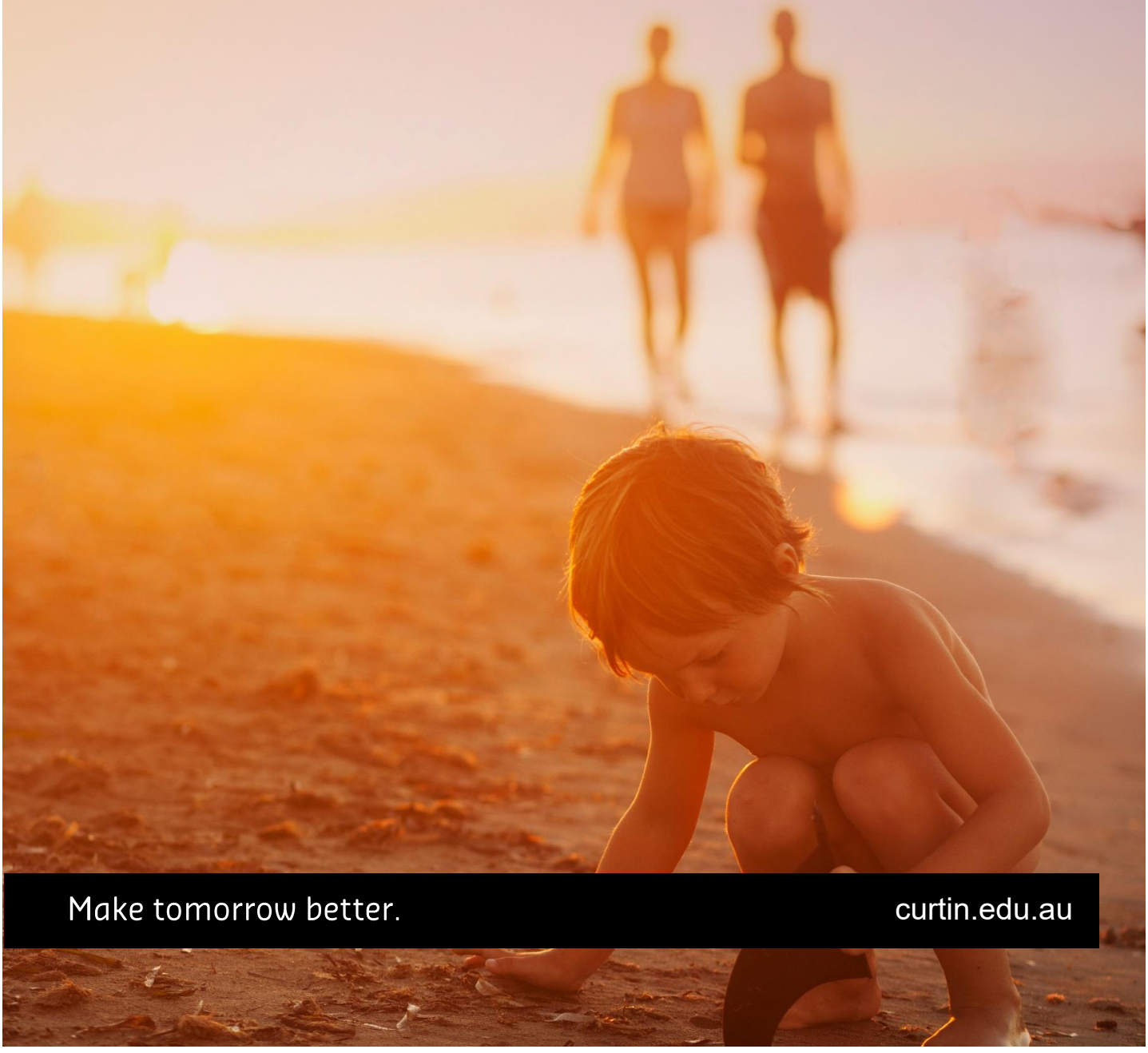
Curtin University

KEEP WATCH PROGRAM 2025 IMPACT EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

Background

Keep Watch is a well-established toddler drowning prevention program conducted by the Royal Life Saving Society Western Australia (RLSSWA) for over 25 years (1). In the summer of 2020/21, after a comprehensive formative evaluation process, a new media campaign was launched. With the tag line, *'Kids can't help themselves around water, you need to',* the campaign initially included three personas (*the Wild One*, *the Bolter* and *the Quiet One*). In the summer of 2023/24, two new personas (*the Curious One* and *the Sidekick*) were introduced. Stylistically, the campaign creative is fast-paced, using attention-grabbing images, music and text. The focus is on increasing self-efficacy and changing social norms; and the new suite of video clips provides explicit cues to action, specifically to *Supervise, Restrict, Teach and Respond*. The 2025 evaluation assessed target group campaign awareness, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs and behaviour; and compared results with baseline data collected prior to the campaign launch in 2020.

