

# Make the Right Call: An evaluation of a drowning prevention campaign for adults in Western Australia

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## Background

Drowning deaths among adults in Western Australia (WA) have been increasing. In 2022-2023, two in every three drowning deaths occurred in those aged 45 or older. In response, the Royal Life Saving Society WA (RLSSWA) established the Adult Water Safety Program (AWSP), a state-wide collaborative and comprehensive health promotion program utilising educational, behavioural and environmental strategies to reduce fatal and non-fatal drowning among adults aged 45 and older. The AWSP comprises: a media campaign, community swimming and safety skills classes, lifejacket trade-in, subsidised first-aid training and community education.

A key strategy is the 'Make the Right Call (MTRC)' campaign, which aims to increase knowledge and skills to prevent drowning in and around waterways, using radio, print and social media.



Over the past four years the Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health (CERIPH) has worked with RLSSWA to evaluate MTRC.

Study approved by the Curtin University Human Ethics Committee (HR2019-0347)

## Evaluation methods

- A population-level, cross-sectional online and intercept survey of Western Australians aged over 45.
- Data were collected at three time-points (T1 (2020) n=158; T2 (2021) n=258; and T3 (2023) n=389).
- The recruitment protocol required equal proportions of male and female participants; regional WA participation (20%); age categories: 45-64 years (65%), 65-74 years (20%), 75 years+ (15%).
- Variables collected: demographics, swim ability, water-based activity, CPR training, risk-taking behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs regarding water safety, social norms, health and wellbeing, campaign awareness.

## Participant demographics

**Table 1: Demographics and other characteristics**

|                              | T1<br>(n=158)<br>% | T2<br>(n=258)<br>% | T3<br>(n=389)<br>% |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                |                    |                    |                    |
| Men                          | 33.3               | 36.7               | 31.0               |
| Women                        | 66.7               | 63.3               | 69.0               |
| <b>Age*</b>                  |                    |                    |                    |
| 45–64 years                  | 64.6               | 70.5               | 73.3               |
| 65–74 years                  | 29.7               | 24.0               | 18.0               |
| 75+ years                    | 5.7                | 5.4                | 8.7                |
| <b>Location*</b>             |                    |                    |                    |
| Metropolitan                 | 87.3               | 83.3               | 80.5               |
| Regional                     | 12.7               | 16.7               | 19.5               |
| <b>Birth Country</b>         |                    |                    |                    |
| Australian born              | 63.3               | 59.7               | 66.3               |
| Overseas born                | 36.7               | 40.3               | 33.7               |
| <b>Swimmability (metres)</b> |                    |                    |                    |
| >500m                        | 25.7               | 27.5               | 30.1               |
| 201–500m                     | 14.3               | 10.6               | 12.1               |
| 101–200m                     | 9.3                | 6.6                | 10.3               |
| 51–100m                      | 25.0               | 27.0               | 22.3               |
| <50m                         | 22.1               | 20.1               | 19.3               |
| Don't know                   | 3.6                | 8.2                | 5.9                |
| <b>Occupation Type*, **</b>  |                    |                    |                    |
| Retired/not searching        | 37.3               | 34.0               | 30.4               |
| Full-time                    | 42.4               | 33.2               | 34.0               |
| Part-time                    | 17.1               | 29.3               | 26.2               |
| Not working                  | 2.5                | 3.1                | 3.4                |
| Other                        | 0.6                | 0.4                | 6.0                |

\*Significant difference between T3 and T1 (p<0.05) \*\* Significant difference between T3 and T2 (p<0.05)

## Campaign Awareness

At T3, almost two-thirds of participants remembered seeing water safety or drowning prevention advertising (63.4%, n=243). Of those who described the advertising they remember seeing or hearing (n=235), most remembered RLSSWA-specific drowning prevention advertising (35.3%. n=83).

