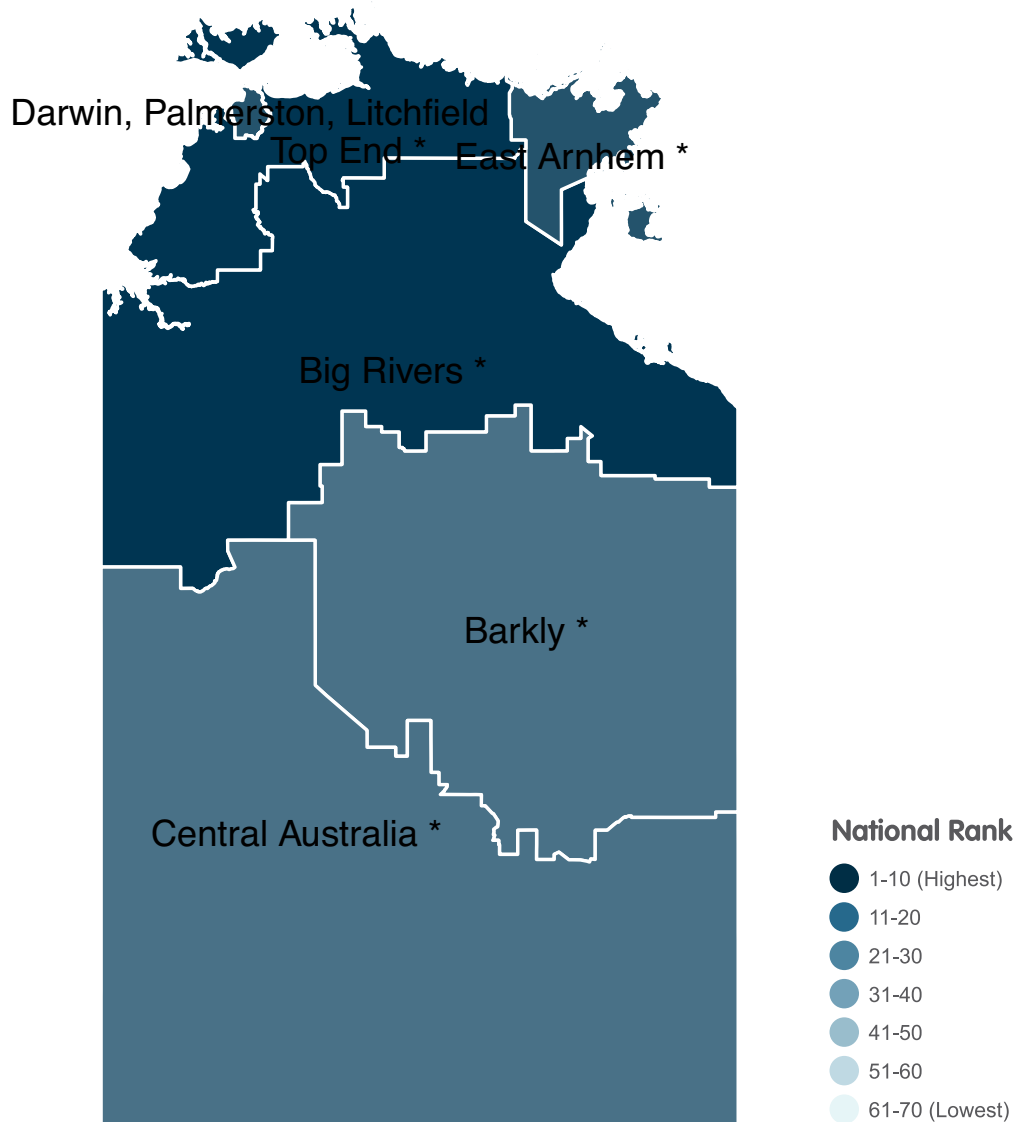
OF DROWNING DEATHS WERE AGED BETWEEN 35-44 YEARS

Northern Territory drowning deaths by rates per 100,000 population 2015/16 to 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by NT region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

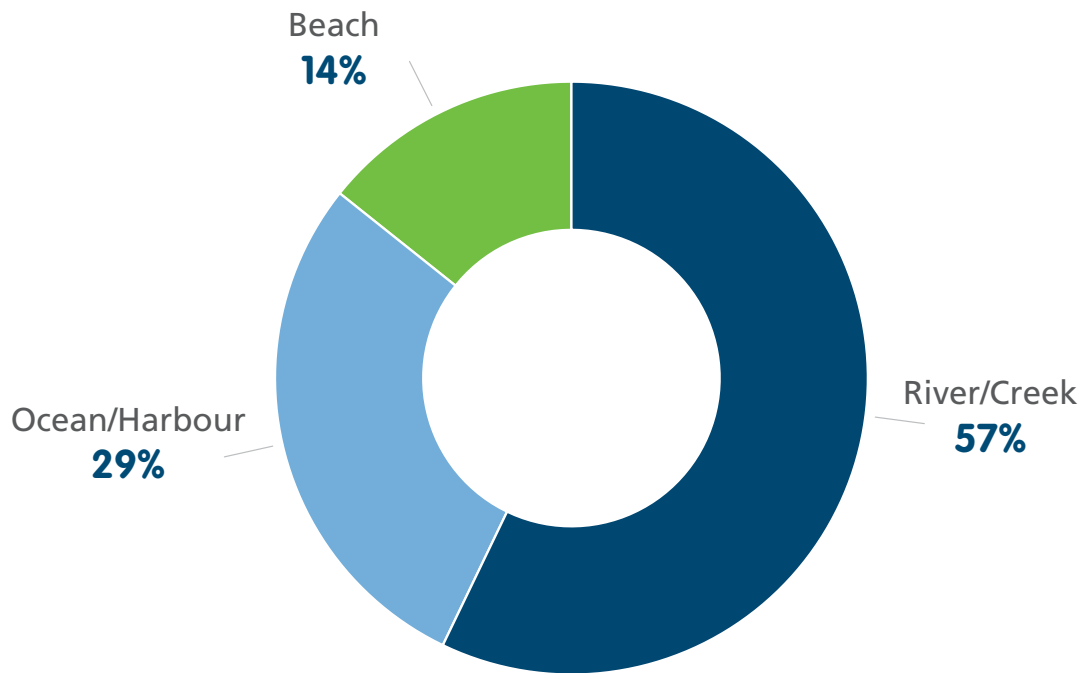
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each NT region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
Big Rivers *	2.82	5
Top End *	2.76	6
East Arnhem *	2.05	14
Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield	1.86	18
Barkly *	1.64	21
Central Australia *	1.47	23

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

Northern Territory drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



Northern Territory Key Facts

57%

occurred in the wet season



57%

occurred in a river/creek



71%

occurred swimming and recreating



57%

occurred in very remote locations



Northern Territory Risk factors

29%

of cases alcohol was recorded



71%

*Includes both prescription medication and illicit drugs
of cases drugs were recorded *



From Policy to Prevention: Swimming and Water Safety for Northern Territory Children

For more than 25 years, Northern Territory primary school students did not have access to a funded universal school swimming program. This was particularly significant in a jurisdiction with Australia's highest drowning rate per capita, where rivers, creeks, beaches, floodways and swimming pools are an everyday part of life.

Following the 2024 Northern Territory election, a commitment to swimming and water safety education became government policy. From January 2025, the Northern Territory Government introduced a funded Swimming and Water Safety Education initiative for children in Years 1–6, supported by **\$3 million in annual strategic funding**.

The initiative is delivered through collaboration between the Department of Education and Training, Royal Life Saving NT, schools, communities and Swim and Survive partners. Every NT school has been mapped to its nearest swimming pool, with tailored delivery models and logistical support helping regional and remote schools overcome barriers to participation.

Early impact

The impact has been significant. In 2025, 17,899 children from 130 schools participated, compared with 10,105 children from 63 schools in 2022–23.

Importantly, participation is translating into improved swimming and water safety competency:

- > **7,894** children achieved Swim and Survive Benchmark 1
- > **901** children achieved Swim and Survive Benchmark 2
- > **130** schools participated across the Northern Territory.

Student progress is tracked through Swim and Survive benchmarks, with data collection aligned to the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework. Feedback from schools, instructors and families is also incorporated into an ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement process.

Building a safer generation

This initiative demonstrates how drowning prevention policy can be translated into practical, equitable action. By removing financial barriers, coordinating delivery and embedding swimming and water safety education within primary schooling, the Northern Territory is creating an opportunity for thousands more children to develop skills that may one day save their lives.

The long-term goal is for **all Year 6 students to achieve Level 7 Swim and Survive**, helping build a generation of Territorians with the swimming, survival and water safety skills needed to safely enjoy the Territory lifestyle.



> QUEENSLAND

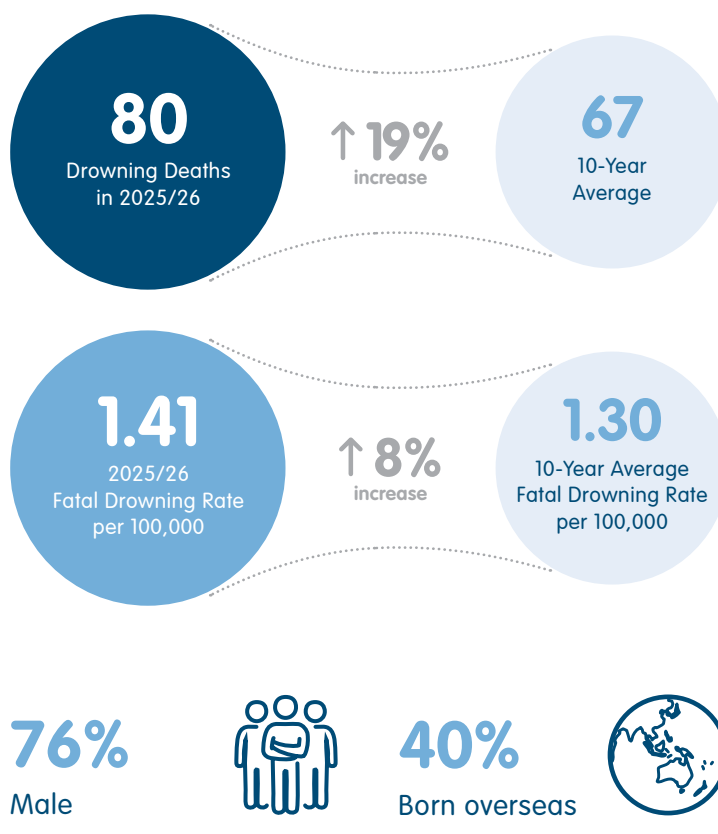
There were 80 drowning deaths that occurred in QLD between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

The drowning rate of 1.41 per 100,000 population increase by 8% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

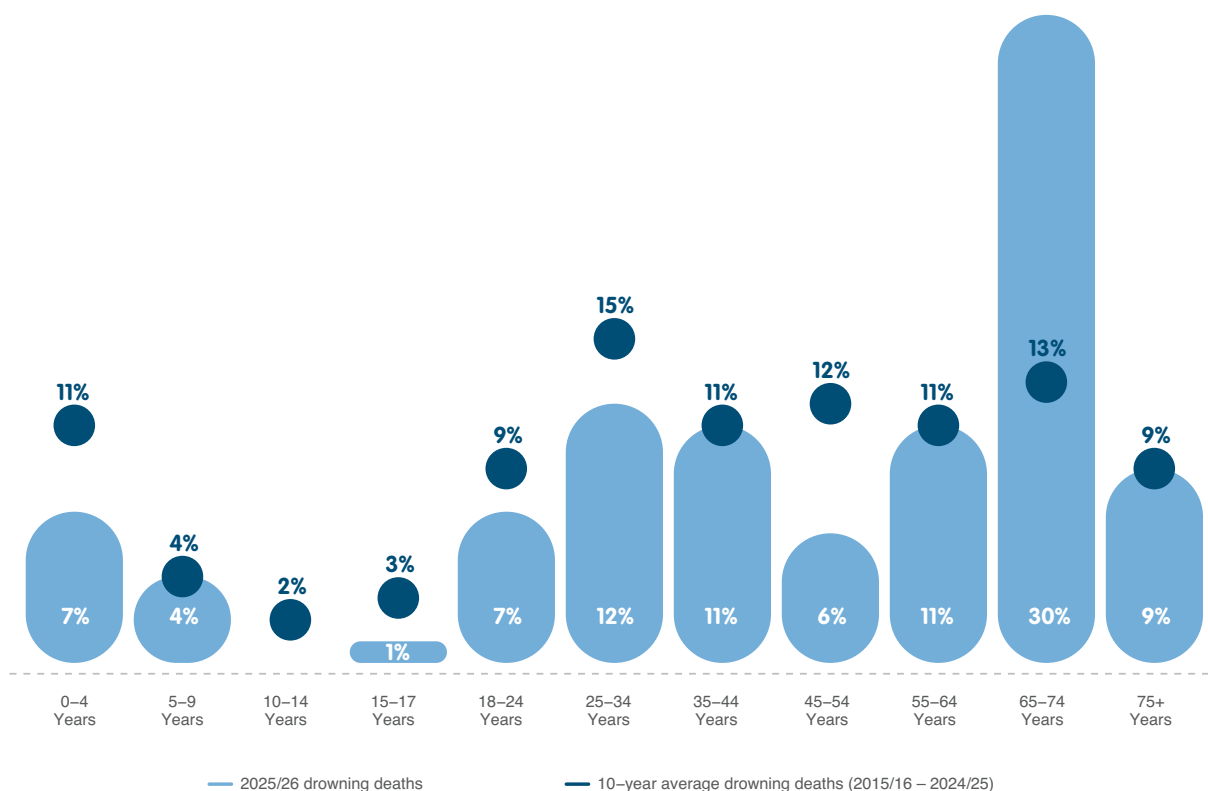
The highest number of drowning deaths in Queensland occurred in people aged between 65-74-years (30%), who also recorded the highest crude drowning rates: 4.50 deaths per 100,000 population. The number of drowning deaths in this age group, more than doubled compared to ten-year average: 24 this financial year compared to a ten-year average of 9.

People residing in disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Deciles 1-4), accounted for 48% of total drowning deaths in Queensland. Those who lived in the most advantaged areas (IRSAD Deciles 9-10) accounted for 5% of drowning deaths in Queensland.

Drowning deaths in Queensland mainly occurred at rivers/creeks (26%), followed by beaches (25%), while swimming and recreating (38%). Of note, the number of beach-related drowning deaths were up 54% from the 10-year average, and the number of drowning deaths in the month of October was triple the ten-year average: 18 this financial year compared to a ten-year average of 6.

