

100
YEARS
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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31 people drowned in Western Australia in 2009. Across all age groups a drowning statistic was recorded.

Quick Facts

31 people drowned in Western Australia in 2009

- 84% were male
- 52% occurred in regional areas
- 35% involved young adults aged 15-29 years
- 48% occurred at coastal locations
- 35% occurred while swimming
- 29% were contributed to by alcohol

Infants and Toddlers (0-5 years)

Two children under five years of age drowned in 2009

- All were under two years of age
- Both occurred in home swimming pools
- Contributing factors: Lack of supervision and poorly maintained barriers

Children (6-14 years)

Only one death was recorded amongst this age group in 2009. Inadequate supervision and non-swimming ability contributed to the incident.

Young Adults (15-29 years)

11 young adults drowned in 2009.

- 73% were male
- 64% occurred in regional areas
- 55% occurred while swimming
- Contributing factors: alcohol and other drugs and tourists

Adults (30-59 years)

11 adults drowned in 2009.

- 91% were male
- 64% occurred in regional areas
- 55% occurred at coastal locations
- 45% involved recreating around the water
- Contributing factors: medical conditions, alcohol consumption and poor weather conditions

Older Adults 60+ years

Six older adults drowned in 2009.

- All were male
- 67% occurred in metropolitan areas
- 67% occurred at coastal locations
- Contributing factors: medical conditions and poor weather conditions

Introduction

The Royal Life Saving Society Western Australia Inc. has been collecting drowning death statistics and information on where, when, how and why people drown in Western Australia for over a decade. This information is important in tracking drowning deaths, highlighting priority areas for intervention and directing water safety and drowning prevention programs and initiatives throughout the state.

Between 1st January and 31st December 2009, 43 drowning deaths were recorded in Western Australia. Of these, 31 cases were classified as unintentional and have been included in this report. The remaining nine cases were omitted as they were classified as intentional deaths and a further three cases were omitted as they were classified as open cases or had not been closed by the Coroner.

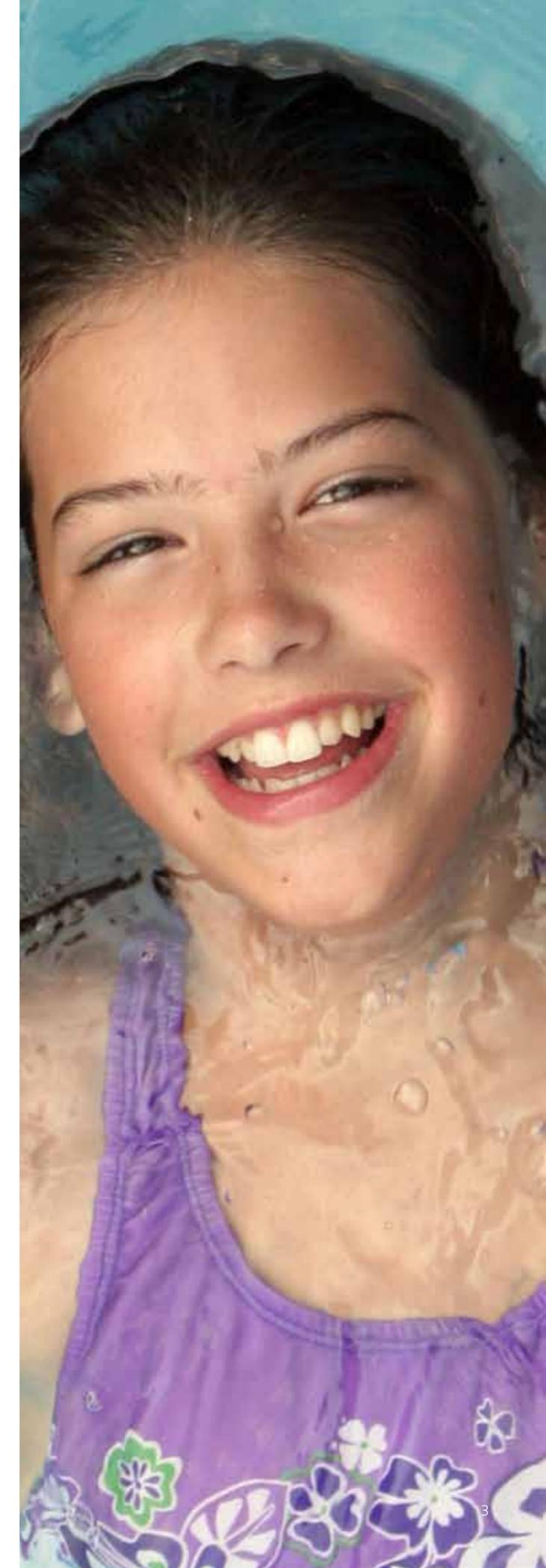
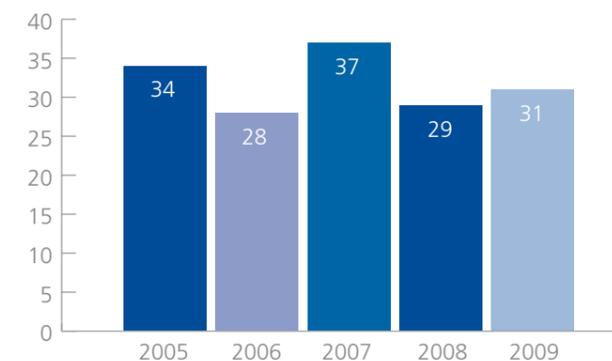
Unintentional drowning deaths place a large burden on the broader community. Research estimates that each drowning death costs the community \$1.6 million, meaning that the cost of drowning in Western Australia in 2009 was almost \$50 million.