Evaluation Approach

Mixed methods were used over the five-year evaluation period. In 2025 (07 February - 21 March 2025), a population-level, cross-sectional online survey was conducted. Comparisons are made with baseline data collected before the current campaign began in 2020 (23 October – 22 November 2020) (n=236). Collection protocols required an 80:20 metropolitan/regional split and a 50:50 equal split of those living on properties with a pool or large body of water and those without. In 2025, a survey link was promoted through social media and relevant stakeholder e-newsletters. A third-party social research panel was also engaged to recruit participants. After data cleaning, the final sample included 283 participants. Descriptive statistics summarised demographics; swim ability confidence; water-based activity; safety actions; attitudes; and knowledge. For 2025 data, descriptive statistics were also used to assess the current campaign and program recall, campaign recognition, awareness, campaign key messages, advertising diagnostics and behavioural intent. Comparisons were made with 2020 baseline data.

Key Findings

Key findings are summarised to inform RLSSWA practice, advocacy, policy and research**.** For noting: 2021 aligns with post Media Wave 1 data and 2023 aligns with post Media Wave 3 data.

Demographics

The demographic profile of participants was broadly similar in 2020 and 2025. A difference was observed in gender, with a significantly greater proportion of males completing the survey in 2025 compared with 2020. There were slight differences in the ages of children (older in 2025) and the level of highest education of carers (fewer university-educated participants in 2025); these were not significant differences. As in previous years, 2025 participants were typically Australian-born, university-educated females, residing in the Perth metropolitan area. Most participants were parents or primary carers; and half were aged between 35 and 44 years.

Some of the demographic shifts observed may be explained by changes in recruitment methods. Specifically, using a panel for recruitment in 2025 likely contributed to a broader and more diverse demographic profile compared with previous in-house recruitment approaches. Panel recruitment can reduce selection bias by reaching individuals outside traditional networks and may be more representative of the wider community. In contrast, in-house recruitment may unintentionally attract participants with similar characteristics, thereby limiting demographic diversity.

Additionally, the offer of panel payment for completing the survey in 2025 may have influenced participation (2). Monetary incentives can be particularly appealing to individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, which may explain the observed decrease in participants with university-level education in 2025. For some, financial compensation may have provided a meaningful reason to engage, increasing participation among groups historically underrepresented in unpaid research.

Importantly, the increase in male participants is a pleasing outcome, aligning with previous recommendations to increase male engagement, together with older adults, grandparents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Going forward, it is imperative to continue to pursue greater demographic diversity, including using micro-segmentation strategies, to ensure future findings are both inclusive and reflective of the broader population.

Water Based Activity

In 2020 and 2025, few participants indicated they couldn't swim, and swimming confidence was high. The top three swimming locations, the public pool, the beach, and the residential pool, have remained consistent over time. Fewer children attended swimming lessons in 2025 (56.2%, n=154) than in 2020 (67.8%, n=160). This finding is consistent with recent work on the eastern seaboard of Australia (3, 4), which highlights ongoing challenges to swimming lesson participation, which is critical for drowning prevention, especially among pre-school-aged children. Affordability remains an ongoing issue, with a 2018 RLSSA report finding the average cost of a lesson for children 2 – 4 years was AUD $15.50 (5), and this will have risen with inflation over the last 5 years. Families from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those with multiple children, or those caring for children with disabilities are affected by affordability and should be a RLSSWA priority going forward. Access is often limited for families in rural and remote areas, multicultural communities, and children with disabilities (4). Five years on from the COVID-19 pandemic, the literature suggests re-engagement in swimming lessons has been slow, hampered by workforce shortages and rising household costs (4, 6) and this is reflected in the current evaluation.

Findings reinforce the need for continued messaging around supervision and advocacy regarding swimming lessons, supporting recent state government investments. Moving forward, evidence-informed programs, advocacy and policies should focus on increasing the availability, affordability, and cultural relevance of lessons, and targeted support for priority groups is essential to increase participation in water-based activity.