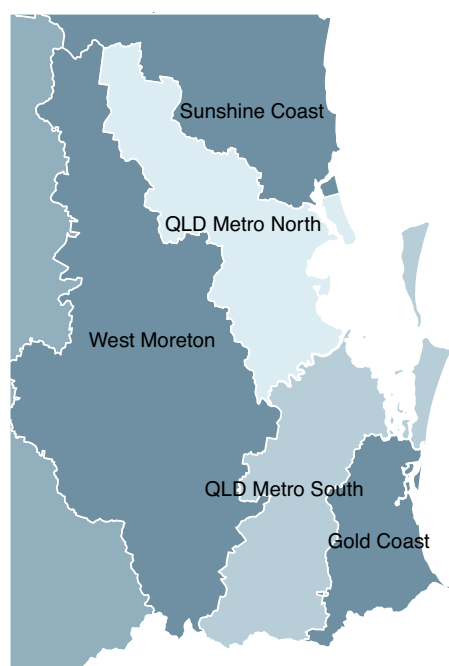
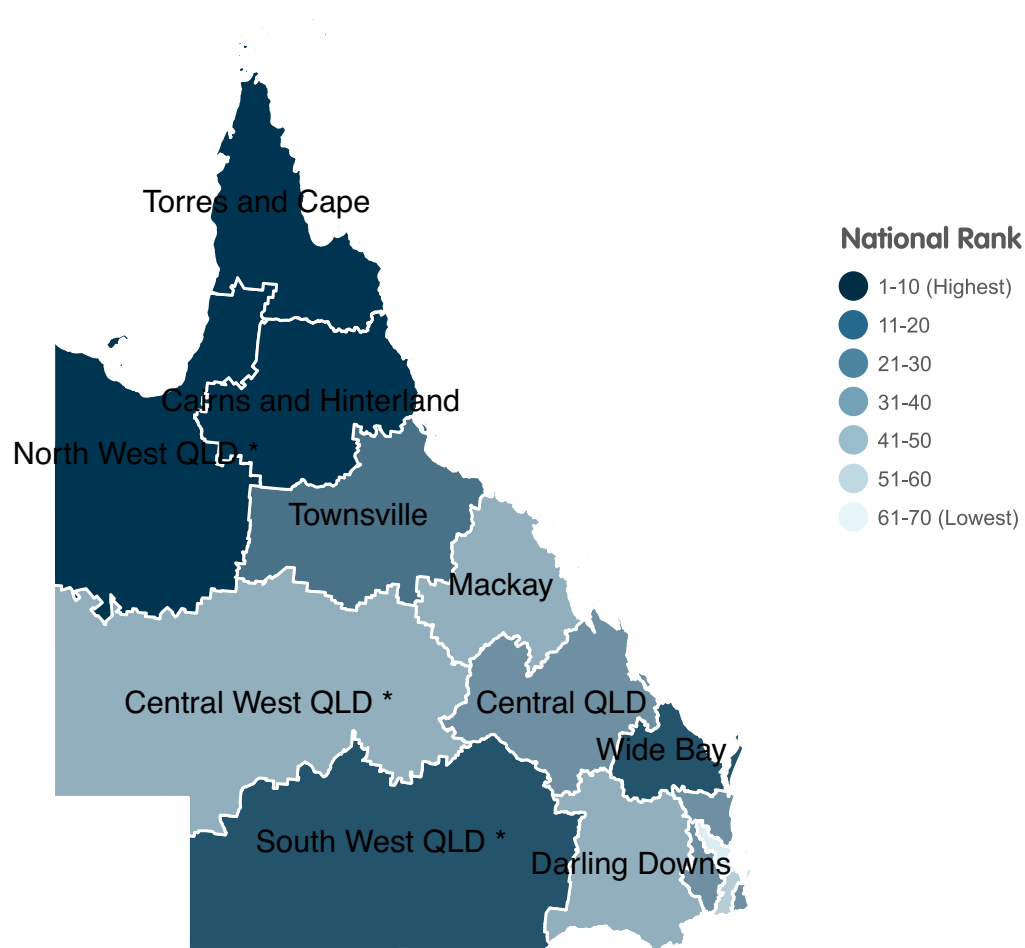


Queensland drowning deaths by age group, 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by QLD region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

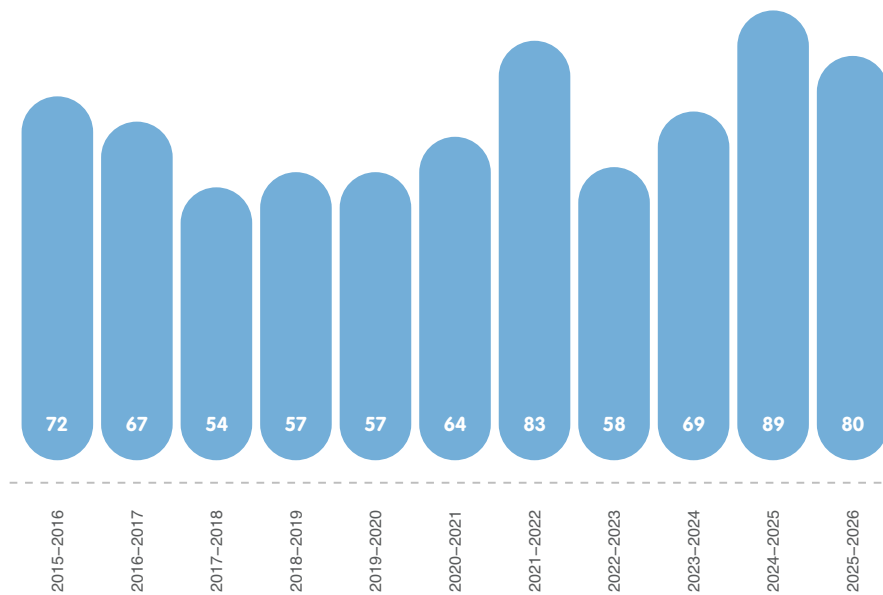
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each QLD region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



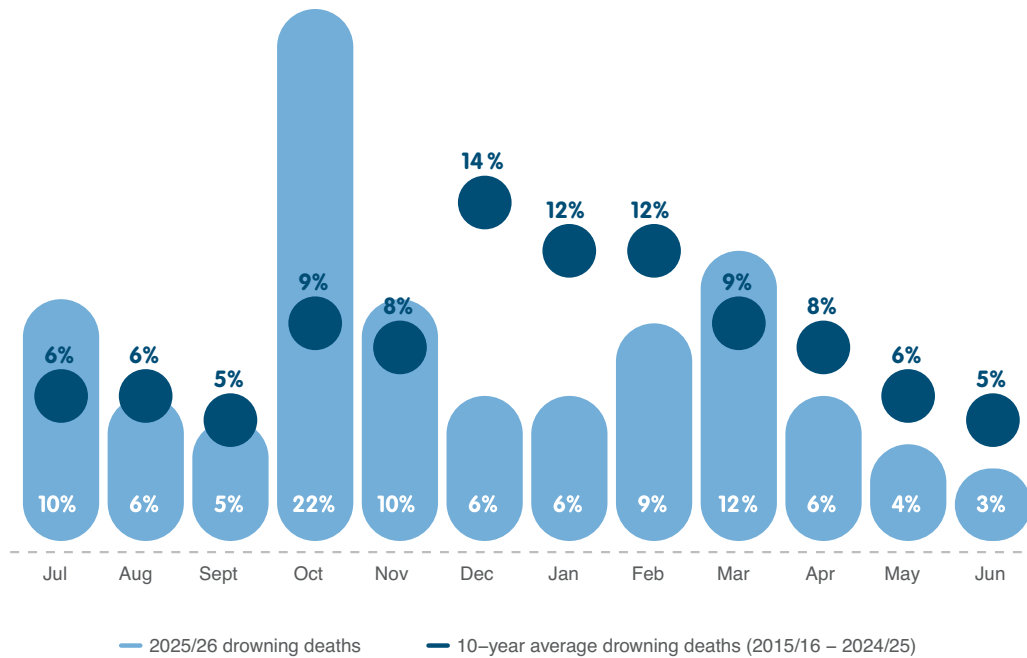
Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
Torres and Cape	6.07	1
North West QLD *	3.23	3
Cairns and Hinterland	2.52	8
Wide Bay	2.24	12
South West QLD *	2.06	13
Townsville	1.48	22
Central QLD	1.24	31
Gold Coast	1.23	32
Sunshine Coast	1.21	34
West Moreton	1.15	40
Darling Downs	1.13	41
Mackay	1.10	42
Central West QLD *	0.94	49
QLD Metro South	0.78	60
QLD Metro North	0.66	63

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

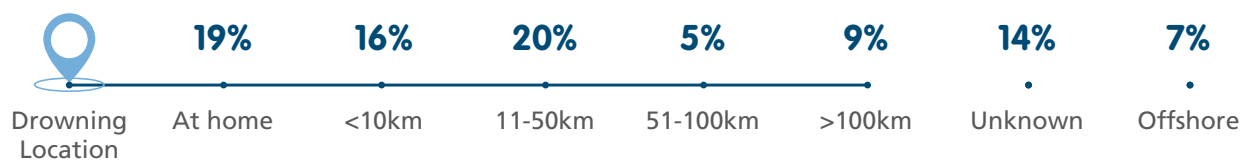
Queensland drowning deaths by financial year, 2015/16 to 2025/26



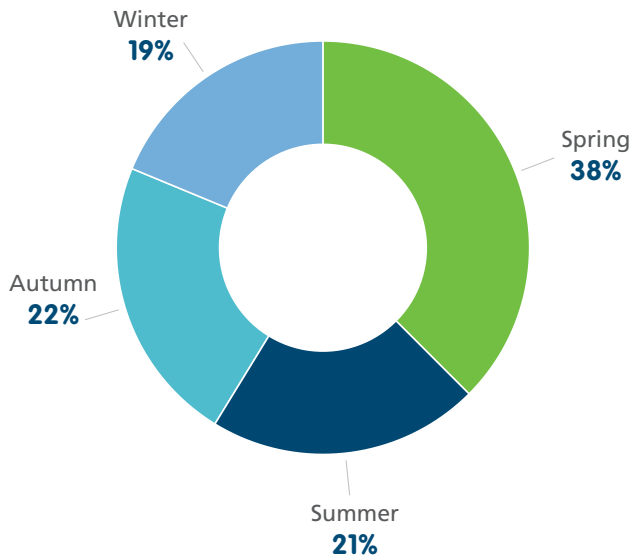
Queensland drowning deaths by month, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and Queensland drowning location 2025/26



Queensland drowning deaths by season, 2025/26



Queensland drowning deaths by activity, 2025/26

38% Swimming and recreating



17% Unintentional fall into water



12% Diving/Snorkelling



11% Non-aquatic transport



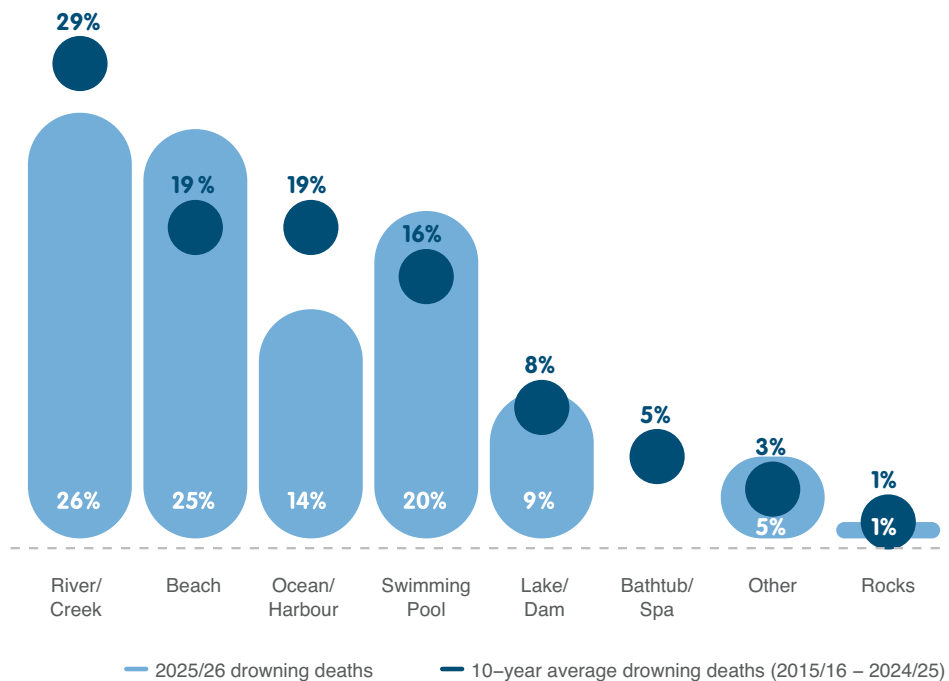
6% Watercraft and boating (6%)



5% Unknown



Queensland drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



Risk Factors

34% *Includes both prescription medication and illicit drugs
of cases drugs were recorded *



16%
of cases alcohol was recorded



> SOUTH AUSTRALIA

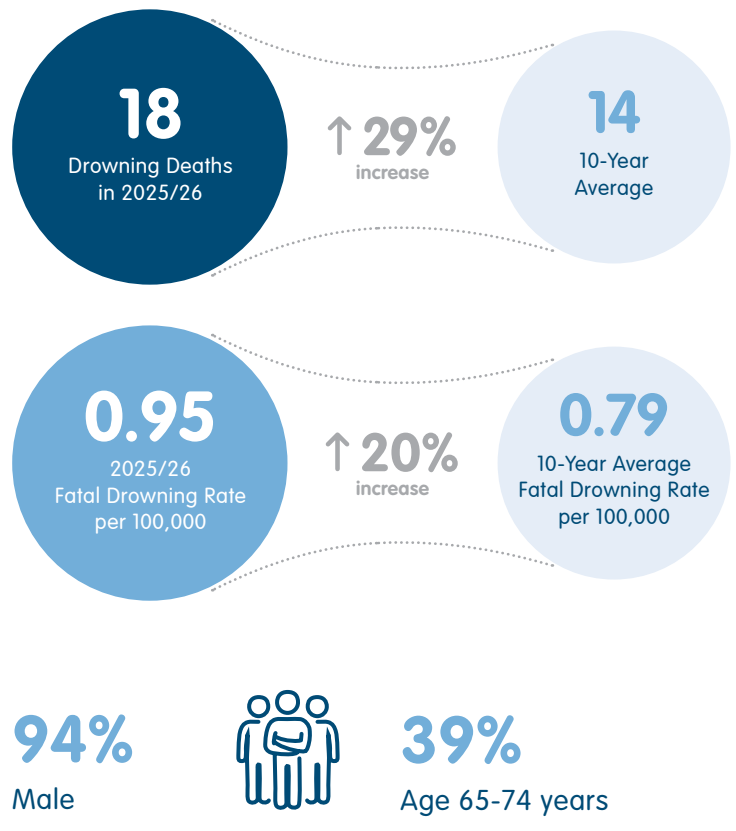
There were 18 drowning deaths that occurred in SA between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