Drowning Trends in Western Australia

Over the past five years we have seen drowning deaths continue to fluctuate from year to year with an average of 31.8 deaths/year recorded in Western Australia (2005-2009). The statistics for 2009 are on par with this average figure.

Drowning Rates in Western Australia

The Western Australian population was 2,270,300 at December 2009 which was an increase of 2.9% from the previous twelve months. Based on this figure, the rate of drowning death in Western Australia is 1.36 deaths per 100,000 persons



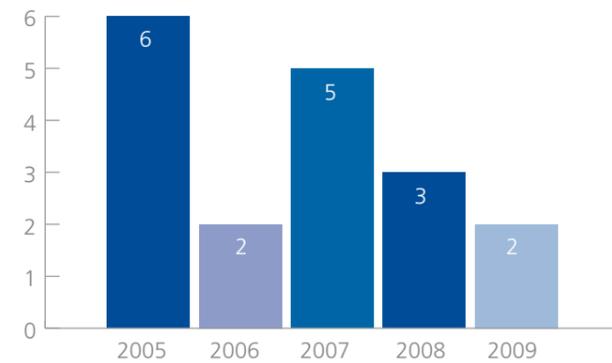
Drowning remains one of the leading causes of preventable death and injury in children under five years of age in Australia.

Infants and Toddlers

0-5 years

Drowning deaths remained low in this age group in 2009 with two deaths recorded in Western Australia bringing the five year average down to 3.6 deaths/year. Given that we have seen a significant increase in toddler drowning deaths at a national level, this is a great achievement.

Total Drowning Deaths



* 5 year average 3.6/year

In a continuing trend all deaths amongst this age group involved children under two years of age with 50% of incidents involving males.

Both drowning deaths occurred at locations within the Perth metropolitan area and were in the home swimming pool, which differs from recent drowning statistics for this age group in Western Australia. In both cases a lack of appropriate adult supervision and poorly maintained barriers contributed to the incident.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that toddler drowning prevention education and awareness strategies are directed at parents, grandparents and all home pool owners
2. With children under two years of age identified as the most at-risk group, it is recommended that additional strategies to educate new parents be developed and implemented
3. Continue to promote and enforce current pool barrier legislation and in particular the importance of performing regular checks to ensure barriers are in good working condition to maintain low numbers of home swimming pool deaths amongst toddlers.