Safety Actions

In general, reported safety behaviours were lower in 2025 compared with 2020 across all actions, although still relatively high in most cases. Differences were significant for the action of '*empty paddle pool after use*', with 67.3% of participants in 2025 reporting always performing this behaviour compared with 80.2% in 2020. Intention to participate in water familiarisation was also significantly lower in 2025 (71.0%) compared with 2020 (83.1%). A promising trend was seen in the intention to participate in CPR classes, which was higher in 2025 (28.3%) compared with 2020 (18.7%). As '*participating in CPR training'* is a key outcome indicator for the Keep Watch program, RLSSWA must remain cognisant of barriers to, and enablers of, attending first-aid training. These are logistical, economical and mental (7). Interestingly, for the public, the fear of doing something wrong and the associated fear of responsibility are prevalent barriers not only to learning but also to administering CPR and first aid in an emergency (7). Using tailored strategies such as the Heart Beat Club grants to remove some of the barriers (e.g. logistics and economics) for parents and carers of children aged 0 to 4 years to gain water familiarisation and CPR skills across a diverse community membership is key to moving intention to action. Overall, the trends continue those seen in previous campaign evaluations.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Negative trends between 2020 and 2025 were seen across attitudes and beliefs. Participants in 2025 were less likely to strongly disagree that '*it's ok to leave toddlers in the care of older children if you're confident those children are mature',* that '*backyard pools are safe as long as they are fenced*', and that '*toddlers who live in homes without pools are not at risk of drowning'* than participants in 2020. Parents and grandparents were seen to differ in their belief that '*it is better to develop a toddler's swimming ability rather than rely on constant adult supervision*', with grandparents

more likely to strongly agree than parents. The findings demonstrate that there has been a shift in attitudes and beliefs over time, with fewer participants strongly disagreeing with the series of statements. However, there are other personal, social and societal factors at play, including country of birth, health literacy, previous experience with water or different health priorities, which have been found in other research (8, 9) and may reflect the shifting community landscape in WA. Further consideration of the cultural, socio-demographic and emotional dimensions of attitudes and beliefs is warranted to target strategies more effectively. This is consistent with the recommendations of the previous evaluation and reiterated here for consideration in the next phase of the Keep Watch evaluation.

Knowledge

The consistent 5-year high knowledge result (80% for three out of the five knowledge questions across all time points) confirms the importance of the long-term investment in Keep Watch, an evidence-informed program delivered to parents and carers to keep children safe around waterways. Identifying the Keep Watch strategies (supervise, restrict, teach, and respond) was significantly higher in 2025 compared with 2020, reinforcing the importance of a multi-strategy, sustained investment in the Keep Watch program and the benefit of specific cues to action to emphasise the importance of specific behaviour. As the response options changed between the two time points, some caution is needed in interpreting these results. However, changes in response categories provided further refined perspectives not seen in the earlier analysis. The greatest differences were water familiarisation (86.9% in 2025; 75.2% in 2020) and learning CPR (66.8% in 2025; 57.7% in 2020). Knowledge of the most appropriate method of supervision (*within arms' reach*) was significantly lower in 2025 (82.0%) compared with 2020 (94.4%). Whilst the trends reflect what has been seen in past evaluations, the results may help direct resources to inform new content designed for educational strategies and any refinement of campaign messaging, together with the potential to leverage opportunity between programs that may intersect parents and carers/grandparents that is currently underexplored; and has been recommended in the past.

Media Campaign

Advertisement

Over the 5 years, and 'unprompted', around 40% of participants recalled any advertisement about water safety and children aged under five, which is a positive finding. When prompted, 16.5% recognised the campaign. Levels of recognition (16.5%) and total awareness (16.9%) reflected those seen in the 2023 evaluation (recognition 17.2%, awareness 17.6%) and improved from 2021 (recognition 6.7%, awareness 6.7%). Most participants indicated messages were well-conveyed, with the most positive responses for the message '*It is up to parents to keep children safe around water*'. Messages were also generally well-received; more than 90% of participants agreed the advertisements were relevant, believable, easy to understand, and made them think about the issue of water safety. Around two-thirds (67.7%) agreed that the advertisements were likely to stick in their minds, and more than half (58%) would talk about advertisements with friends. When asked who developed the advertisement, a similar proportion of participants identified RLSSWA and Royal Life Saving Society Australia. When asked what behavioural intentions the advertisement prompted, most participants reported that they intended to update their CPR skills (81.8%). This is a substantial increase from the proportion seen in previous evaluations (50% in 2023; 47.6% in 2021) and is consistent with the hierarchy of effects model (HOEM) used to guide media evaluation (10). The HOEM proposes that evaluation of media campaigns should first establish if there are immediate effects, e.g. awareness of the campaign, prior to evaluating more distal outcomes, including changes in attitudes, intentions, and ultimately behaviour. This is reflected in the CPR findings. However, downward or inconsistent trends in awareness of some key strategies point toward the importance of continued targeted messaging and strategies beyond media.

