



**water safety**  
England

**Towards zero drownings: building a future where everyone in England can be safe in, on and around the water**

# **England's Drowning Prevention Strategy 2026-2030**





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# Foreword

This is the first Water Safety England (WSE) Drowning Prevention Strategy but it relates to the earlier National Water Safety Forum UK Drowning Prevention Strategy (2016–2026)<sup>i</sup> and addresses the long-standing and preventable cause of death that is drowning.

The impact of drowning has been felt in homes, schools, workplaces, emergency services and communities for many years. The thousands of years of life lost each year to drowning in England represent a disaster that must be confronted. This strategy does this by considering how – through data that guide and optimise, education that informs, and communications and campaigns that promulgate and promote water safety behaviours – we can prevent as many drownings as possible. WSE is structured to enable these functions and undertake this task.

This strategy is founded on the data-based understanding of the causes of drowning in England. This information has been used to determine the aims and actions, in terms of projects, that are proposed. These projects are comprehensive and ambitious, which they need to be if we are to make a significant impact on this notoriously intractable problem. The aims and projects presented set an agenda that the members of WSE can tackle collaboratively and with mutual, coordinated support. WSE recognises that no organisation can prevent drowning alone and a key role of WSE is to bring people and organisations together, support consistent practice and focus collective effort where it can have the greatest impact. This aligns with the growing global recognition that drowning prevention requires coordinated, evidence-informed and sustained action.

The overwhelming mandate received by this strategy during the public consultation demonstrated strong support for a more coordinated approach in England and gives us great confidence that we are setting sail in the correct direction. Importantly, it also indicates that the debilitating impact drowning has on our society is being recognised much more widely and there is a real appetite to deal with it.

This strategy is a call to action for national organisations, local partnerships, government, landowners, educators, emergency services, communities and families to help people stay safe in, on and around water. It is also a strategy that will be used: it will focus and direct our effort in the years to come with the sole intention of reducing drownings in England. Drowning has too often been seen as inevitable, isolated or too difficult to prevent. It is none of those things. With the right evidence, leadership, partnerships and commitment, more lives will be saved.

**Professor Mike Tipton, Chair of Water Safety England**

# Introduction

**Water Safety England (WSE) is the national partnership network for drowning prevention in England. As part of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), it brings together organisations and individuals with expertise and influence across water safety, Search and Rescue, education, public health, local government, research, risk management and community-based prevention efforts.**

WSE's members and partners include national charities, emergency services, local government representatives, landowners, education and swimming organisations, and academic experts. Together, organisations such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), Surf Life Saving GB, Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), Swim England, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Environment Agency, Canal & River Trust, the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group and university partners provide the evidence, expertise and delivery capability needed to reduce drowning and water-related harm.

Every life lost to drowning has long-lasting impacts on families, friends, communities, public services and the wider society and economy. In England, 2,306 people died in water-related fatalities between 2019 and 2023. At least 5,464.3 years of life are lost each year to accidental drowning, with an estimated societal cost of about £327,858,000 annually<sup>i</sup>. These impacts are unevenly distributed, with younger people bearing a disproportionate burden, leading to a significant loss of human potential.

## How we use the terms “drowning” and “water-related fatalities”

For the purposes of this strategy, the terms “drowning” and “water-related fatalities” are used to describe deaths that occur in water. Where the strategy refers specifically to accidental drowning, suspected suicide, inconclusive deaths or other categories, this is made clear.

This strategy focuses primarily on preventing accidental drowning and water-related harm. However, water-related suicide represents a significant proportion of deaths in water and cannot be ignored. Suicide prevention is led by dedicated national and local suicide prevention strategies, specialist organisations and responsible authorities. This strategy sets out how WSE will contribute through better data, safe and responsible reporting, place-based insight and stronger links with suicide prevention partners.

England's relationship with water is shaped by extensive coastline, busy beaches and a wide network of rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, harbours, estuaries and open water sites. These environments are closely connected, with coastal, inland and estuarine waters overlapping through tidal rivers, ports, harbours, floodplains, canals and waterside communities.





These places provide major benefits for health, recreation, sport, work and community life. However, drowning is not limited to specific environments or activities involving water. It can occur in a wide range of situations, including during everyday, unexpected encounters with water, where risks may be underestimated.

Preventing drowning in England is complex. Responsibilities for water safety are shared across many landowners, local authorities, emergency services, public bodies, voluntary organisations and community partners. Roles, powers, resources and priorities vary across the country, and no single statutory organisation has overall responsibility for drowning prevention in England. This can create inconsistency in local practice and makes national coordination essential.

WSE cannot deliver this ambition alone. Progress will depend on shared ownership across WSE members and wider partners, alongside stronger support from government, local systems and funders. This strategy is a basis for collective action: it sets the direction, priorities and areas of focus for England, while recognising that delivery will require capacity, resources and clear roles at national, regional and local levels.