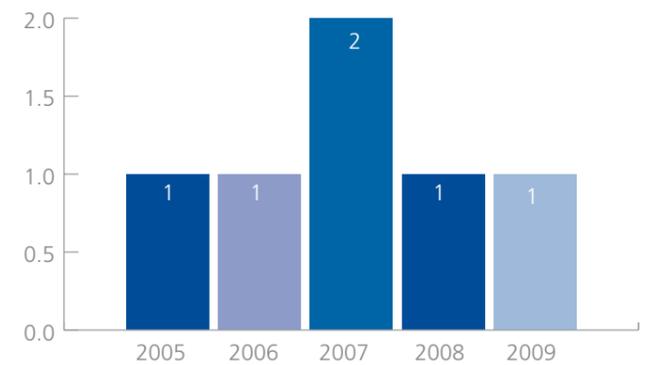


Children

5-14 years

There was one drowning death recorded amongst children aged 5-14 years in Western Australia. The incident was contributed to by a lack of appropriate supervision and poor swimming ability.

Total Drowning Deaths



* 5 year average 1.2 deaths/year

These statistics continue the low number of drowning deaths recorded amongst this age group as seen over the past five years.

The Royal Life Saving Society believes that water safety skills are imperative to ensure that our community continues to enjoy water activities safely and that targeting children is essential in achieving this.

The success of programs delivered through the Royal Life Saving Endorsed Swim Schools including Swim & Survive, Bronze Rescue and Junior Lifeguard Club have contributed significantly to maintaining low drowning rates amongst this age group in Western Australia.

In 2009, over 100,000 Western Australian children undertook Royal Life Saving swimming and water safety classes, giving them the essential knowledge and skills to learn how to swim and also when and where to do it safely which will last a lifetime.

In 2009 there was a significant increase in the number of drowning deaths recorded amongst young adults aged 15-29 years in Western Australia.

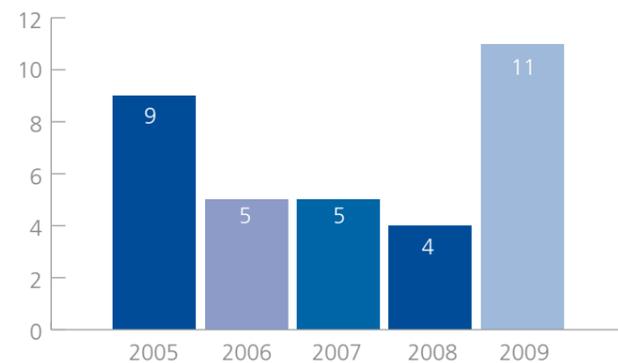
Young Adults

15-29 years

Overall, 11 drowning deaths were recorded amongst this age group in 2009, almost three times the number recorded in 2008 and the highest number recorded in the past decade.

73% of the incidents involved males, a common trend in national drowning and other death and injury statistics

Total Drowning Deaths



* 5 year average 6.8 deaths/year

By Activity

Young adults were likely to be swimming (55%) or recreating around the water (36%) at the time of the incident. This is consistent with the statistics collected in previous years.

By Location

In a continuing trend, the majority of incidents (64%) amongst this age group occurred in regional and remote areas of Western Australia in 2009. Overall 55% of the incidents occurred at coastal locations. The home swimming pool has also emerged as a high risk location with 27% of drowning deaths occurring at this location in 2009.