The drowning rate of 0.95 per 100,000 population increased by 20% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

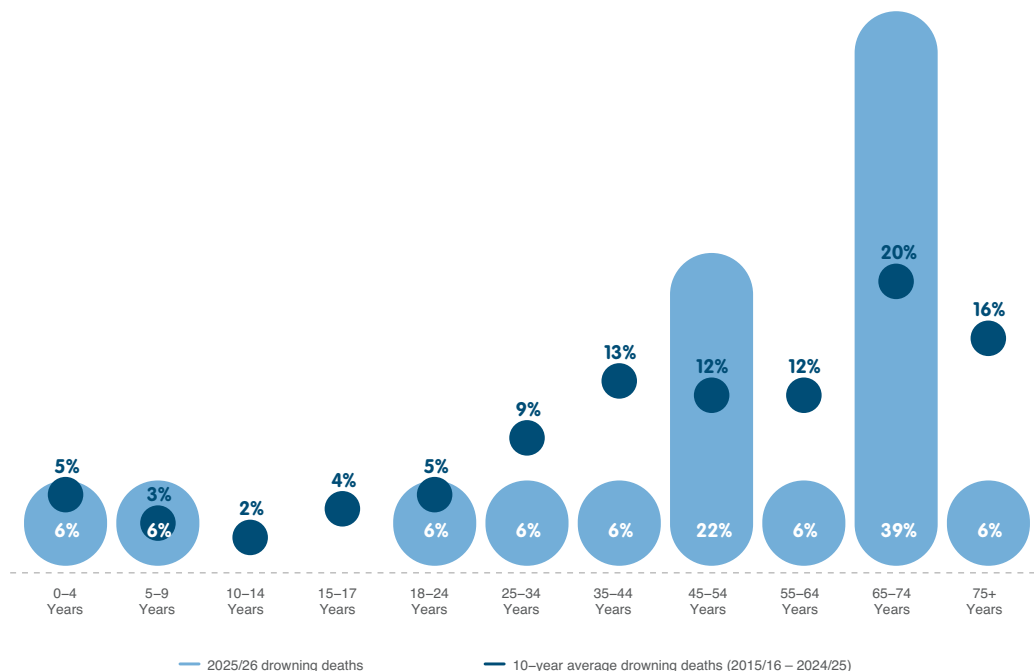
Over a third (39%) of all drowning deaths in South Australia occurred in people aged 65-74-years, recording a crude rate of 3.44 deaths per 100,000 population, this is triple compared to all other age groups.

The socio-economic background of those who drowned in South Australia were in the most disadvantaged areas (IRSAD Decile 1-2), representing 56% of people who drowned and 22% were from the medium disadvantaged (IRSAD Decile 3-4) areas, reinforcing the need for increased awareness and access to swimming and education programs for all communities.

Drowning deaths most frequently occurred at by ocean/harbour (44%) followed by river/creek (22%), with the most common activity being boating (33%). Drowning deaths in most frequently occurred in March (22%).

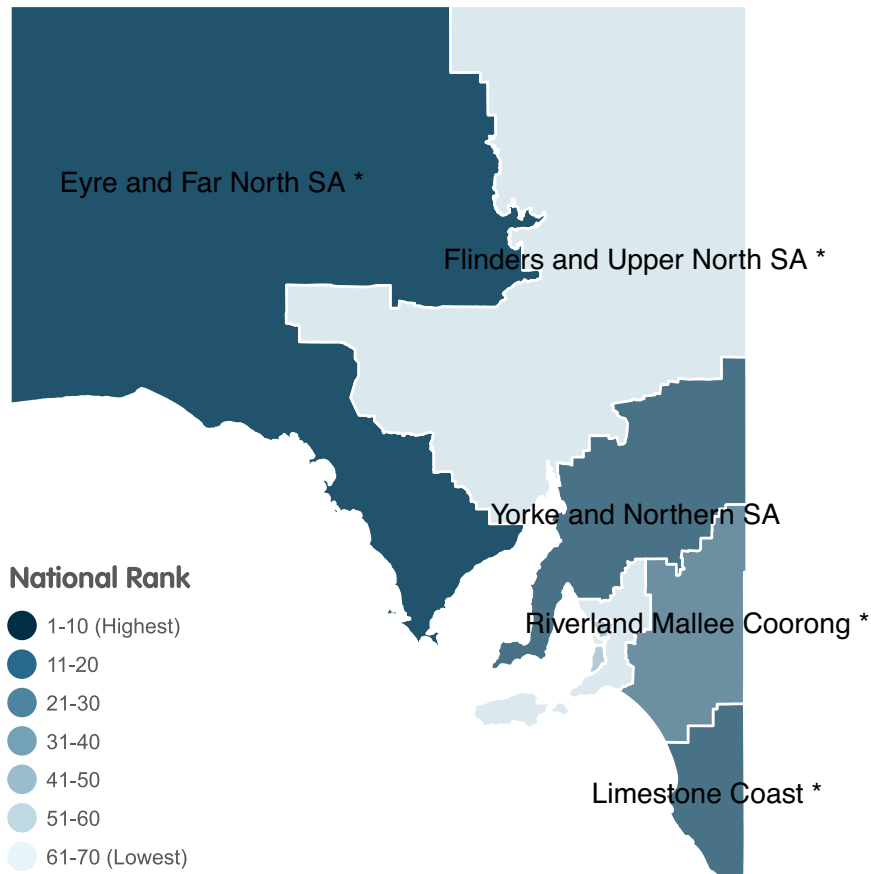


South Australia drowning deaths by age group, 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by SA region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

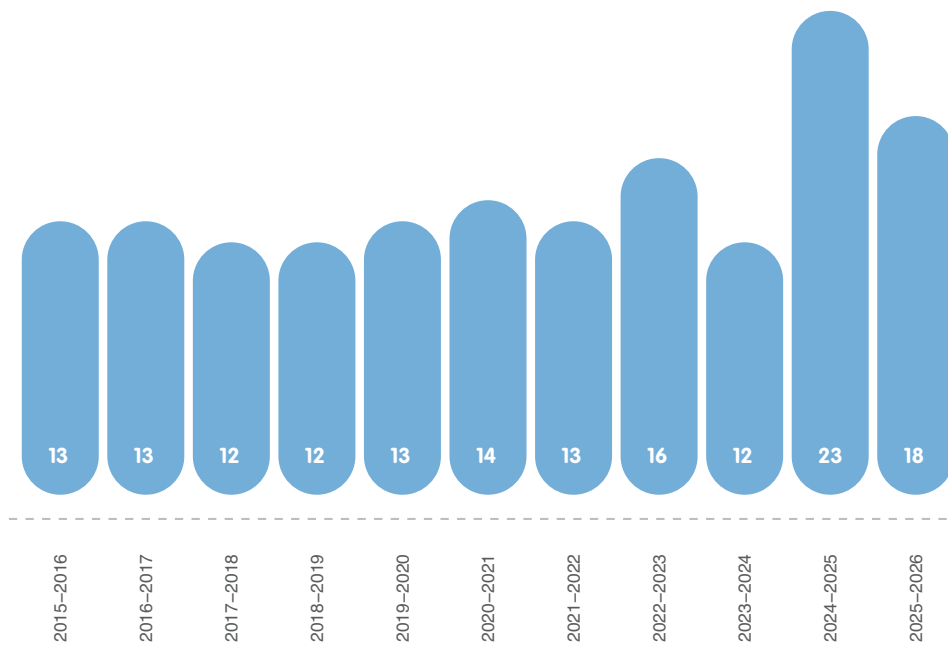
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each SA region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



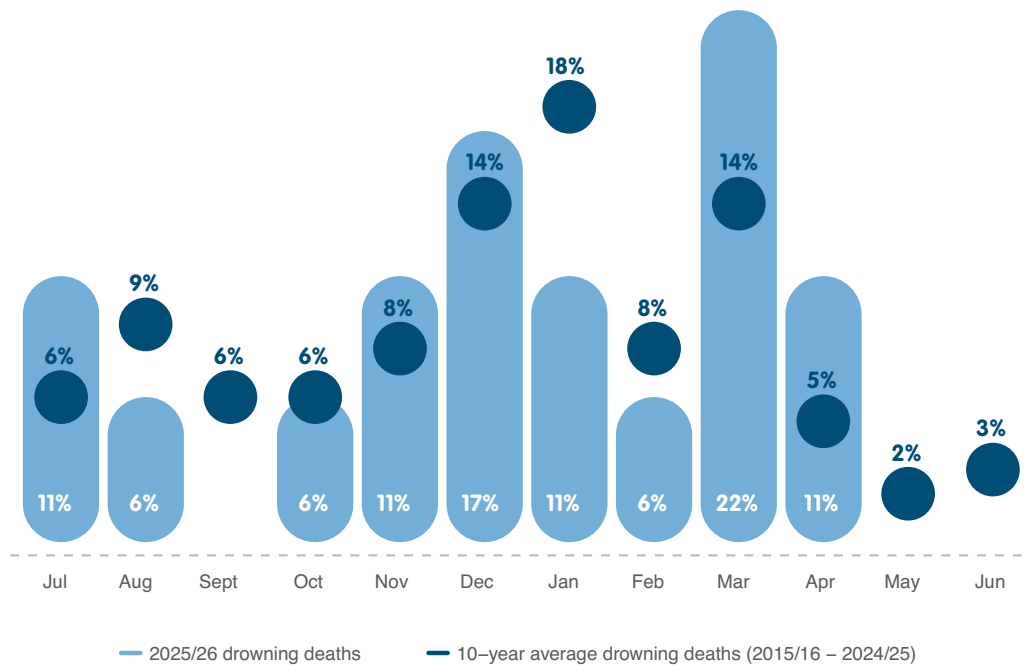
Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
Eyre and Far North SA *	1.95	15
Limestone Coast *	1.32	28
Yorke and Northern SA	1.28	29
Riverland Mallee Coorong*	1.23	33
Southern Adelaide	0.79	58
Northern Adelaide	0.78	59
Barossa Hills Fleurieu	0.71	62
Central Adelaide	0.50	69
Flinders and Upper North SA *	0.45	70

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

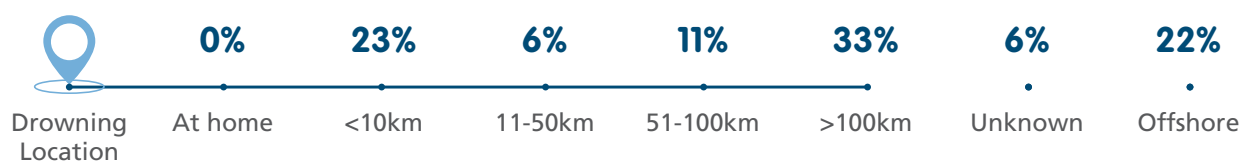
South Australia drowning deaths by financial year, 2015/16 to 2025/26



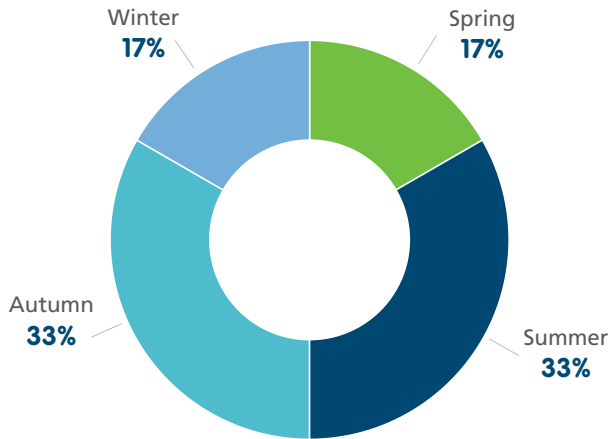
South Australia drowning deaths by month, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and South Australia drowning location 2025/26



South Australia drowning deaths
by season, 2025/26



South Australia drowning deaths
by activity, 2025/26

33% Boating



17% Unintentional fall into water



11% Swimming and recreating



11% Fishing



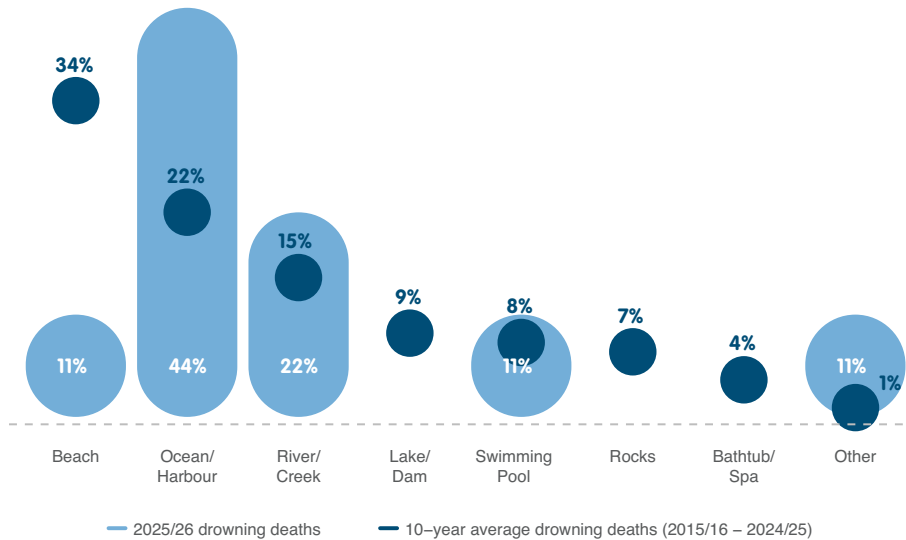
11% Non-aquatic transport



6% Unknown



South Australia drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



Risk Factors

50%

*Includes both prescription medication and illicit drugs
of cases drugs were recorded *