Over the last decade, guided by the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy, WSE and its partners have made important progress by improving education resources, developing local partnership approaches, strengthening the evidence base and delivering high-impact campaigns. Internationally, drowning prevention has also gained increasing recognition through United Nations<sup>iii</sup>, World Health Assembly and World Health Organization action<sup>iv</sup>.



**Figure 1: Relationship between global, UK and England's Drowning Prevention Strategy**



Aligned to the NWSF's UK-wide approach, England's Drowning Prevention Strategy builds on that national and global momentum. This strategy is designed to help turn ambition into practical action by strengthening collaboration, improving consistency, focusing effort where it can have the greatest impact, and supporting those with responsibility for managing water-related risk.

The aims in this strategy set out what WSE will focus on between 2026 and 2030. They are not listed in priority order and should be read as a connected framework. Delivery will be taken forward through WSE's functional groups, with supporting workplans, identified leads, proportionate Key Performance Indicators and regular reporting.

# Anyone can drown; no one should.





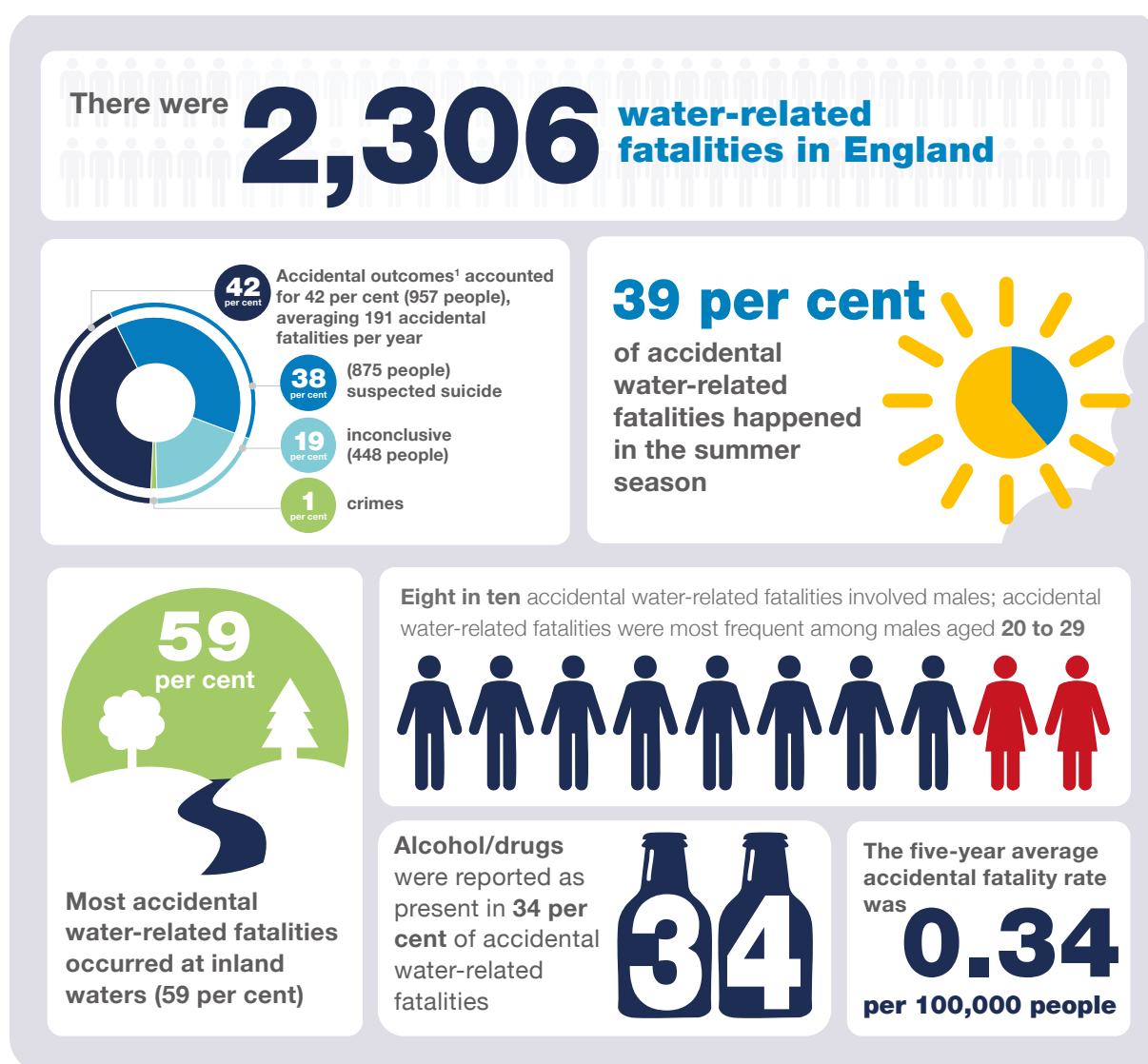


# Understanding the issue (data and context)

Data are essential for understanding drowning, offering insights into patterns, environments and behaviours that relate to and help identify risks, guiding targeted interventions and supporting ongoing monitoring of impact. The figures below are drawn from the WAID Enhancement Project (v2) dataset for 2019 to 2023.