Contributing Factors

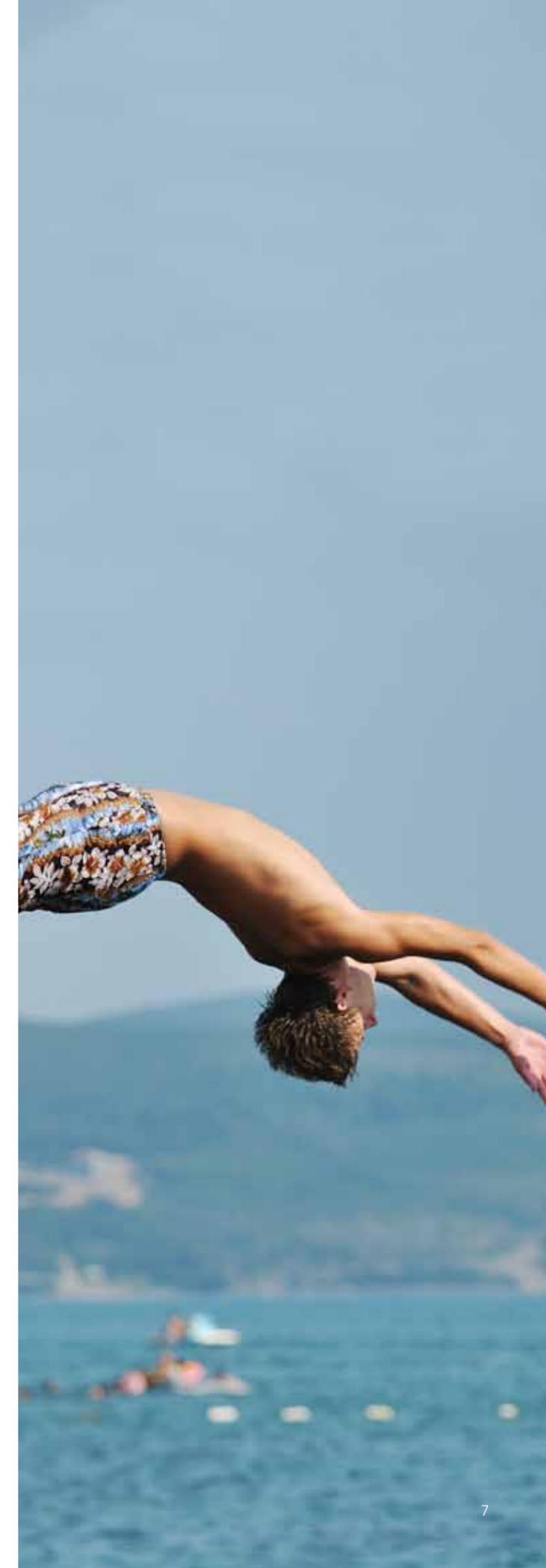
Tourists and visitors to Western Australia were involved in 45% of drowning deaths amongst this age group in 2009. These people were generally from an English or Asian background and were reportedly poor swimmers and lacked knowledge about the local area and water conditions which leaves these visitors open to taking unnecessary risks. This highlights the need for water safety and drowning prevention information and resources to be available and accessible to this group in order to promote safe participation.

Again, alcohol was a issue contributing to 45% of drowning deaths amongst this age group. On average since 2000, 46% of drowning deaths involving young adults were contributed to be alcohol. This continues to be a priority area for drowning prevention in Western Australia as stated by the Coroner:

'The hazards of over consuming alcohol and swimming are well documented. Government agencies have supported regular advertising campaigns in relation to these dangers; however these tragedies continue to occur.'

Recommendations

1. Education and awareness strategies targeted at young adults focusing on the dangers and consequences of mixing alcohol and aquatic activity should be continued
2. Strategies to ensure that tourists and visitors to Western Australia have access to water safety and drowning prevention messages and information regarding local area conditions need to be developed
3. Ensure that water safety and drowning prevention initiatives for young adults are available in regional areas of Western Australia



In 2009, 11 drowning deaths were recorded amongst adults aged 30-59 years in Western Australia, remaining consistent with statistics from previous years.