17%

of cases alcohol was recorded



> TASMANIA

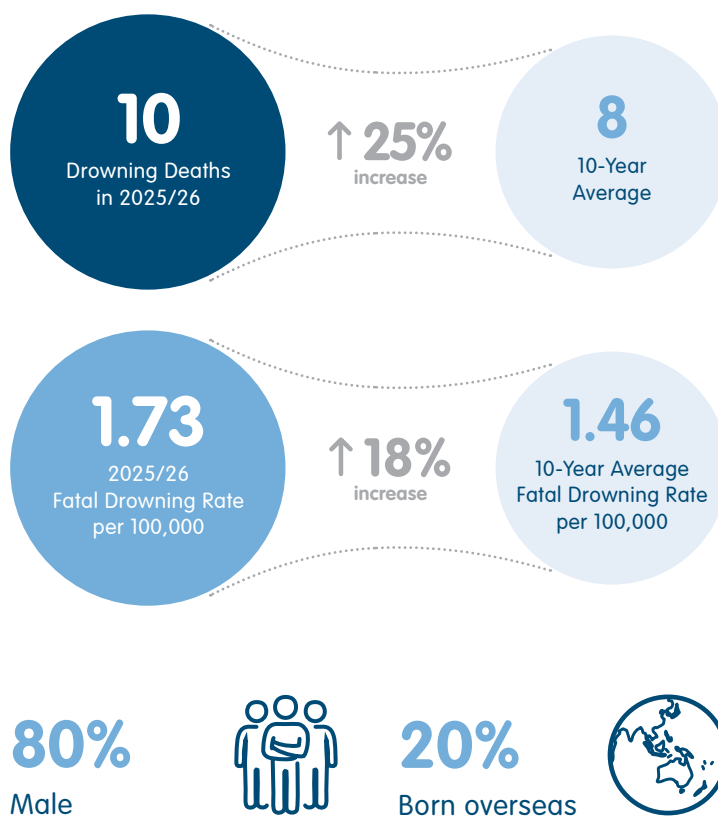
There were 10 drowning deaths that occurred in Tasmania between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

The drowning rate of 1.73 per 100,000 population increased by 18% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

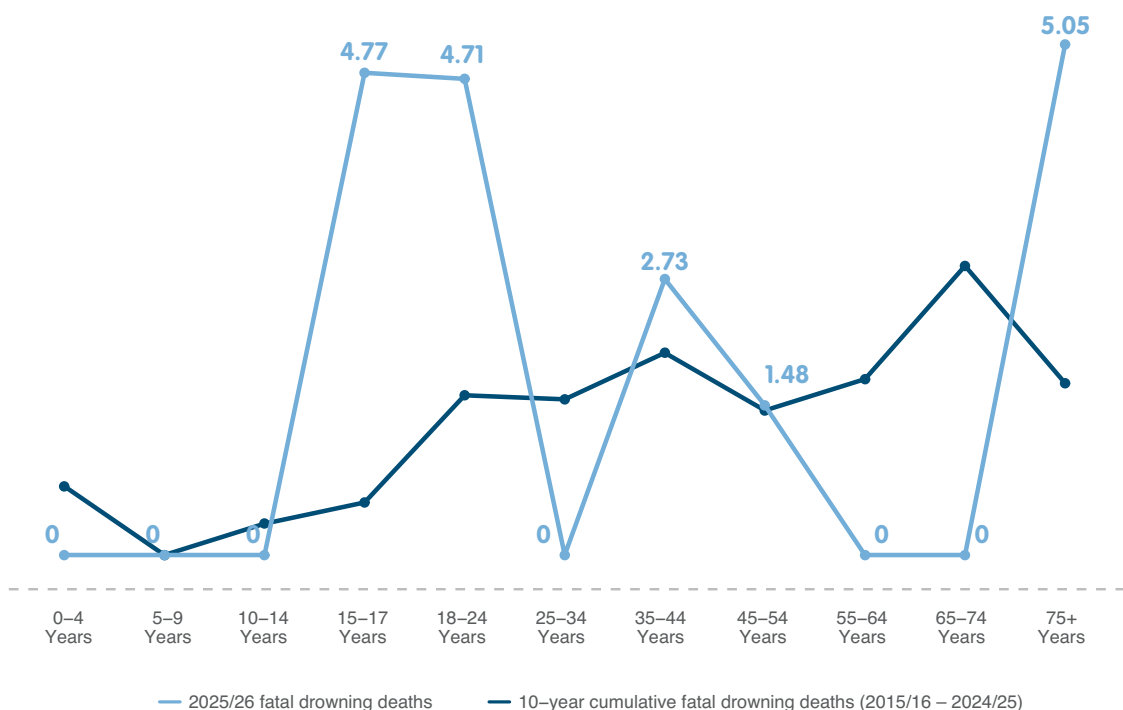
Almost one-third (30%) of drowning deaths in Tasmania occurred among people aged 75+ years, with the highest crude rate of 5.05 deaths per 100,000 population, closely followed by those aged 15-17-years (4.77 per 100,000 population).

Over half (60%) of the people who drowned in Tasmania resided in areas with IRSAD Deciles below 4.

In 2025/26, drowning deaths in Tasmania mostly occurred at ocean/harbour (50%) followed by beaches (20%), and rivers/creeks (20%). The leading activities prior to drowning was swimming (30%) and boating (20%).



Tasmania age-specific drowning rates per 100,000 population, 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by Tasmanian region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each Tasmanian region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



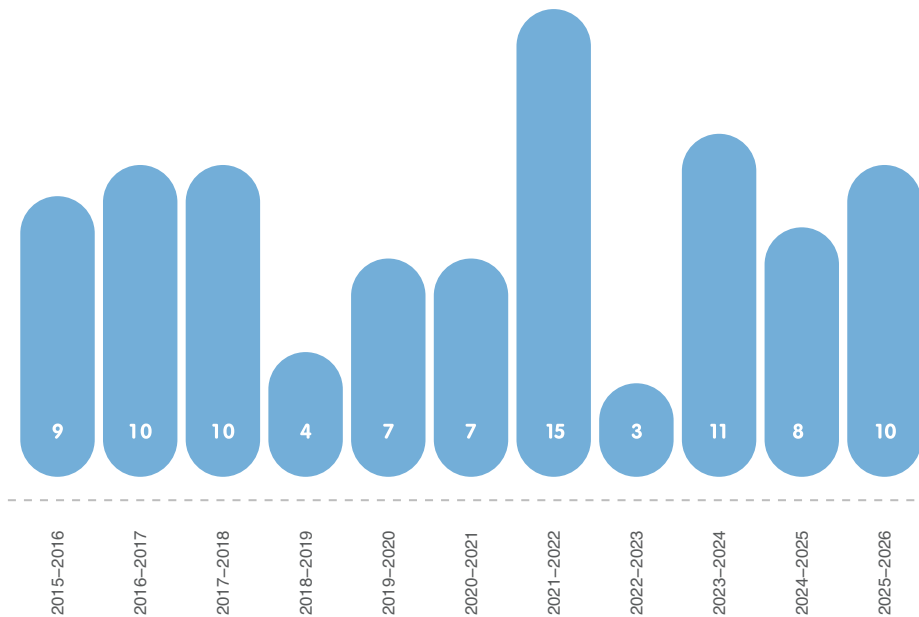
National Rank

- 1-10 (Highest)
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70 (Lowest)

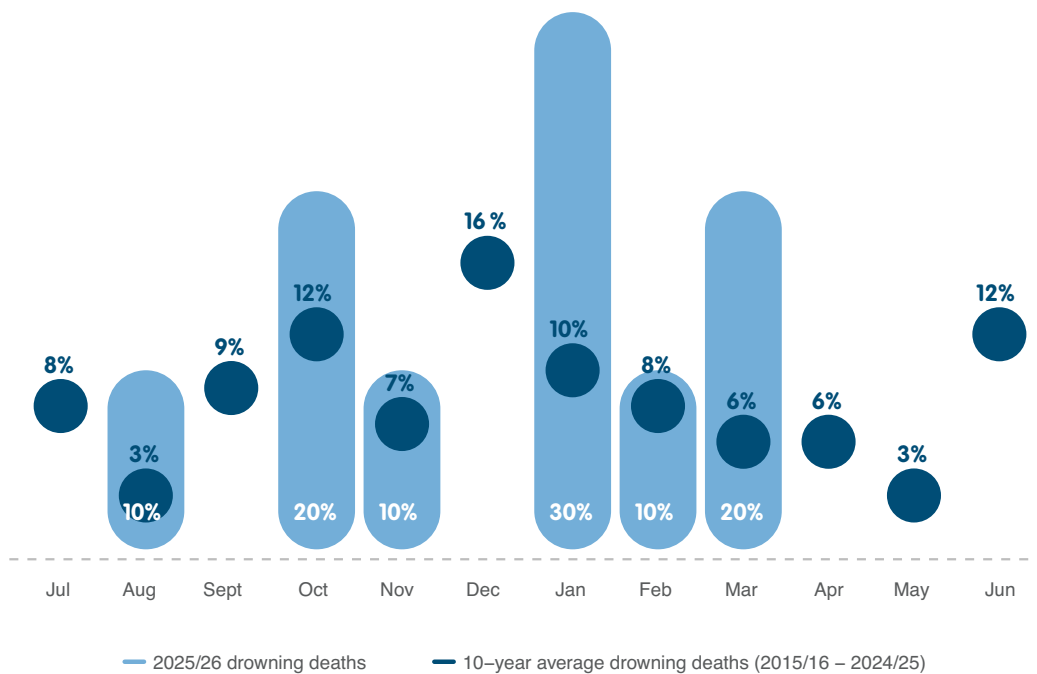
Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
South East TAS	3.07	4
West and North West TAS	1.37	27
Hobart	1.21	35
Launceston and North East TAS	1.19	36

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

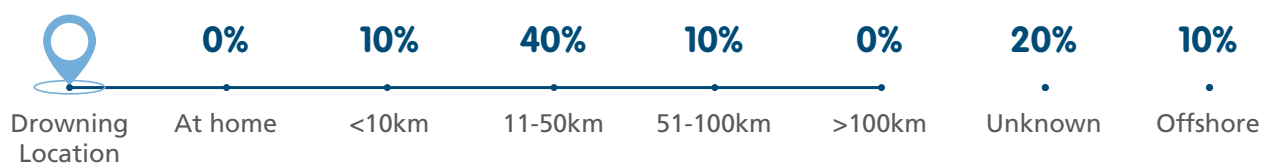
Tasmania drowning deaths by financial year, 2015/16 to 2025/26



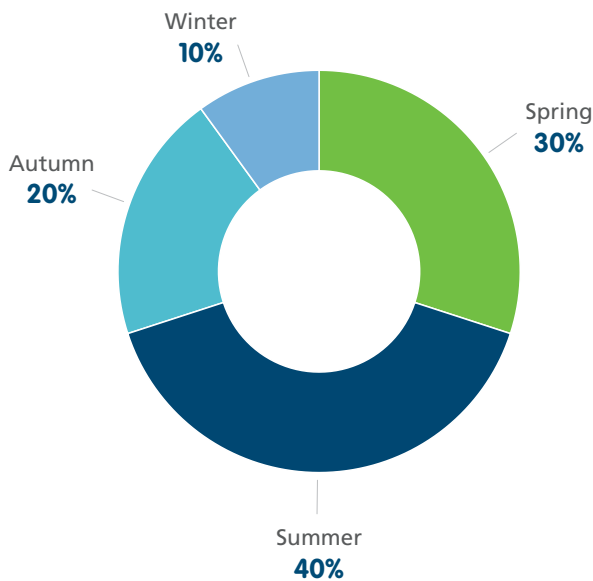
Tasmania drowning deaths by month, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and Tasmania drowning location, 2025/26



Tasmania drowning deaths
by season, 2025/26



Tasmania drowning deaths
by activity, 2025/26

30% Swimming and recreating



20% Boating



10% Fishing



10% Watercraft



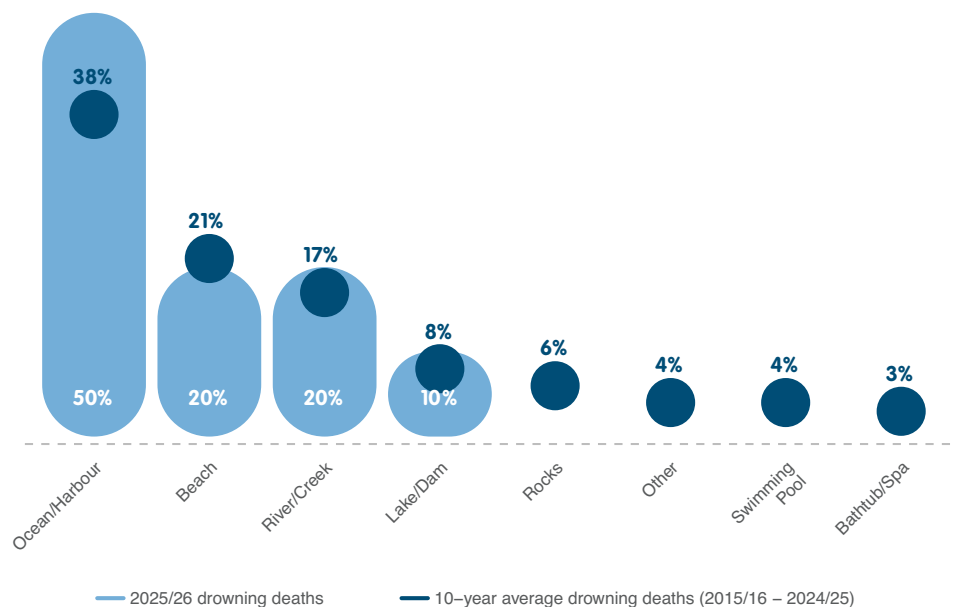
10% Jumped In



20% Unknown



Tasmania drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



Risk Factors

10% of cases drugs were recorded *

*Includes both prescription medication and illicit drugs



30% of cases alcohol was recorded



> VICTORIA

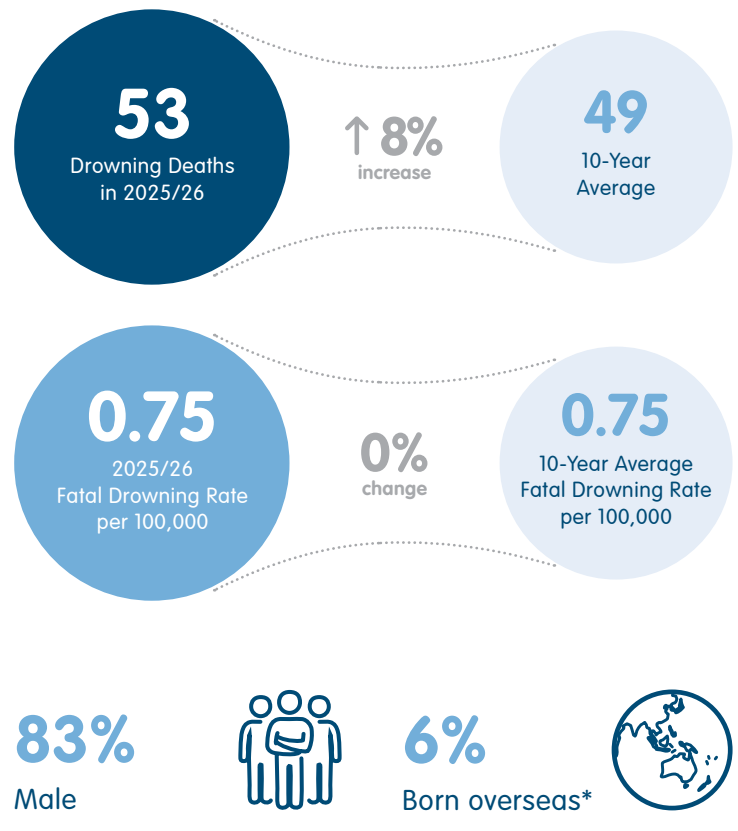
There were 53 drowning deaths that occurred in Victoria between 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

The drowning rate of 0.75 per 100,000 population with no change this financial year, compared to the 10-year average.