## Key data insights

Over five years (2019 to 2023):



A full data analysis is available for England in [England Drowning Prevention Strategy 2026 Annex 1: England Data Tables](#)

<sup>1</sup> Accidental refers to accidental and natural cause outcomes.

## Coastal locations

accounted for  
35 per cent of  
accidental  
water-related  
fatalities



**41**  
per cent

of accidental water-related  
fatalities occurred during  
everyday activities; walking  
was the most frequent  
everyday activity



**47**  
per cent

of accidental water-related fatalities  
occurred during recreational  
activity; swimming was the most  
frequent recreational activity



### From insight to action

Once obtained, high-quality comprehensive and valid data on drowning can be analysed and interpreted to identify interventions that have the greatest potential to reduce drowning. The global strategy framing of people, places and contexts – and combinations thereof – can help in this regard, but is intended to guide and focus, not exclude. It recognises that organisations have different roles, capabilities and expertise, and that tailored, customised action in key areas can help prevent more drownings. At the same time, the strategy addresses all drownings and water-related harm; no life, setting or circumstance is excluded. The long-term vision remains clear: reduce risk wherever it occurs and move towards zero drownings.





### **People:**

Patterns of drowning differ by life stage, behaviour and vulnerability. In England, males – particularly those aged 20 to 29 – experience a disproportionately high burden of accidental drowning, making this an important group for targeted prevention where organisations are well placed to influence behaviour, understanding and risk awareness. At the same time, preparing children and young people to be safer in, on and around water as they grow, gain independence and encounter a wider range of environments remains an essential “lesson for life”.

### **Places:**

Inland waters, especially rivers and canals, account for most accidental fatalities in England. Coastal environments, particularly beaches and the shoreline, also remain a major source of harm. Within domestic settings, a more targeted focus is also needed where baths account for a substantial proportion of fatalities in the home.

### **Contexts:**

A significant proportion of drowning happens during everyday, unplanned exposure to water, such as walking near rivers and canals, being alongside coastal paths or shorelines, or being in familiar environments where hazards may be underestimated. These contexts matter because prevention systems are often weakest where risk is not recognised. Understanding the circumstances in which people unexpectedly encounter danger is therefore essential to designing effective prevention approaches.

# Vision

Our vision is:

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**Towards zero drownings: building a future where everyone in England can be safe in, on and around the water.**

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Outlined below is a summary of the key values and functions defined in the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy<sup>v</sup>. These form the foundation of this strategy, guiding its direction and ensuring consistency with national priorities.

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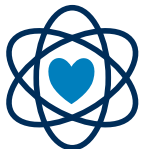
## VISION

Towards zero drownings: building a future where everyone in the UK can be safe in, on and around the water.



## MISSION

The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy sets out the NWSF's key principles for preventing drowning by informing consistent and complementary strategies across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



## VALUES

- Collaboration • Equity
- Informed action • Compassion



## SUPPORTING FUNCTIONS

- Data and evidence • Communication
- Education • Policy

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Figure 2: The concepts underpinning the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy



Using these principles as a foundation, and informed by the key areas for action identified in the earlier “key data insights” section, this strategy establishes clear priorities and targeted interventions to reduce drowning. The primary functional groups of WSE, which are consistent with the UK strategy, are:

- Evidence, Insight and Data: providing high-quality data on which to base decisions and actions
- Communications and Campaigns: communicating and coordinating water safety messaging
- Education, Technical and Engagement: providing educational content, technical advice and a two-way exchange of relevant information with those engaged in drowning prevention.

The remainder of this strategy sets out specific aims, objectives and actions, which will be translated into targeted projects delivered through the functional WSE groups as part of this strategy. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

