



Evaluation 2012/13

Introduction

Watch Around Water (WAW) is an important industry driven program that aims to ensure the safety and reduction in risk at public swimming pools. It provides a consistent message in line with best practice to the public about effective supervision of young children at public pools. The WAW program began in Western Australia in 2004, and has now also been successfully introduced to South Australia and Victoria. It has been running in Victoria through a partnership between Life Saving Victoria (LSV) and Aquatics & Recreation Victoria (ARV) since 2008/09, and now has over 100 year-round and seasonal facilities on board. The program comprises an evaluation component to facilitate this process and to provide ongoing feedback to the industry on the progress of Watch Around Water.

WAW evaluation summary

Evaluation in Victoria to date has revealed that after six months in the program the majority of managers (89%) reported parents/guardians were more aware of the need for active supervision whilst at their facilities since the introduction of Watch Around Water. In order to expand on the feedback from facility managers the current evaluation utilised anonymous questionnaires completed by 27 staff across eight facilities and 45 patrons across four facilities. The study therefore aimed to determine how WAW was perceived by lifeguards and other facility staff and the potential assistance of WAW for lifeguards in performing their supervision duties. In addition the study aimed to determine the direct impact of the program on patrons and their safety and supervision behaviours.

Supervision levels

The majority of staff (70%) and less than half of patrons (44%) responded that supervision is the most effective way to prevent drowning. A higher number of patrons said learn-to-swim lessons were the most effective way (47%).

Every staff member and the majority of patrons (82%) correctly reported the most appropriate method of supervision for children under 5 as 'within arm's reach'. For children aged 5-10 years, 36% of staff and 21% of patrons correctly said 'where visible', with the vast majority selecting higher levels of supervision.

Staff observations of patron supervision

Staff provided feedback on their view of parent/guardian supervision of children at their facility, including a rating of the overall parental supervision within their facility. It was found that:

- Overall, 82% of staff thought parents/guardians visiting their facility had become more aware of the need of actively supervising their children following the introduction of WAW. This is a decrease of 7% compared with 2008/09 assessments.
- Staff mostly rated patron supervision as either 'very good' (41%) or 'good' (37%).
- Staff reported the campaign has been either 'highly successful' (40%) or 'somewhat successful' (56%) in encouraging parents/guardians to safely and responsibly supervise their children when visiting the facility. Patrons, however, mostly rated the program as only moderately successful (74%).
- All staff would recommend the initiative to others in the aquatic industry.

Self-rated supervision by patrons

- The majority of patrons self-rated their supervision ability as 'very good' (41%) or 'excellent' (39%), which exceeds the staff assessments.
- Overall, supervision was better for children aged 0-5 than those aged 5-10 ('very good' or 'excellent' for 63% of patrons supervising children under 5, vs. 22% for children aged 5-10).
- When asked how much responsibility the lifeguard has for the safety of young children, 64% correctly said 'Less than a parent', followed by 30% who said 'about the same level as a parent'.

Patron knowledge of WAW

- Overall, 59% of patrons were aware of the WAW initiative and had mainly noticed brochures (68%) and banners (52%).
- 90% of patrons said exposure to the initiative hadn't changed the way they supervise their children at the pool, mainly because they always actively supervise anyway (56%) or because they hadn't heard of WAW (31%).
- 76% of patrons said facility staff had not spoken to them about the importance of supervising children around water while at a public pool.
- According to staff, the most effective resources for educating and encouraging parental supervision were brochures (37%), wristbands (33%) and pull-up banners (30%).

Although the number of patrons and staff and centres surveyed were limited, the results indicate that while initial promotion of the WAW program may increase awareness of the need for supervision this may drop off in the longer term. Therefore continual promotion of the program is required.

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