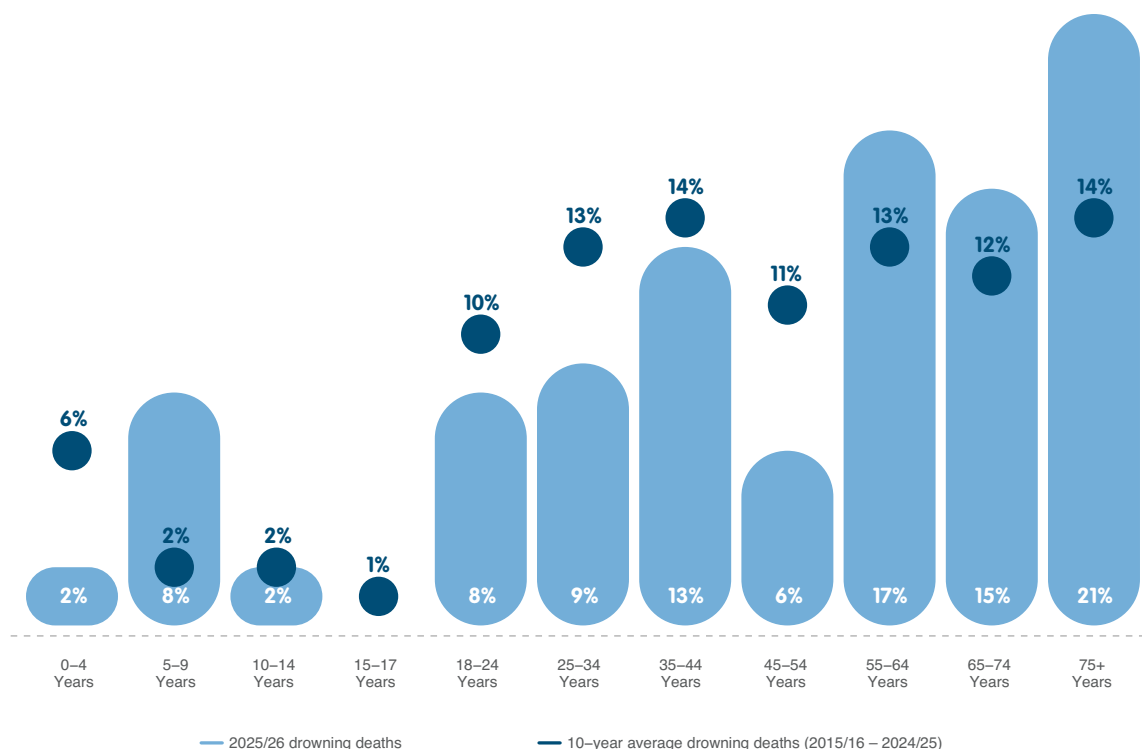
The 75+-year age group recorded the highest number, proportion and rate of drowning, reaching a crude rate of 1.95 per 100,000 population in this age group. This differs from national trends, where people aged 65-74-years are the group with the highest rates for drowning.

Drowning deaths in Victoria mainly occurred at ocean/harbours (28%) followed by rivers/creeks (23%), and swimming pools (21%). Ocean/harbour locations this financial year were triple the 10-year average. Swimming pools this financial year recorded 90% higher than the 10-year average. Swimming and recreating (28%) were the most common activity for those who drowned in Victoria, followed by an unintentional fall into water (17%) and bathing (11%).

** numbers are not representative due to information not being available at the time of publication*



Victoria drowning deaths by age group, 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by VIC region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

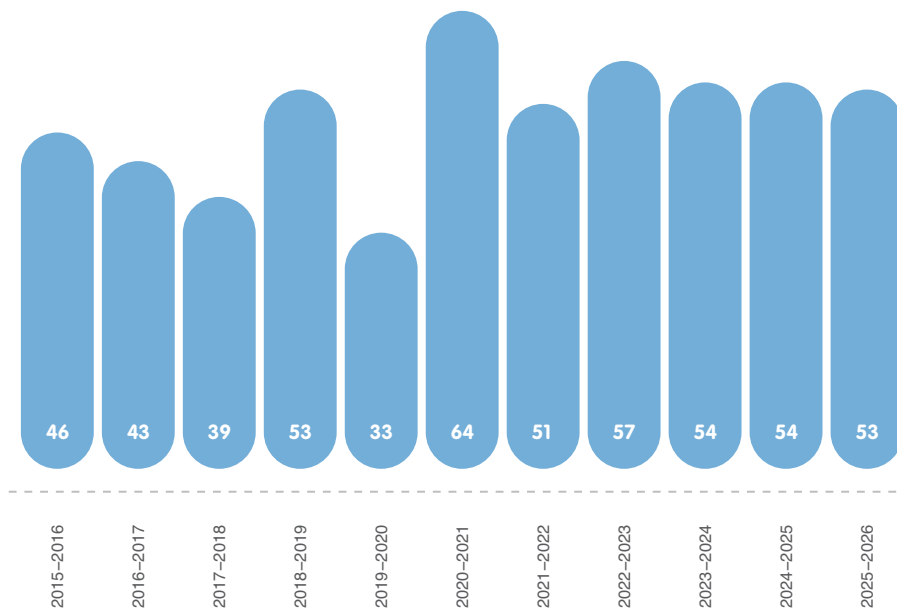
This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each VIC region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



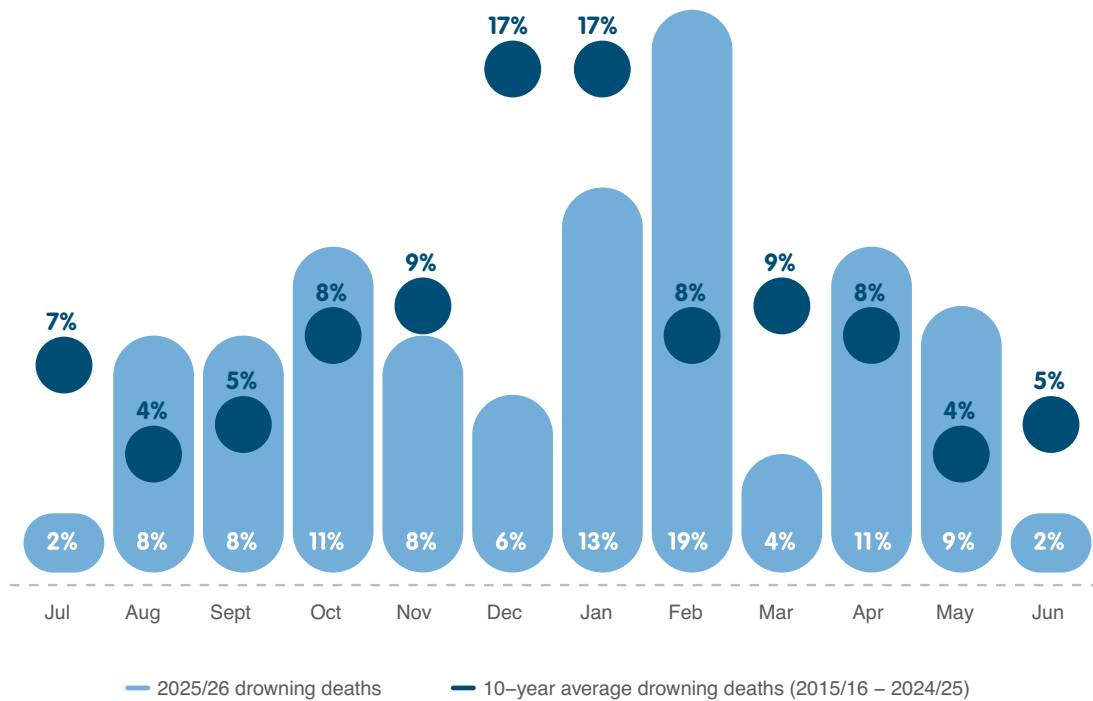
Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
Loddon Mallee	1.18	37
Barwon South West	1.16	39
Gippsland	0.95	47
Goulburn Valley	0.86	53
South East Melbourne	0.71	61
Grampians	0.61	64
Western Melbourne	0.61	65
Ovens Murray *	0.55	67
North Eastern Melbourne	0.54	68

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

Victoria drowning deaths by financial year, 2015/16 to 2025/26

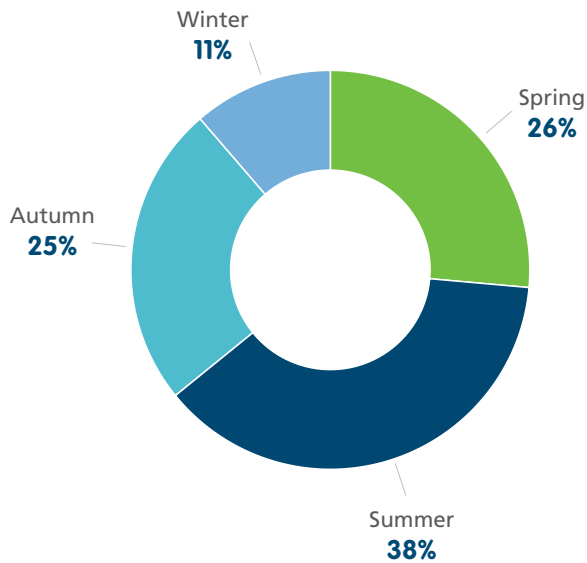


Victoria drowning deaths by month, 2025/26



Due to Victorian cases still open in the National Coronial Information System, residential address was not known to calculate distance from home.

Victoria drowning deaths
by season, 2025/26



Victoria drowning deaths
by activity, 2025/26

28% Swimming and recreating



17% Unintentional fall into water



11% Bathing



6% Watercraft



6% Diving



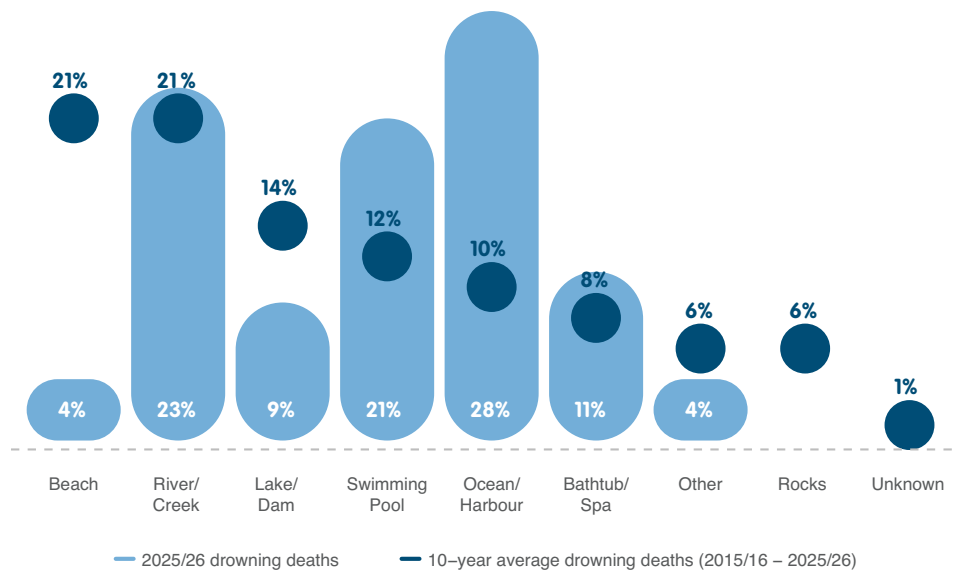
6% Non-aquatic transport



11% Unknown



Victoria drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



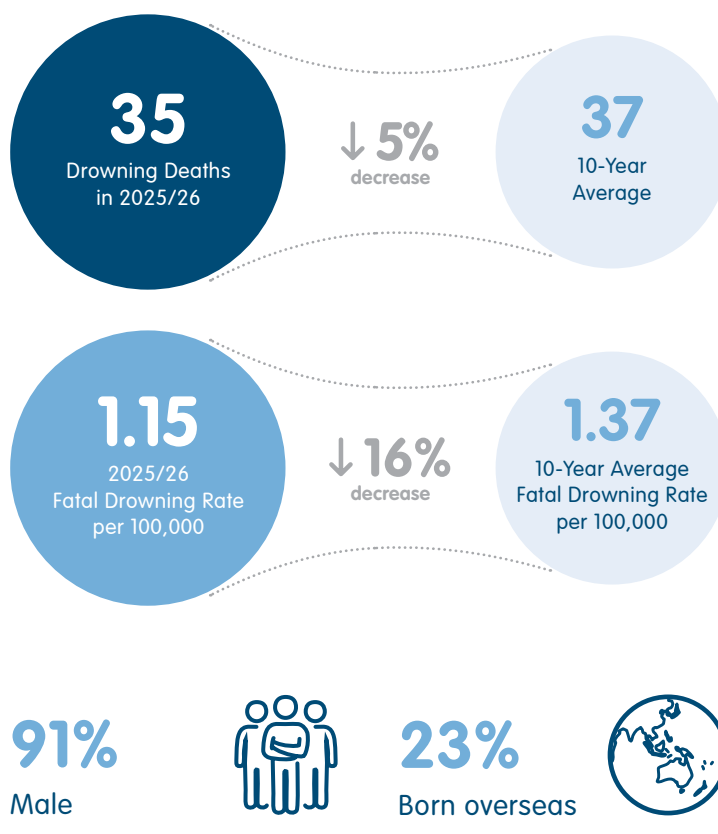
> WESTERN AUSTRALIA

There were 35 drowning deaths that occurred in Western Australia between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026.