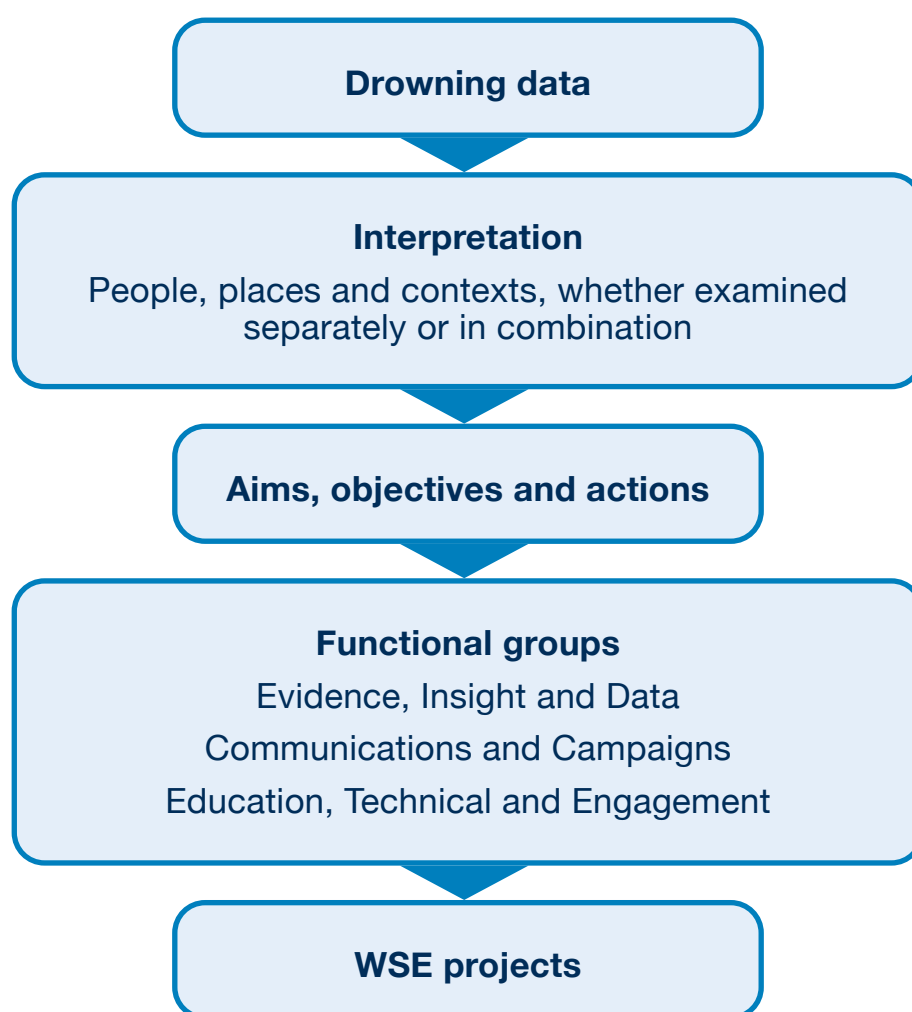


Figure 3: England’s Strategic Delivery Framework



# Aims

To achieve our vision, WSE will work collaboratively with members and non-members of WSE to focus on the following aims. Each aim is supported by objectives and the main actions we expect to take, with delivery led by one of the supporting WSE functions. These aims are not listed in priority order.

- Strengthen data, evidence and insights to drive targeted action, measurable impact and continuous improvement in drowning prevention
- Ensure people affected by drowning are listened to, supported and able to meaningfully shape future prevention
- Create equitable and inclusive opportunities for adults, children and young people to learn water safety knowledge, swimming and safe rescue skills
- Educate people on how to stay safe in, on and around water through targeted awareness- and knowledge-building interventions
- Advocate for stronger, clearer legal responsibilities and support proactive management of water-related risks
- Understand and respond to how climate change, extreme weather, changing water use and new technology are influencing drowning risk
- Strengthen high-level leadership, influence and advocacy for drowning prevention
- Support efforts to reduce water-related suicide.

## AIM

**Strengthen data, evidence and insights to drive targeted action, measurable impact and continuous improvement in drowning prevention**

### OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

**Secure the long-term future of the Water Incident Database (WAID) and provide comprehensive reporting on water-related fatalities**

- Complete the development of the WAID system to ensure long-term sustainability
- Improve the completeness of the WAID dataset through collaboration with relevant partners and data providers
- Collate, analyse and publish WAID water-related fatality data annually in line with data governance best practice
- Explore methods for near real-time incident reporting and data sharing with appropriate partners
- Complement WAID data with qualitative insights from local communities.



### **Improve understanding of non-fatal incidents**

- Investigate, develop and pilot methods for capturing and reporting non-fatal water-related incident data.

### **Advance the evidence-base and research capacity for water safety in England**

- Develop, maintain and implement a research agenda in priority areas and issues of concern in drowning prevention
- Review and incorporate learning from Prevention of Future Deaths notices to improve the quality and depth of insight
- Develop predictive methods for forecasting incidents to inform proactive interventions
- Develop a comprehensive evaluation framework for members to assess interventions and projects.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **The Water Incident Database (WAID)**

WAID is the UK's system for collecting data on drowning and water-related incidents. Developed by the NWSF and led by the RoSPA, the Maritime Coastguard Agency and the RNLI, it has brought together data from across the UK since 2009.

WAID plays a vital role in supporting water safety across the UK by providing a single, shared evidence base for drowning prevention efforts. In line with the World Health Organization's recommendation for countries to underpin water safety plans with reliable data, WAID helps ensure prevention efforts are informed and targeted, offering important insights into who is at risk and where and when incidents occur. These insights support national and local partners to design effective interventions and prevention activities.

In 2024, a project was launched to stabilise the current system and plan for its future. This focused on identifying a clear minimum dataset and exploring options for a more efficient, user-friendly system. The aim is to streamline data collection while improving quality, usability and timeliness.