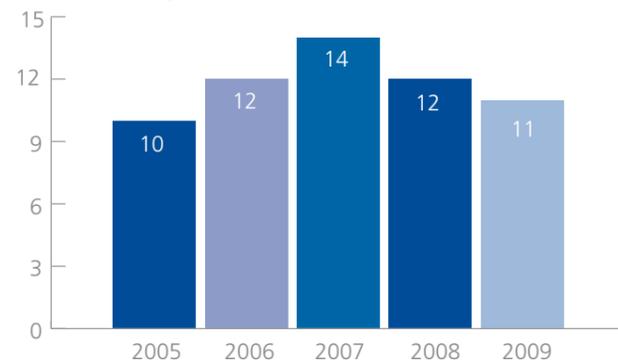
Adults

30-59 years

The average number of deaths recorded amongst this age group have also remained constant with 11.8 deaths/year recorded. This group continues to record high numbers of drowning deaths and remains a priority area for water safety and drowning prevention initiatives.

Similar to previous years, the majority of incidents involved males (91%), which is consistent with other areas of unintentional death and injury.

Total Drowning Deaths



* 5 year average 11.8 deaths/year

By Activity

The majority of incidents occurred while adults were recreating around aquatic environments (45%). Boating has emerged as a high risk activity for this age group with 36% of incidents involving boating in 2009. Other common activities being undertaken at the time of the incident were fishing and swimming.

By Location

In contrast to 2008, the majority of incidents (64%) occurred in regional areas of Western Australia. This has been a common trend over the past five years, with the exception of 2008. This highlights the need to ensure people living in regional and remote areas have access to water safety and drowning prevention programs, services and information.

The majority of incidences occurred at coastal locations (55%) and home swimming pools (18%). Other common locations included rivers and lakes.

Contributing Factors

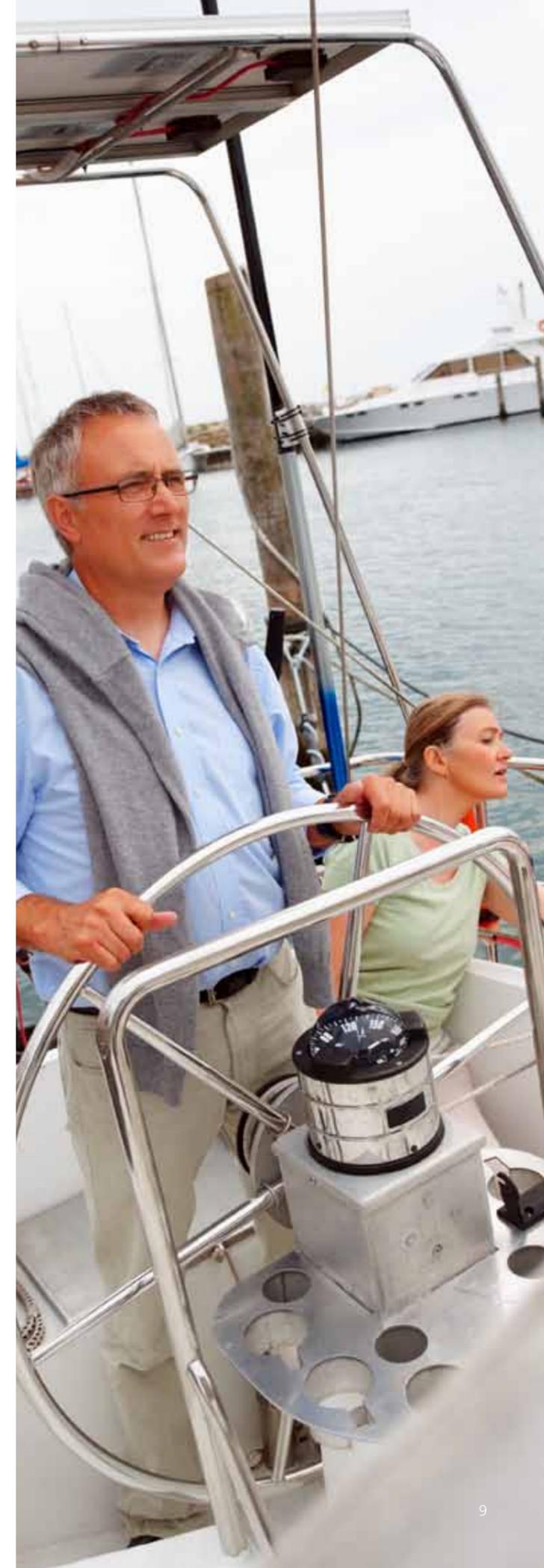
There were a number of factors that contributed to drowning deaths amongst the adults' age group. Medical and health conditions also emerge as a contributing factor in this age group with 45% of incidents contributed to by medical conditions.