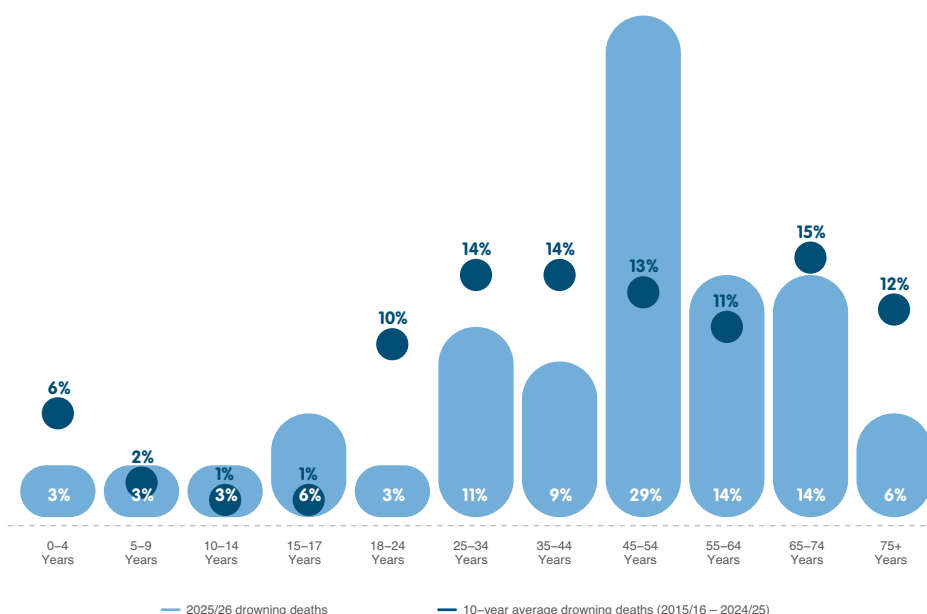
The drowning rate of 1.15 per 100,000 population decreased by 16% this financial year, compared to the 10-year average. The highest number of drowning deaths in WA occurred in the 45-54-year age group (29%), which also recorded the highest crude rate in the state with 2.69 drowning deaths per 100,000 population. Those aged 65-74-years recorded the second highest crude rate of 1.85 per 100,000 population and represented 14% of drowning in WA. Drowning deaths among young-children 0-4 years accounted for 3% of total drowning deaths recording a crude drowning rate of 0.59, a decrease of 50% on the 10-year average of 1.17 per 100,000 population.

Over one-third (37%) of all drowning deaths in Western Australia were of people who lived in areas with IRSAD scores below 4, reinforcing the need for increased access and opportunities to swimming and education programs for those that need it most.

Drowning in WA mostly occurred at beaches (34%), followed by ocean/harbour (14%). The leading activity prior to drowning was swimming and recreating (26%) followed by diving/snorkelling (17%). The majority of drowning deaths occurred in the summer months (57%), with the highest number of drowning deaths occurring in December (31%). Drowning in December this financial year was more than double the 10-year average, 11 drowning deaths this financial year compared to the 10-year average of 5.

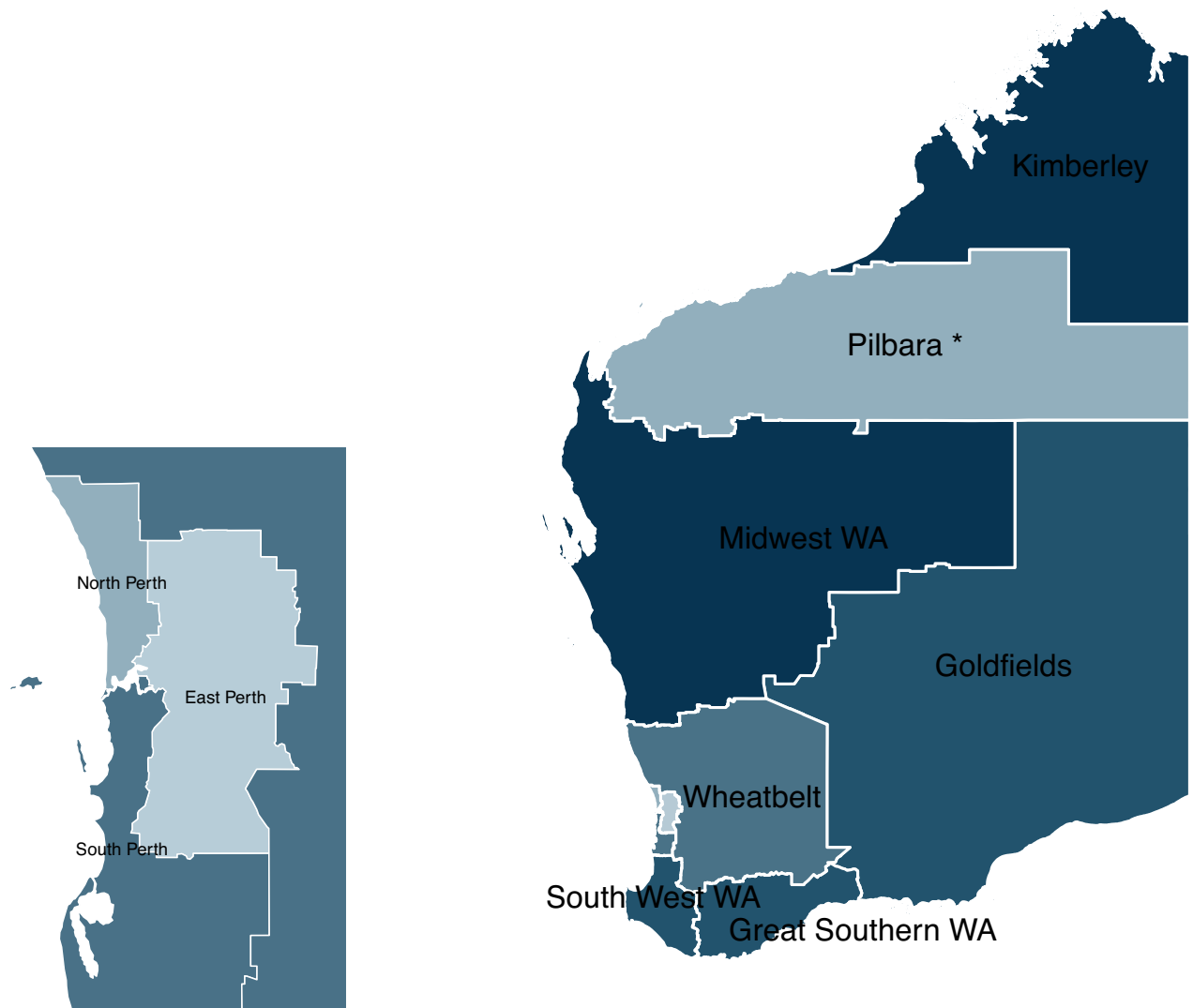


Western Australia drowning deaths by age group, 2025/26



Residential fatal drowning rate by WA region, 2015/16 - 2025/26

This map shows the crude fatal drowning rates per 100,000 residents of each WA region. As an indication of the relative burden of drowning in each community, these rates are based on where people lived, not where the incident occurred.



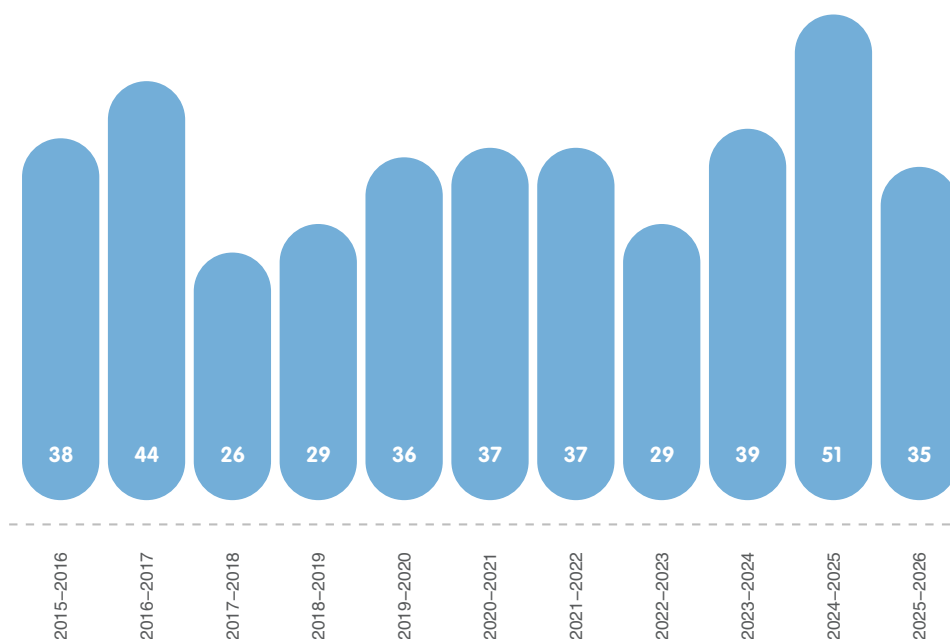
National Rank

- 1-10 (Highest)
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70 (Lowest)

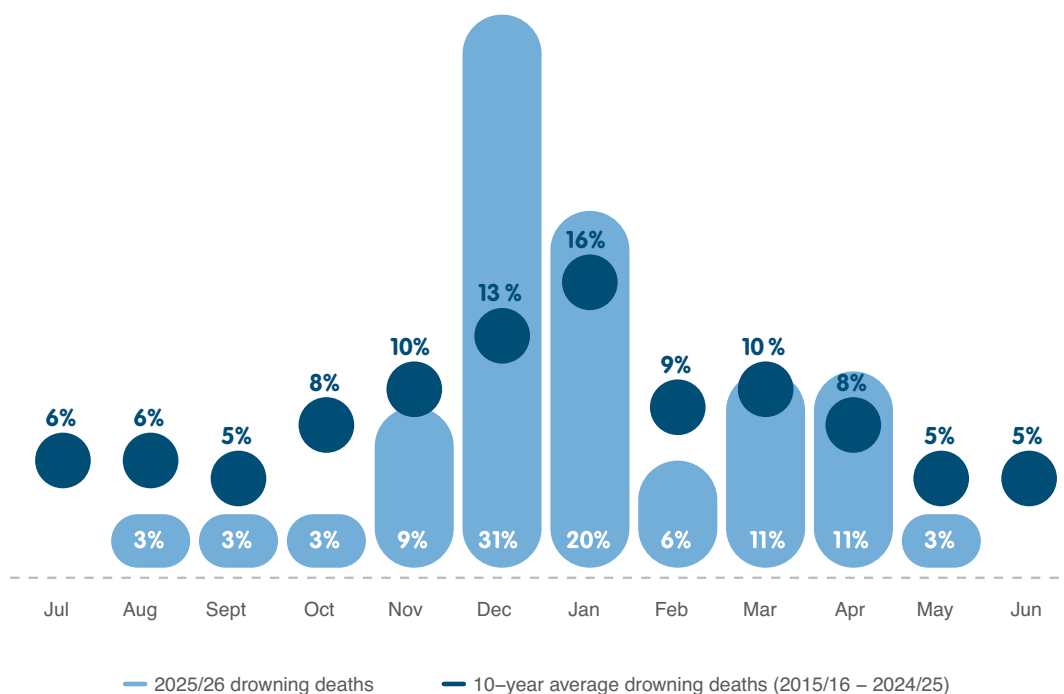
Region	Rate/ 100k	National rank
Kimberley	4.17	2
Midwest WA	2.39	9
South West WA	1.90	16
Great Southern WA	1.89	17
Goldfields	1.76	19
Wheatbelt	1.40	25
South Perth	1.27	30
Pilbara	1.00	45
North Perth	0.89	51
East Perth	0.88	52

* Rates calculated from less than 10 cases, interpret with caution

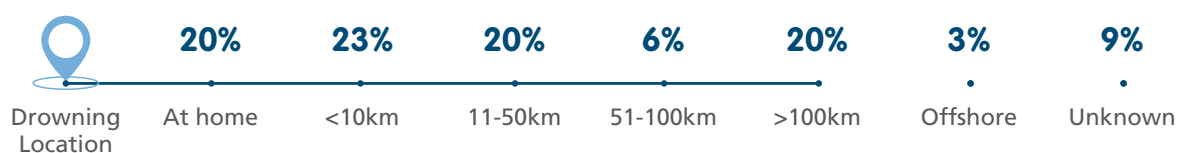
Western Australia drowning deaths by financial year, 2015/16 to 2025/26



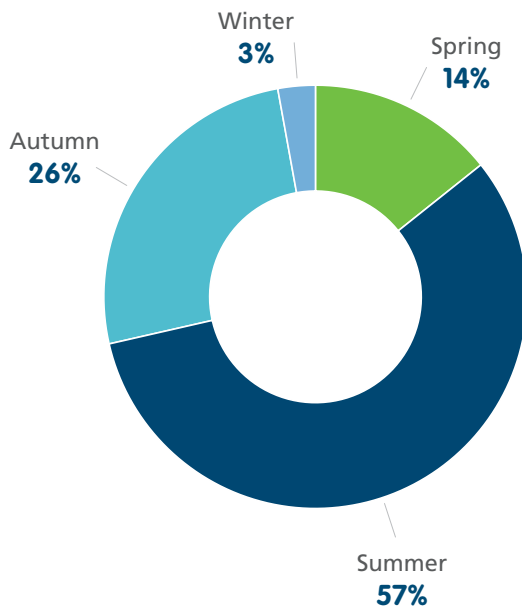
Western Australia drowning deaths by month, 2025/26



Drive distance between residence and Western Australia drowning location, 2025/26