WAID is a focused and practical tool that continues to evolve. The database remains essential in shaping this strategy, supporting ongoing analysis of trends and strengthening the evidence base, as well as helping to guide action that ultimately saves lives.

## **AIM**

**Ensure people affected by drowning are listened to, supported and able to meaningfully shape future prevention**

### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS**

**Bring lived experience into the delivery of drowning prevention**

- Provide clear and consistent ways for people affected by drowning to help shape future water safety priorities, policy and messaging.

**Support people affected by drowning who choose to contribute to WSE activity**

- Establish a clear approach for how individuals and families are supported, briefed and cared for when they choose to share their experience or contribute to WSE-led prevention activity.

**Improve support and signposting for people affected by drowning incidents**

- Map current provision and develop clear, consistent signposting so people affected by drowning can access appropriate support.

**Help partners keep support pathways clear, current and useful**

- Provide partners with guidance on available support pathways and support regular review so information remains accurate, consistent and accessible.

## CASE STUDY

### Doing it for Dylan

After losing her 13-year-old son Dylan in a quarry drowning in 2011, [Doing it for Dylan](#) founder Beckie Ramsay turned unimaginable personal tragedy into determined public action. Dylan had been a confident swimmer, but like many young people, neither he nor his friends fully understood the hidden dangers of cold water shock and open water. Beckie has since become one of the UK's most passionate grassroots voices for drowning prevention.

Through her “Doing it for Dylan” campaign and large social media following – [Doing it for Dylan on Facebook](#) – Beckie has shared Dylan's story openly and honestly, often using direct and emotional language to challenge organisations and government to do more. Public responses to her work consistently show strong support from families, teachers, emergency responders and members of the public, many describing her campaigning as courageous, heartfelt and lifesaving. Her work reflects the determination of a bereaved parent committed to preventing other families from experiencing the same loss.

A major focus of Beckie's campaigning has been her call for water safety education to become part of the national curriculum. Her petition to government gained national attention and went on to win “Petition of the Year”, helping build momentum for greater recognition of water safety education within schools in England. Alongside campaigning from many other bereaved families, charities, educators and water safety organisations, this collective advocacy has helped contribute to water safety becoming part of the national curriculum. In recognition of her services to water safety and drowning prevention, Beckie was later awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM). She has also spent years visiting schools, speaking at community events and supporting national awareness campaigns.

Beckie's work is a powerful example of how family advocacy can help drive change. By speaking openly about loss, she has helped keep drowning prevention visible, influenced national conversations, and inspired others to take action in memory of loved ones lost to drowning.





## AIM

**Create equitable and inclusive opportunities for adults, children and young people to learn water safety knowledge, swimming and safe rescue skills**

### OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

**Advocate and work with the government to ensure every child receives equitable, age-appropriate and consistent water safety education**

- Publish and implement a National Water Safety Education and Swimming Competency Framework and Education Pathway to support consistent, age- and stage-appropriate delivery of the Water Safety Code across a range of settings
- Align and embed evidence-based water safety education within teaching materials, training and CPD to support consistent delivery of statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education requirements
- Promote and enable the ongoing development of inclusive evidence-based methods and resources to tackle inequalities and increase access to water safety education in a variety of contexts and in support of a range of learning needs.

**Advocate and work with the government to ensure all children learn to swim through school swimming lessons**

- Enable all swimming providers to embed and promote age- and stage-appropriate water safety and rescue-skills messaging through effective use of the national competency framework and education pathway
- Support and contribute to collective efforts that advocate for sufficient, high-quality aquatic and swimming participation opportunities
- Support and promote work by partners to increase access to, and the development of, evidence-based methods to support inclusive swimming and water safety through key national projects and campaigns.

**Improve support for identified high-risk groups and contexts to ensure learning is accessible to all**

- Promote stronger links between schools, colleges, universities and community partners (including family hubs, leisure providers, sports clubs, youth organisations and emergency services) to support learning through life stages
- Support the development of interventions that deliver consistent messaging through key stages of development such as early secondary school and late adolescence, when independence increases
- Promote water safety and self-rescue skills for adults through evidence informed interventions including those that develop bystander rescue skills, and those that support the safe supervision of children
- Enable partners to support an increased and inclusive offer for young people to develop swimming, safe rescue, and water safety skills in an open water environment through outdoor and immersive education.

## CASE STUDY

### **The Black Swimming Association: providing water safety and drowning prevention initiatives for African, Caribbean and Asian communities**

Around 400 people accidentally drown across the UK every year, with many of those victims having no intention of getting into the water. Data show that the risk of water-based fatalities is higher among African, Caribbean and Asian communities, while Black children in England are three times more likely to drown than White children.

The Black Swimming Association (BSA) is an award-winning non-profit organisation that works to reduce drownings in African, Caribbean and Asian communities. Through water safety and drowning prevention education, research and programmes, they actively campaign to reach communities who experience higher rates of drowning.