In a continuing trend, the consumption of alcohol was a contributing factor in 27% of drowning deaths in this age group, a 10% increase from 2008. The average blood alcohol concentration recorded in these incidents was 0.189% which is alarming and requires urgent attention.

Other contributing factors included poor weather conditions, poorly maintained water craft and spinal injuries.

Recommendations

1. Undertake further research into the impact of alcohol on drowning deaths amongst adults aged 30-59 years and assess the relevance of current alcohol and water safety messages to this age group
2. Develop and implement evidence based water safety and drowning prevention strategies that target identified high risk activities (boating, swimming) and locations (coastal and river locations)
3. Promote the importance of undertaking first aid and resuscitation training and maintaining appropriate qualifications



Older Adults

With an ageing population, water safety and drowning prevention amongst older adults in Western Australia remains a priority group for intervention despite a slight decrease in drowning deaths being recorded amongst this group in 2009.

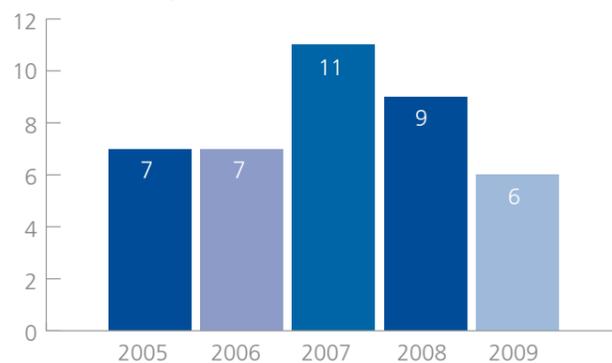
60+ years

In 2009 six drowning deaths were recorded amongst West Australians aged over 60 years, which is the lowest number seen in the past five years and well under the five year average.

However, the average number of drowning deaths recorded over the past five years has increased slightly since 2008 which highlights the need to continue targeting water safety and drowning prevention programs and messages to this target group.

Similar to previous years, all incidents in this age group involved males.

Total Drowning Deaths



* 5 year average 8.0 deaths/year

By Activity

The majority of incidents amongst this age group occurred while swimming and boating (33%). Other common activities included fishing and recreating around aquatic environments. This is consistent with statistics collected in previous years.

By Location

Again, as in previous years the majority of incidents (67%) occurred within the Perth metropolitan area. The majority of incidents occurred at coastal locations (67%) with the remaining 33% occurring at inland waterway locations.

Contributing Factors

A continuing trend in drowning deaths involving older adults is the existence of pre-existing medical conditions and their contribution to the incidents recorded amongst this group. Medical conditions place older adults at increased risk of drowning death and other aquatic related injuries. In 2009