Nine out of ten participants enjoyed the ads. They commented ads were:

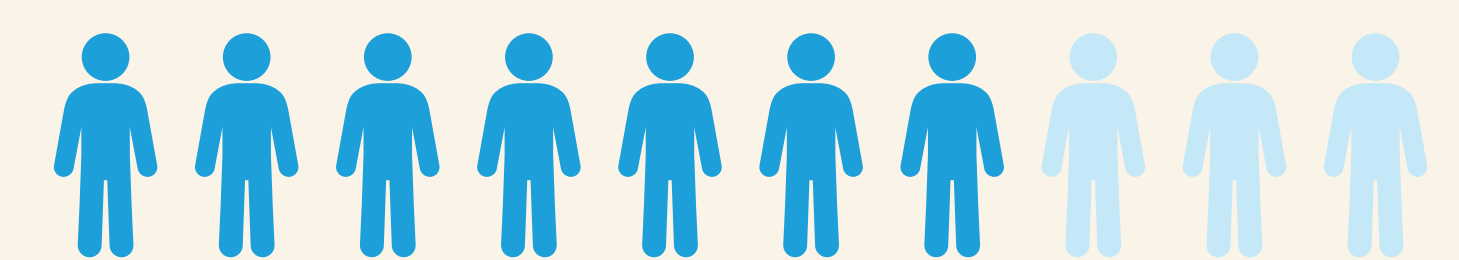
“short, down to earth”

“informative, pertinent and thought provoking”

Participants also suggested:

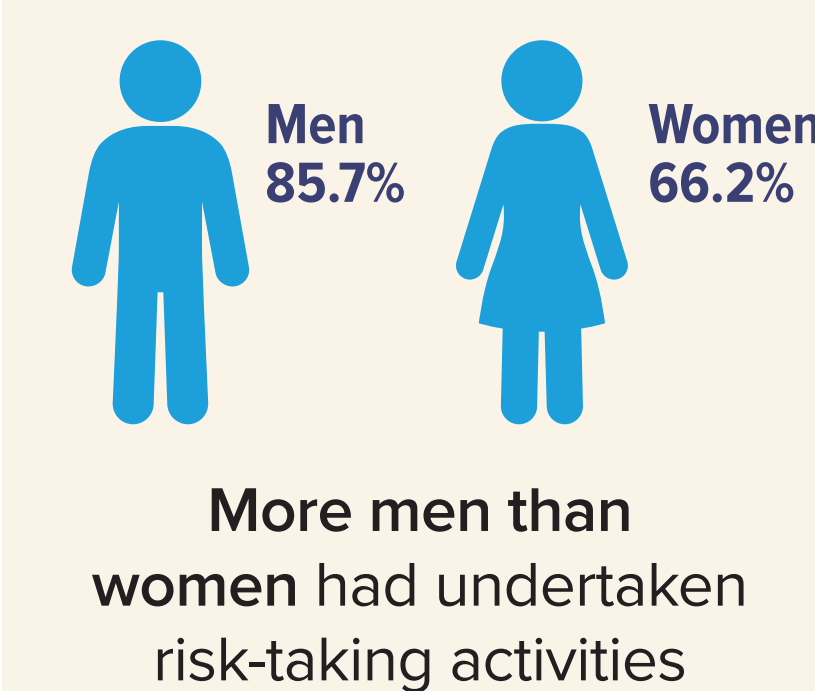
“rhyming was effective”