Their flagship water safety programme Together We Can™ is delivered across London and South Wales. The programme is aimed at all adults who do not engage in water-based activities, and who have little to no water safety knowledge. Additionally, they deliver water safety workshops in schools to reach and inform young people of the dangers in, on and around water.

For many, the BSA's Find Your Float research project has been crucial to changing the narrative around floating. In partnership with the University of Portsmouth and RNLI, the BSA recruited more than 100 participants of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage to take part in the largest research project of its kind: debunking the stereotype that Black people cannot float due to bone density.

The preliminary results, launched in a joint campaign, found no correlation between floating ability and bone density. While the findings are expected to be published further in the future, through Together We Can sessions, the BSA continues to educate participants about the skill of floating – questioning its definition, challenging preexisting tutorials and confirming that everybody can float; you just need to be taught correctly.



Credit: Black Swimming Association

## CASE STUDY

### **National Water Safety Education and Swimming Competency Framework and Education Pathway**

In 2016, the UK drowning prevention sector set an aim that all children should learn to swim and receive water safety education in primary school. However, delivery prior to this had been inconsistent, with variation in access and content. A cohesive, evidence informed framework was needed to align the sector and ensure every child received equal access to learning.

In 2017, the RNLI led a child centred research project to examine young people's perceptions of open water and associated risks. This research highlighted the need for clear messaging and unified learning, prompting Swim England, the RNLI and RLSS UK to launch the Water Safety Code for England. Tireless campaigning and support from bereaved families shaped priorities, raised awareness and strengthened policy engagement. In 2024 and 2025, further ministerial engagement accelerated progress towards classroom-based water safety education being mandated. Curriculum changes planned for September 2026 will embed classroom based water safety education for all pupils at primary and secondary school.

To support this, a National Water Safety Education and Swimming Competency Framework and Pathway were launched in June 2026 by WSE. These have been developed to provide a strategic overview of the water safety skills, knowledge and key benchmarks that every child should know at each stage of their learning. It is designed to support partners, educators and government in their efforts to provide consistent swimming and water safety education for all children by mapping key water safety competencies to the National Curriculum and the Learn to Swim frameworks. The supporting Education Pathway can be used by teachers and practitioners to develop and deliver tailored resources and interventions, supporting all school-aged children and their families to build lifesaving skills.





## AIM

**Advocate for stronger, clearer legal responsibilities and support proactive management of water-related risks**

### OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

**Work collaboratively with duty bearers such as local authorities and landowners, to ensure all have an active and effective water safety policy**

- Analyse and report on the adoption of water safety policies
- Engage with relevant landowners and provide relevant guidance on policy and risk management
- Prioritise action by working closely with duty holders and relevant partners in areas with high frequency drowning locations or areas of emerging risk.

**Strengthen and sustain Water Safety Partnerships (WSPs) across England by establishing a direct pathway between national and local level activity**

- Establish a model for WSPs with a direct conduit between national, regional and local areas
- Strengthen regional coordination in areas where shared governance of waterways and risk systems will improve effectiveness
- Provide relevant guidance and data to enable WSPs to implement good practice and address community-specific risk
- Members of WSE to actively support WSPs in the areas they operate.



## CASE STUDY

### **Mapping the evolution of high-frequency locations for unintentional and intentional drowning in England: a tool for evaluating intervention efficacy**

Drowning is a significant cause of accidental and intentional death in the United Kingdom. In 2023, there were a total of 659 drowning deaths recorded in the UK's WAID, 34 per cent of which were accidental water-related fatalities and 32 per cent were suspected suicides. Resources for prevention are limited, with rescue efforts falling to publicly funded emergency services and charitable organisations.

To inform drowning prevention strategy and policy, it is vital that we understand the high-frequency locations where drownings tend to occur. Initial analysis confirmed the existence of high-frequency locations for drownings that occurred from 2012 to 2019. This analysis has since been repeated using more recent data (up to 2023), with the aim of establishing if these high-frequency locations had evolved as a result of targeted interventions, such as the formation of a local WSP.

In England, between 2012 and 2019 there were three very high-, four high- and 14 moderate-priority locations identified for intervention from 116 fatalities. Specific stakeholder reports were provided for these locations, with stakeholders encouraged to form WSPs. Between 2016 and 2023 there were one very high-, three high- and 14 moderate-priority locations identified from 94 fatalities, demonstrating a net reduction of high-frequency locations by three (-22 fatalities).

One successful example is in York city centre, where 2016 to 2023 data revealed three fewer fatalities and a drop in category rating from very high to moderate following the establishment of the York Water Safety Partnership. These results suggest an effective intervention in York, and that this analysis can be used to evaluate local and national strategies across England.