Social Media Tiles

In 2025, social media tile recognition and message were included in the survey for the first time. Around 12.5% participants recognised the social media tiles, most from Facebook. Message portrayal was high (though less so than the advertisement). Highest message portrayal was for '*teach your child to be water confident'* (82.3% very or extremely well), followed by supervise (66.7%) and CPR (64.7%) messages.

Digital tools such as social media offer promising avenues to address water safety and drowning prevention. Platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram can effectively disseminate health information, increase awareness, and

enhance social accountability (11). The challenge herein for Keep Watch lies in creating the best buy of social media tools and platforms for disseminating campaign messages and their evaluation beyond process measures.

Keep Watch Program

Significantly fewer participants indicated they had 'heard of' Keep Watch program in 2025 (44.7%) compared with 2020 (68.2%). However, once shown the Keep Watch logo, recognition was similar in 2020 and 2025. Most participants had seen the Keep Watch program at public swimming pools, on television or streaming services, or on Facebook. In the summer of 2024-2025, Australia experienced an extraordinarily high number of drownings and the resulting surge in media attention may have overshadowed or diluted drowning prevention programs and campaigns, such as Keep Watch. The crowded communication landscape with diverse media platforms is inundated with safety messages, product promotion, and commercial aquatic activities, which may confuse the public and place added pressure on prevention programs such as Keep Watch to cut through and engage effectively. In the context of a challenging broader media landscape and sociodemographic environment, findings from the modest campaign strategies attached to Keep Watch are to be commended.

Reflections

The 2024-2025 evaluation of the Keep Watch program offers invaluable insights that should inform the future practice, policy, and research of the RLSSWA aimed at reducing drowning incidents among children aged 0 to 4 years in WA. The findings underscore the importance of a long-term, sustained investment in drowning prevention strategies and emphasise the necessity to intensify advocacy initiatives to overcome barriers and promote enhanced parent and carer engagement in water safety.

The demographic composition of participants has remained largely consistent between 2020 and 2025, with a notable increase in male respondents observed in 2025, which aligns with a previous key recommendation. Modifications in recruitment strategies and introducing a small financial incentive may have enabled greater demographic diversity, highlighting the significance of inclusive engagement approaches.

Participation in swimming lessons has declined, reinforcing the need for targeted, equity-focused program and policy responses. Although safety behaviours have slightly declined over time, the intention to engage in CPR training has increased, indicating the impact of ongoing media campaigns. Continued support for programs such as the Heart Beat Club, along with further investment in logistical and financial enablers, is crucial for transforming intention into actual CPR training for parents and carers. Especially considering the changes to government incentives that were removed very recently in 2025.

Attitudes and beliefs regarding water safety have slightly declined, particularly concerning perceptions of supervision and pool safety. These changes underscore the necessity for culturally relevant, targeted educational strategies that align with the evolving population dynamics of Western Australia.

It is important to note that knowledge regarding drowning prevention strategies remains robust, and campaign messaging, particularly regarding CPR and supervision, has been positively received. However, awareness of the media (traditional and digital) has diminished between 2020 and 2025, potentially due to competing media coverage during a period characterised by higher than ever before recorded drowning incidents over the summer of 2025. While media recognition has remained consistent, the findings suggest that persistent, sustained investment in diverse communication channels, including tailored social media strategies, is essential to maintain reach and visibility.

These findings emphasise that evidence- informed advocacy is increasingly critical. To enhance its impact, RLSSWA must prioritise equitable access to swimming lessons, targeted support for high- risk groups, and strategic investments in communications that keep water safety at the forefront of concerns for parents and caregivers of children aged 0 to 4 years in Western Australia.

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