## Risk Taking

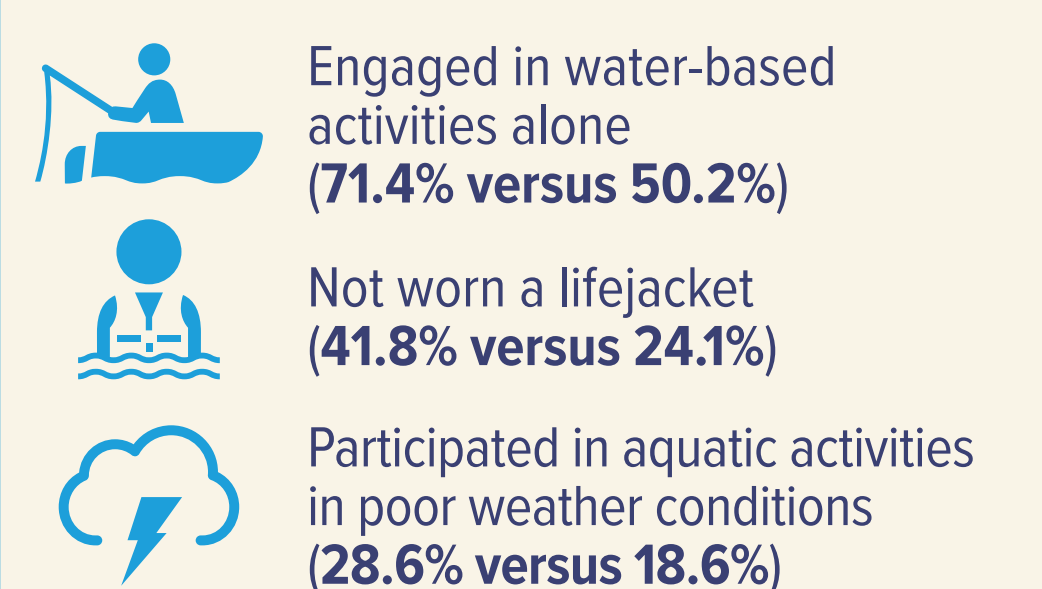


At T3, **7 out of 10** participants (**71.8%**) reported risk-taking behaviour in the last 12 months, most frequently engaging in water-based activity alone (**56.1%**).

### Gender



At T3, men were more likely to have:



### Age



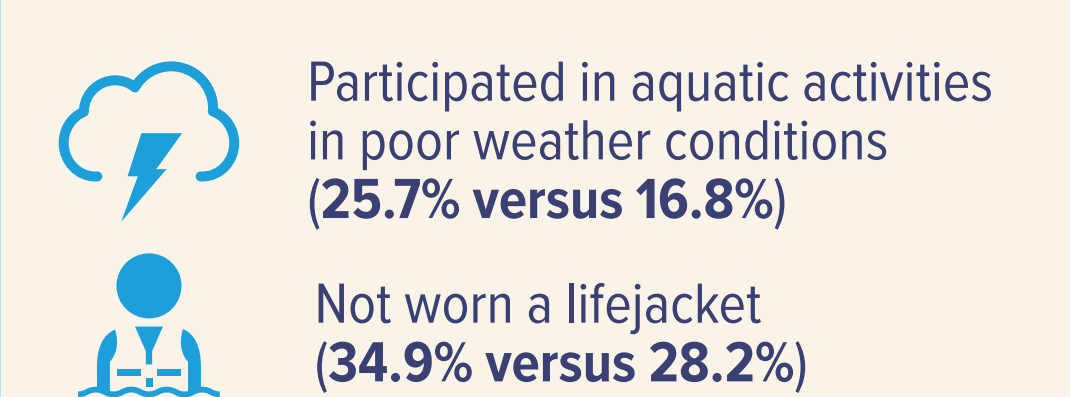
At T3 younger participants were more likely to report alcohol consumption (**15.5%**) than older participants (**6.4%**).

### Country of birth



Those born in Australia were more likely to engage in risk-taking activities than those born overseas.

Across all timepoints, Australian-born participants were more likely to have:



## Insights

The AWSP program uses an evidence-informed health promotion multi-strategy approach. The combination of educational, behavioural and environmental strategies including the use of a media campaign has the potential to increase awareness of drowning prevention among WA adults 45 and older. Evaluation findings suggest that the campaign has been positively received and the program has had some impact on drowning risk factors for adults in WA. Additional insights on radio advert execution e.g. novelty and message usefulness will be an interesting area to interrogate. Future program planning could consider the life-stage trajectory and the differing attitudes of older individuals, for example, those who avoid risk and those actively seeking to be a risk-taker. Messages targeting risk perception and alcohol consumption may be of benefit for any campaign redevelopment.



### For more info, contact:

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