## AIM

**Educate people on how to stay safe in, on and around water through targeted awareness- and knowledge-building interventions**

### OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

**Develop and deliver impactful and evidence-based water safety campaigns to individuals and communities, with a particular focus on high-frequency locations, groups and emerging risks**

- Develop data-informed campaigns that target high-frequency places, people and contexts where drowning is most common
  - Places e.g. rivers, canals and coastal beaches
  - People e.g. 20 to 29 year-old men
  - Contexts e.g. everyday unplanned exposure to open water
- Support and amplify UK-wide water safety campaigns by NWSF and WSE partners, and support global awareness initiatives like World Drowning Prevention Day
- Support practical bystander rescue skills for relevant duty holders in high-footfall waterside settings
- Pilot parent/carer water safety webinars focusing on everyday risks, supervision and what to do in an emergency.

**Ensure safety messages and advice are consistent, equitable and inclusive so water safety knowledge is accessible to all**

- Develop toolkits and key messages for key water-related activities to support consistent advice
- Develop an inclusive approach to extend the reach and relevance of lifesaving water safety messages to people and communities who need them most.

**Regularly review and evaluate water safety campaigns and guidance to ensure accuracy and strengthen future approaches**

- Implement proportionate evaluation for WSE-supported campaigns and communications in an annual report
- Consistently review and update water safety advice and resources to ensure they align with the latest drowning prevention data, research and expertise.

## CASE STUDY

### Float to Live

*Float to Live* shows how science, partnership and public communication can turn research into lifesaving action. The campaign began with a simple challenge: what should someone do if they unexpectedly find themselves in difficulty in the water? Rather than relying only on traditional advice to swim to safety, the RNLI worked with experts including the University of Portsmouth's Extreme Environments Laboratory and Leeds Trinity University to understand what happens during cold water shock and how people can improve their chances of survival.

The evidence showed that, when someone first enters cold water, the immediate danger is often panic, gasping and loss of breathing control. Floating on the back, with the ears submerged and airway clear, can help people stay calm, control their breathing and buy vital time to call for help or make a safer decision. This insight became *Float to Live*: tilt your head back, relax, control your breathing and use your hands to help you stay afloat.

Since launching in 2017, the campaign has evolved through testing, survivor insight and partnership. Messaging has been refined to make it more inclusive and practical, including reassurance that everyone floats differently, clothing can help trap air, and floating is a skill that people can practise safely in supervised places. The campaign has also challenged myths around body type, ethnicity and buoyancy, helping more people see the advice as relevant to them.

*Float to Live* has grown from an RNLI campaign into a internationally recognised water safety message. It has been adopted by the NWSF, embedded in HM Coastguard 999 call scripts, and shared by partners across the UK and Ireland. Its real-world impact is increasingly visible: independent tracking has shown growing public awareness and knowledge of floating as a first action, while more than 50 people have contacted the RNLI to say the advice helped them survive. It is a strong example of evidence being translated from lab-based insight into a lifesaving behaviour that anyone can remember.



## CASE STUDY

### Phone Float Throw

In 2025, the NWSF partnered with Claremont Communications to carry out a review of its established bystander rescue messaging. The effectiveness of existing instructions (Call, Tell, Throw) was analysed through surveys, public focus groups and stakeholder workshops.

This process found that both the clarity and memorability of existing messaging was limited, both among stakeholders and the public. *Phone Float Throw* emerged from the review as a clearer, more widely understood set of instructions that emphasised the same lifesaving behaviours:

- Phone 999 to get help
- Tell them to stay calm and float on their back
- Throw rescue equipment to help them float until the emergency services arrive

*Phone Float Throw* launched under *Respect The Water* – the NWSF’s umbrella brand for public-facing water safety messaging – in April 2026. The new campaign aimed to embed the new instructions for bystanders into sector-wide water safety messaging, empowering the public to take positive action if they see someone in trouble in the water, without putting themselves at risk. Through simple, impactful imagery, the campaign uses the universally recognised symbol of a life ring to immediately associate the campaign with water-based rescue in the mind of the audience.

Claremont Communications developed a campaign toolkit including static and animated social media assets, posters and a digital six sheet to allow NWSF partners to support and share the campaign with their networks. The NWSF also worked with media buyer agency CAN Digital to publicise the campaign to key audiences through social and digital advertising.



## **AIM**

**Understand and respond to how climate change, extreme weather, changing water use and new technology are influencing drowning risk**

### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS**

#### **Improve understanding of climate-related drowning risk**

- Develop a consistent working definition of climate-related drowning risk, including incidents associated with heatwaves, flooding, storms, extreme cold and other severe weather events.

#### **Build climate and exposure analysis into drowning prevention research**

- Use WAID, weather, environmental and participation data, where available, to better understand how changing conditions affect drowning risk, and share learning with resilience, local government, public health and emergency planning partners.

#### **Identify risks and opportunities linked to changing water use**

- Monitor and share evidence on how changing patterns of recreation, access, behaviour and participation in, on and around water are creating new or changing drowning risks.