Western Australia drowning deaths by season, 2025/26



Western Australia drowning deaths by activity, 2025/26

26% Swimming and recreating



17% Diving/Snorkelling



14% Unintentional fall into water



14% Watercraft



6% Boating



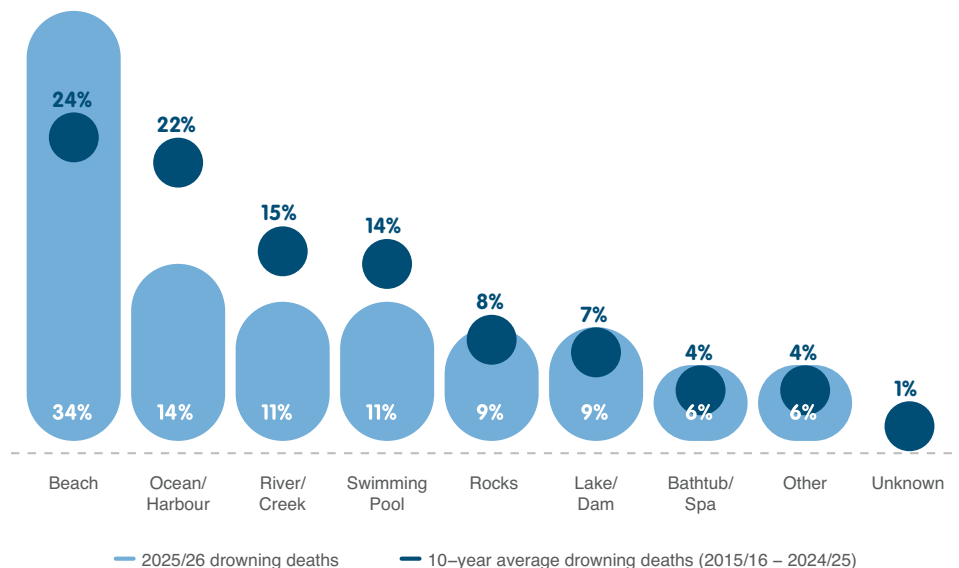
6% Bathing



6% Attempted rescue



Western Australia drowning deaths by location, 2025/26



Risk Factors

49%

*Includes both prescription medication and illicit drugs
of cases drugs were recorded *



14%

of cases alcohol was recorded



Fatal drowning

The information presented in the National Drowning Report 2026 has been collated from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS), State and Territory Coronial offices and year-round media monitoring. The number of drowning deaths are collated in partnership with Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs) and Surf Life Saving Australia and analysed by Royal Life Saving Society - Australia. The data presented in the Insights by Key Drowning Locations: Beaches, Ocean/harbour, and Rocks section were analysed by Surf Life Saving Australia. Information contained within the NCIS is made available by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety. Due to limited information available for Victorian cases, information has been provided by Life Saving Victoria where available. There are some differences between location definitions and coding between Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving due to planning and operational reasons, which may result in some double counting in the location data analysis.

Royal Life Saving uses a media monitoring service for broadcast, print and online all year round to identify drowning deaths reported in the media. This information is then corroborated with information from the NCIS, police reports, Royal Life Saving STMOs, and Surf Life Saving Australia before being included in the National Drowning Report.

Great care is taken to ensure that the information in this report is as accurate as possible. Figures may change depending on ongoing coronial investigations and findings, as 79% of cases are still under investigation (i.e., open) as this report went to press. Royal Life Saving regularly publishes ongoing studies, which provide detailed information on long-term data trends.

Information on the drowning deaths included in this report is correct as of 30 July 2026. Historical drowning data are correct as of 1 July 2026 in accordance with Royal Life Saving's ongoing data quality assurance policy. All cases in the Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database are checked against those in the NCIS on a regular basis and figures are updated in annual National Drowning Reports as cases close. The 10-year averages in this report are calculated from drowning death data from 2015/16 to 2024/25 inclusive.

Drowning rates per 100,000 population are calculated using population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publication 'Australian Demographic Statistics' (Cat 3101.0). Percentages and averages are presented as whole numbers and have been rounded up or down accordingly.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas [8]

The Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area, including both relative advantage and disadvantage measures.

For SEIFA 2021, the concept of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage is the same as that used for SEIFA 2016 and SEIFA 2011. That is, the ABS broadly defines relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in terms of people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society.

A low score indicates **relatively greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage** in general. For example, an area could have a low score if there are:

- many households with low incomes, or many people in unskilled occupations, AND
- few households with high incomes, or few people in skilled occupations.

A high score indicates a **relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage** in general. For example, an area may have a high score if there are:

- many households with high incomes, or many people in skilled occupations, AND
- few households with low incomes, or few people in unskilled occupations.

Data for socio-economic status was determined using the socio-economic index for advantage and disadvantage for an individual's usual place of residence [8].

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this report, the authors did not use generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies in the analysis, interpretation, writing, or design of the report. The authors take full responsibility for the content, analysis, findings, and presentation of the report.

Sub-state and territory regions

The regional maps presented in the Insights by State and Territories section are intended to provide a general sense of the relative burden of drowning for residents in different parts of each state and territory. The sub-state/territory regions presented align with the local health districts/units of each state or territory, defined by the health department in that state/territory. In cases where these geographies do not align to other defined Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) boundaries, the health district boundary was re-aligned to closest Statistical Area 1 (SA1) boundary. That is, if an SA1 overlapped with different two regions, it was assigned to the region that it shared the most area with.

Drowning cases were assigned to each region based on the home residence of the person who drowned. For drowning cases occurring in Victoria, available data on home residence was limited to postcode only. Victorian cases were therefore assigned to regions (Victorian Local Public Health Units) based on proportion of overlap; postcodes fully contained within a region were assigned to that region, postcodes with geographic area split across one or more regions were assigned to the region with which they shared the most area.

Exclusions and categorisations

Drowning deaths as a result of suicide or homicide, deaths from natural causes, shark and crocodile attacks, or hypothermia have been excluded from this report. All information presented in this report relates to drowning deaths or deaths where drowning is a contributory cause of death.

Coastal locations include beaches, oceans/harbours and coastal rocks.

Inland locations refer to rivers/creeks (including waterholes and waterfalls), lakes/dams, ponds.

'Non-aquatic transport' relates to drowning deaths involving a means of transport that is not primarily designed or intended for aquatic use such as cars, motorbikes, bicycles and aeroplanes among others.

Means of transport primarily used for aquatic purposes are categorised under 'boating' (water-based wind or motor-powered vessels, boats, ships and personal watercraft, such as boats, jet skis, sail boats and yachts). 'Watercraft' refer to water-based non-powered recreational equipment such as those that are rowed or paddled (e.g., rowboats, surfboats, kayaks, canoes, surf boards and boogie boards).

Within this report, 'swimming pool' includes home swimming pools, public swimming pools, hotel and motel pools, and portable swimming pools among others.

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving Australia would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing the Royal Life Saving Australia National Drowning Report 2025/26:

- Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs)
- The National Coronial Information System (NCIS)
- Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)
- The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)
- Jessica Bryan - The National Coronial Information System
- Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Bernadette Matthews (Life Saving Victoria)
- Hannah Graefe (Life Saving Victoria)
- Floss Roberts (Royal Life Saving Northern Territory)
- Tim East (School of Sport and Education NT)
- Masaki Shibata (Monash University)
- Lauren Nimmo (Royal Life Saving Western Australia)
- John Lippman OAM (Australasian Diving Safety Foundation)
- Rick Carter (Studio One Another)

The drowning prevention research of the Royal Life Saving Society - Australia is supported by the Australian Government.

This report was compiled and written by Lauren Miller, Norton Grey, Lasindu Yapa Abeywardene, Jasmin Lawes, William Koon

➤ 2026 National Water Safety Summit and World Drowning Prevention Day

On 23 and 24 July 2026, over 240 people from across the nation and all parts of the water safety sector came together to reflect on progress, explore opportunities, and create momentum aligned with the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030.

In January 2026, the Australian Water Safety Council released a Midpoint Update to the 10-year strategy, providing a critical assessment of progress in several key areas and refining priorities to focus on the things that matter most. [9]

The Midpoint Update informed the 2026 National Water Safety Summit program, which featured plenary sessions with 51 different voices involved, breakouts with 98 presentations across 15 themed sessions, and three focused workshops.

World Drowning Prevention Day

The 2026 Summit also formed part of Australia's commemoration of 2026 World Drowning Prevention Day, held on 25 July of each year. World Drowning Prevention Day was established in April 2021 when the United Nations adopted the first Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention, calling for coordinated action to prevent drowning worldwide. World Drowning Prevention Day aims to raise awareness of the importance of drowning prevention and to reduce preventable deaths.





➤ WE SWIM: Multicultural Community Water Safety Program

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.

One in three drowning deaths is someone born overseas, and while nearly half of Australian children can't swim 50 metres by the end of primary school, this proportion is estimated to be even higher among children from multicultural backgrounds. Multicultural communities face language, cultural, financial and access barriers to lessons, venues and aquatic careers. The WE SWIM Multicultural Community Water Safety Program funded by the Australian Government and led by Royal Life Saving Society - Australia responds to this challenge.

Royal Life Saving Australia will bring together national coordination, community partnerships, and rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning into a single, coherent program built around a commitment to saving lives, removing barriers, and building belonging. 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.

Royal Life Saving funds this work through three partnership streams – Place-Based Partnerships, Community Programs and Pathfinder Programs – aligned to the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030's target to halve drowning by 2030, the Commonwealth's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy, and Royal Life Saving's strategic framework for eliminating drowning, empowering communities, strengthening safety and succeeding together.

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.

For more information visit:

www.royallifesaving.com.au/WESWIM



Every WE SWIM activity activates one or more of four pillars:



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.



> RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: A new approach to beach safety education

This year, people born overseas accounted for 39% of Australian drowning deaths. Research has shown that migrants have significantly lower beach safety knowledge, particularly regarding rip currents and beach safety flags. Although culturally targeted water safety programs are available, they require sustained funding and human resources and typically reach people who are already aware of the risks.

Therefore, how can we sustainably educate migrant communities who may be unaware of the risks or have little interest in water safety?

A new study proposed an innovative approach: integrating beach safety information into English-language preparation materials for visa-related English examinations, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). [10] By embedding beach safety education into a familiar and necessary activity for migrants, this approach could reach a broader population without requiring additional dedicated programs.

Experience of beach safety education

A total of 101 international students, with English language proficiency ranging from intermediate to advanced, participated in the study. Most participants (93.3%) were recent arrivals who had lived in Australia for one year or less. Only 28.7% reported having previously received beach safety education in Australia, and approximately 70% of those who had received such education reported learning about beach safety through educational institutions.

29%
Previously learned
about beach safety in Australia

54%
Never learned
about beach safety in Australia

18%
Unsure whether they have learned
about beach safety in Australia



Multicultural workshop in Sydney.



Multicultural workshop in Melbourne.

Improvement of beach safety knowledge

The pre-survey, conducted before participants completed the exercise, showed that 65.3% had no knowledge of rip currents. More than half incorrectly interpreted the red and yellow beach safety flags, with 44.6% believing that they indicated a danger zone. Knowledge of common beach safety terms was also limited: more than 85% of participants did not understand the terms 'bluebottle' or 'shore dump'.

The post-survey, conducted after completion of the exercise, demonstrated a significant improvement in beach safety knowledge ($p < 0.05$). Following the intervention, 94.9% reported understanding what rip currents were, with some participants being able to describe their characteristics such as calm water and darker colour. Similarly, 83.5% correctly understood the meaning of the red and yellow beach safety flags. Knowledge of bluebottle also increased substantially, with 73.5% reporting that they understood the term, while 56.9% reported understanding shore dump.

Although some deterioration in knowledge was observed at the four-week follow-up, the intervention produced substantial improvements in beach safety knowledge. These findings provide preliminary evidence supporting the effectiveness of integrating beach safety education into English-language learning materials.

Translation into practice

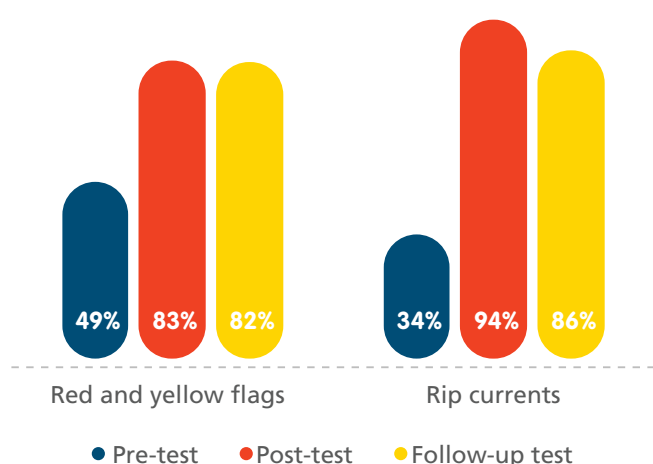
Although this study demonstrated the effectiveness of the educational materials, their educational impact depends on their uptake and use by migrant communities and international students. To facilitate translation into practice, the research team hosted workshops in Sydney and Melbourne to introduce the materials to relevant community, education, government and water safety organisations.

Future directions

Building on the demonstrated effectiveness of this educational approach, future studies will develop similar English-language learning materials addressing not only beach safety but also other water safety issues. The materials will also be adapted for learners with beginner-level English proficiency to increase accessibility.

In addition, the approach will be expanded to other exercises such as listening with audio-visual material, providing learners with opportunities to develop a broader range of English skills while gaining practical water safety knowledge.

Improvement of knowledge



Next steps



[10] M. Shibata, J. C. Lawes, R. Stolper, J. Ford, A. E. Peden, and H. Watanabe, "Public Health Promotion Through Language Learning: Improving Migrants' Australian Beach Safety Knowledge Through a Reading Exercise for English Language Proficiency Tests," *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* 37, no. 1 (2026): e70132, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.70132>.

➤ India - Australia Drowning Prevention Workshop

Royal Life Saving Australia is bringing together the Australian and Indian drowning prevention sectors to address the terrible impacts of drowning in both countries.

Tragically, drowning causes the deaths of more than 35,000 people in India each year. The Indian Government, at national and state levels, are taking pro-active steps to address drowning prevention and water safety.

In Australia, over one-third of drowning deaths are among people born overseas, with the Indian diaspora over-represented in drowning fatalities, and eager to strengthen community water safety.

During the week, 40 drowning prevention experts from across Australia and India gathered in Sydney 17-19 February, for a two-way drowning prevention workshop aiming to identifying new water safety solutions and strengthening ties between both countries.