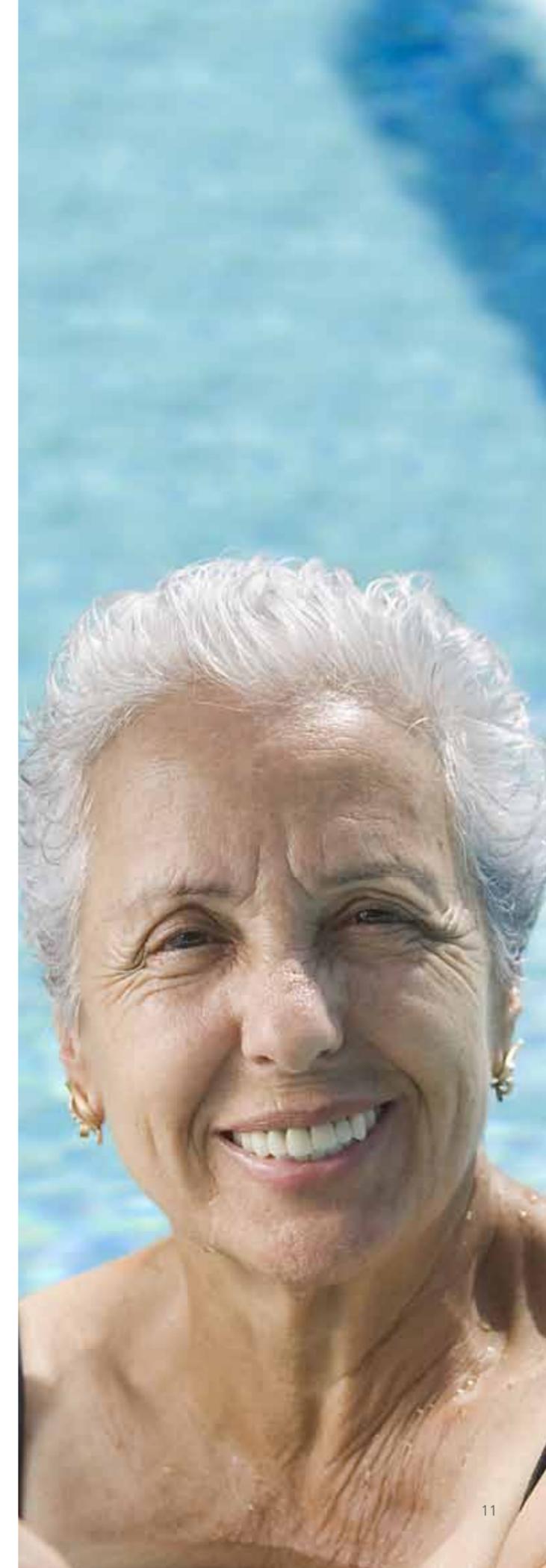
the presence of medical conditions contributed to 36% of drowning deaths in this age group.

In addition, 50% of incidents recorded amongst this age group were contributed to by lack of weather conditions including strong currents and large, unpredictable swell.

Other contributing factors included participating in aquatic activities alone and lack of swimming ability.

Recommendations

1. Develop appropriate water safety and drowning prevention programs and messages that educate older adults of the impact that medical conditions and medications have on their ability to undertake aquatic activity
2. Promote participation in regular aquatic activity to limit the deterioration of skills with age and create awareness of changing body abilities
3. Encourage older adults, particularly those with pre-existing medical conditions to always participate with others when in or around water environments
4. Encourage older adults to seek medical clearance and complete a comprehensive fitness test before participating in aquatic activities



The Royal Life Saving Society Western Australia Inc. believes that everyone can be a lifesaver.

Royal Life Saving Initiatives

The Royal Life Saving Society Western Australia Inc. believes that everyone can be a lifesaver and has developed a number of water safety and drowning prevention initiatives to turn everyday people into everyday lifesavers and prevent drowning tragedies from occurring.

- Keep Watch Toddler Drowning Prevention Program
- Don't Drink and Drown
- Watch Around Water
- Remote Aboriginal Swimming Pools Project
- Infant Aquatics
- Swim & Survive
- Junior Lifeguard Club
- Home Pool Inspection Program
- Rescue and Revive – event safety program
- Aquatic Injury Surveillance Program
- First aid and water safety training programs
- Event management
- Great Australia Day Duck Pluck Fundraising Event
- Sport and Recreation Management Singapore programs



**Don't Drink
and DROWN**



For further information or to obtain additional copies of the 2009 Drowning Report, please contact:



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Disclaimer – While all care is taken to ensure that the results presented in this report are as accurate as possible, they are only provisional and are subject to change based on ongoing coronial investigations.