Representatives are from federal, state and local governments in India, policy makers and researchers, and water safety organisations across Australia and India. Being multisectoral, the benefits of addressing water safety and drowning prevention, span health, education, recreation and emergency management in both countries.

Royal Life Saving acknowledges the support of the Centre for Australia-India Relations and the Department of Foreign Affairs to deliver this exchange program, as a recipient of the Maitri Grant Program 2025. The Maitri (meaning friendship) Grants aim to support greater collaboration with India across technology, business, education and culture.

Royal Life Saving Australia Chief Executive Officer Dr Justin Scarr said "The Maitri Grant provides an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with Indian drowning prevention colleagues to reduce the burden of drowning in both countries."

Centre for Australia-India Relations Chief Executive Officer Ryan Neelam said "We are pleased to support the Royal Life Saving Society in its efforts to prevent drowning in Australia and India. As two nations connected by strong people-to-people ties, coastal communities and a shared love of water, this partnership reflects practical ways we can work together to save lives and build safer communities."

We are also very pleased to have the support of The George Institute for Global Health - India and World Health Organisation - India to assist in delivering the program in Australia and India.

The project is being delivered in line with Royal Life Saving's new strategy aiming to bring people together to eliminate drowning and help communities stay safe around water.



> Summer Drowning Toll

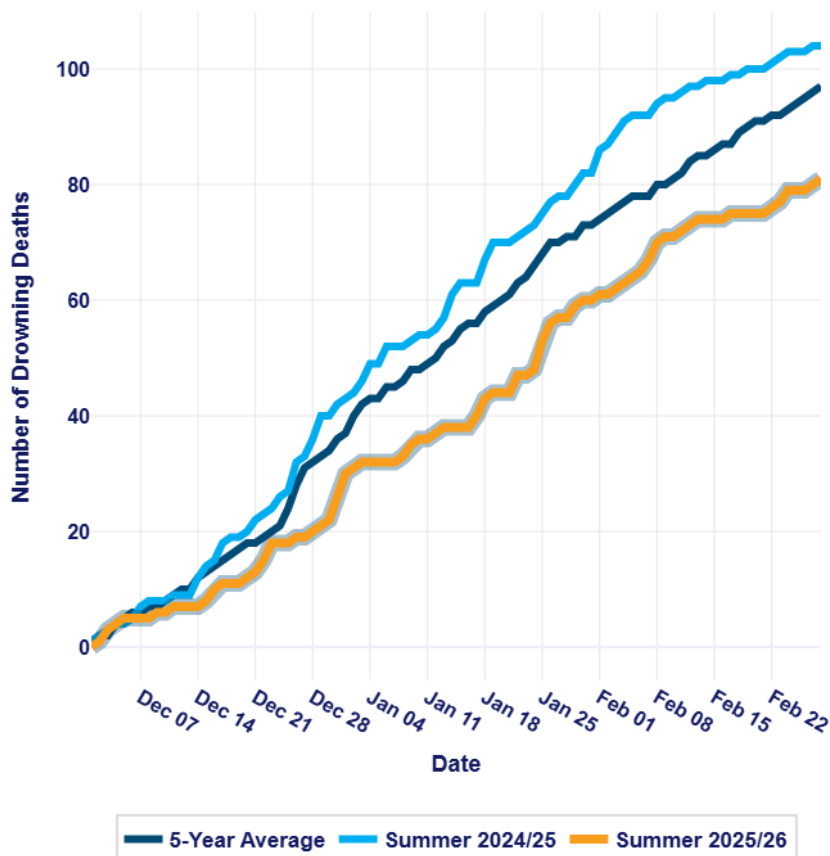
Royal Life Saving research shows a consistent peak in fatal drowning cases in the summer months. In a bid to understand the increased risks during this time, each year, we publish the Summer Drowning Toll from 1 December to the end of February, which charts drowning incidents around Australia in these months. This serves as a timely vehicle for us to promote safety advice in conjunction with our ongoing drowning prevention campaigns for particularly high-risk groups and communities, such as men, children and people from multicultural communities.

The purpose of the Summer Drowning Toll is to report on drowning number based on real-time report from the media and police reporting.

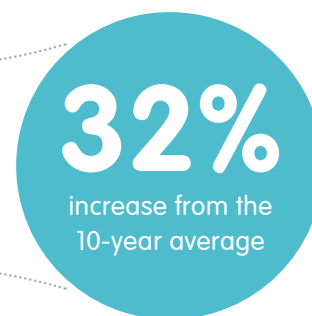
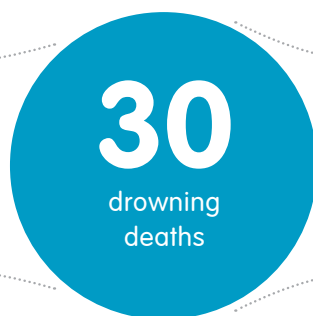
Royal Life Saving's Summer Drowning Toll dashboard was updated daily over the summer (1 December 2025 to 28 February 2026).

This year, there was 81 drowning deaths that occurred over the summer period: a 22% decrease from last year. Males accounted for 91% and those over the age of 55-years represented 57% of the summer drowning cases. Beaches continue to be the leading location for drowning (27%), followed by ocean/harbour (25%).

Number of 2025/26 summer drowning deaths reported in the media compared to last summer and the five-year average



> MULTIPLE FATALITY DROWNING DEATHS SNAPSHOT:
Financial year 2025/26



83% of multiple fatality drowning events were males



KEY HIGHLIGHTS



27%
were aged between
65-74-years



30%
occurred while boating



47%
occurred in a River/Creek



20%
non-aquatic transport

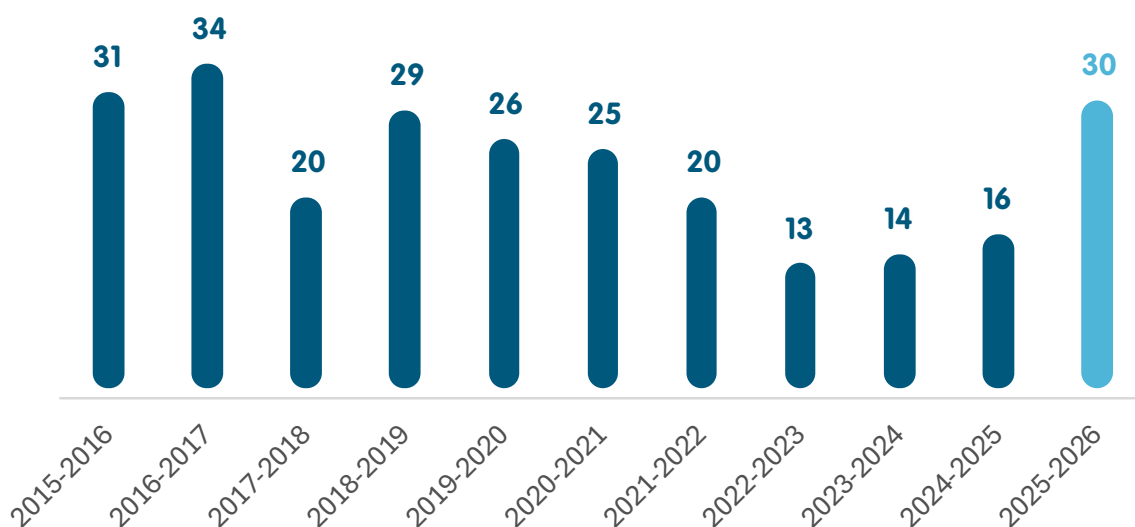


37%
were born overseas
27% were born in China &
27% in United Kingdom



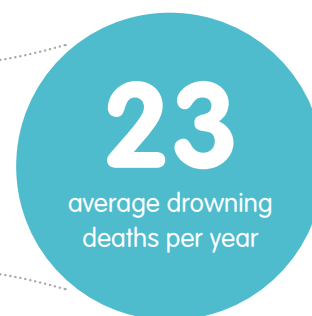
20%
occurred while swimming

COMPARISON OVER THE PAST 10-YEARS (2015/16-2024/25) TO THIS FINANCIAL YEAR (2025/26)



> MULTIPLE FATALITY DROWNING DEATHS 10-YEAR SNAPSHOT

Analysis from 2015/16 to 2024/25



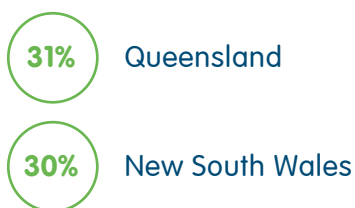
79% of multiple fatality drowning events were males



AGE



STATE OCCURED IN



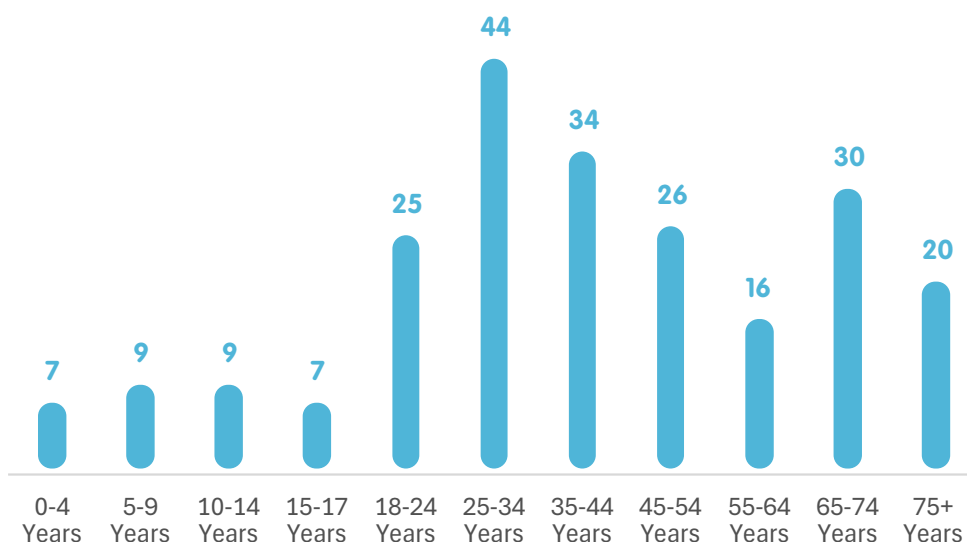
WERE RESIDENTS OF



42% were among people born overseas

The top three countries being United Kingdom, China, and India.
Of those born overseas 8% were overseas visitors and 1% were international students.

AGE GROUPS



736

PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER DROWNED IN AUSTRALIA.

1.77 DROWNING DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION.

26% OF TOTAL DROWNING DEATHS DURING THIS PERIOD.

54%

WERE BETWEEN 65 AND 74-YEARS.

1.71 DROWNING DEATHS PER 100,000

46%

WERE OVER THE AGE OF 75-YEARS.

1.86 DROWNING DEATHS PER 100,000

81%

WERE MALE



32%

WERE BORN OVERSEAS



OLDER ADULTS ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN DROWNING STATISTICS:

Comparing proportion of older adults in the population to the proportion of all drowning deaths.

% of population aged 65+-years

% of drowning deaths

16%

26%

% of population aged 65-74-years

% of drowning deaths

9%

14%

% of population aged 75-84-years

% of drowning deaths

5%

9%

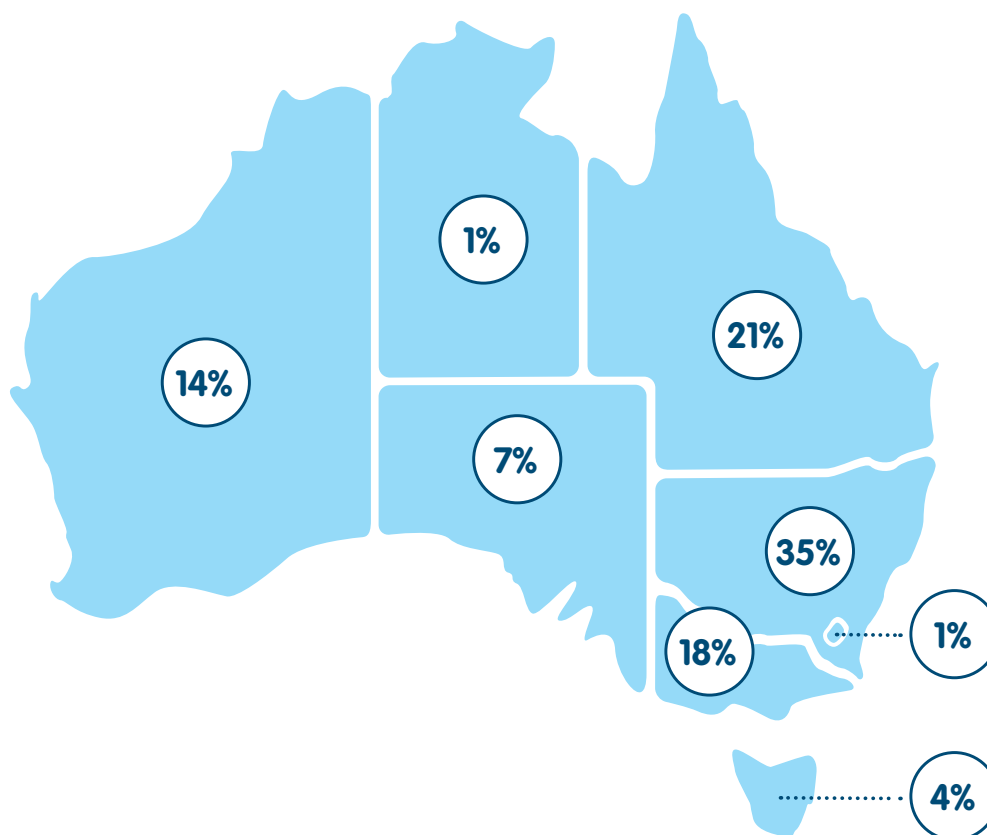
% of population aged 85+-years

% of drowning deaths

2%

3%

STATE AND TERRITORY BREAKDOWN



RISK FACTORS

31%

had a medical condition that contributed to the fatality



75%

of all medical conditions were cardiovascular diseases



39%

reported drugs (medications and illicit substances)



77%

of drugs reported were prescription medication



17%

involved alcohol



ACTIVITY AND LOCATION

24%

Beach



22%

River/Creek



24%

Swimming and recreating



17%

Boating



14%

Unintentional fall into water



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➤ **Acknowledgement of Country**

Royal Life Saving Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging recognising their continued connection to land, waters and communities.

➤ **Suggested citation**

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National Drowning Report 2026, Sydney Australia.
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