#### **Explore the role of new technology in drowning prevention**

- Share examples of where new technology may either increase risk or support prevention, response, rescue, data collection, communication or public education.





## CASE STUDY

### Heatwaves

Hot weather is now recognised as a predictable drowning risk in the UK. In 2024, the NWSF brought together partners from lifesaving charities, academia, fire and rescue, and families with lived experience to turn emerging evidence into practical prevention activity.

The work was underpinned by two complementary pieces of research. Bournemouth University's published study found that when UK air temperatures reach 25°C or above, accidental drowning risk increases almost fivefold compared with days below 10°C. RLSS UK's analysis added further insight, showing that on days above 25°C, 57 per cent of people who drowned were swimming, compared with 20 per cent in normal temperatures, with teenagers and young adults proportionately more at risk.

This evidence gave the sector a clearer basis for timely, proactive communication. Rather than waiting for incidents to happen, partners were able to plan heatwave warnings around forecast conditions, helping the public enjoy water safely while understanding the risks of cold water shock, open water, alcohol and unsupervised swimming.

The collaborative approach also strengthened media impact. In July 2024, NWSF partners rapidly mobilised ahead of hot weather, with spokespeople from NWSF, RLSS UK, Bournemouth University, RNLI, London Fire Brigade and Swim Wales, alongside water safety campaigner Megan Griffiths, whose brother Haydn drowned during a heatwave in 2022. The campaign secured national and regional broadcast coverage, including Good Morning Britain, ITV News, LBC, BBC regional radio and Sky News Radio, reaching an estimated 55.5 million people.

By June 2026, this work had helped move heatwave water safety from a reactive media message to part of national public health preparedness. A major milestone was the inclusion of water safety campaigns in the UK Health Security Agency's national heatwaves toolkit, giving local authorities, public health teams and partners ready-to-use drowning prevention advice when hot weather is forecast.

## AIM

### **Strengthen high-level leadership, influence and advocacy for drowning prevention**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS**

##### **Support UK-wide advocacy to secure ministerial support for the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy (DPS) and aligned national strategies**

- Develop an advocacy plan grounded in evidence, incorporating all relevant stakeholders and informed by a clear theory of change, to identify the policy levers and changes required to significantly reduce drownings
- Develop a concise England-focused Ministerial briefing to support the UK-wide advocacy plan.

##### **Identify and influence multisectoral partners who can contribute to drowning prevention**

- Update any relevant WSE guidance to reflect emerging risks and promote sector-wide best practice guidance
- Strengthen collaboration with partners and duty holders to embed drowning prevention across relevant agendas, sectors and programmes.



## AIM

### **Support efforts to reduce water-related suicide**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS**

##### **Share place-based insight to support suicide prevention leads and responsible authorities to reduce risk in and around water environments**

- Explore options for sharing WAID insights with suicide prevention partners and support the ethical consideration of environmental measures at priority locations
- Develop and maintain connectivity with the suicide prevention sector to contribute to its prevention.

##### **Ensure all reporting and learning is conducted in a safe, sensitive and responsible manner, aligned with established suicide prevention good practice**

- Align WSE outputs with Samaritans' media guidance<sup>vi</sup> and local suicide prevention plans, with an internal review prior to publishing suicide-related content.





# Monitoring, evaluation and review

Regular monitoring, evaluation and review are essential to ensure that this strategy remains relevant and drives effective action. WSE will review progress annually through its Steering Group and work with the NWSF to align reporting and learning across the UK, while sharing insights internationally. Periodic reviews will assess adoption of water safety policies in high-risk local authority areas to support accountability and improvement.

In addition, WSE's functional groups will develop workplans, including KPIs, to deliver these actions through defined projects (as set out in Figure 3). Progress against these workplans will be regularly monitored and reported, enabling adaptive delivery, clear accountability, and continuous improvement.



# Acknowledgements

This document was developed and written by members of WSE's Strategy Subgroup:

- Ross MacLeod (RNLI)
- Carlene McAvoy (RoSPA)
- Professor Mike Tipton (University of Portsmouth).

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organisations for providing case studies and other contributions that informed the strategy:

- Professor Martin Barwood (Leeds Trinity University, UK), Dr Samuel Hills (Bournemouth University, UK), Dr Matthew Hobbs (University of Canterbury, NZ), Dr Lukas Marek (University of Canterbury, NZ)
- Sam Johnson (RNLI)
- Georgie Beardmore (RoSPA)
- Rebecca Ramsay (Doing it for Dylan)
- Seren Jones (Black Swimming Association)
- Kerry Downes (Black Swimming Association)
- Rachael Brogan (RoSPA).

We also extend our thanks to members of WSE's Steering Group and partner organisations for their contributions to the development of this strategy:

- |                                                               |                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| • Canal & River Trust                                         | • National Independent Lifeboat Association     |
| • Environment Agency                                          | • Portsmouth University                         |
| • Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service                  | • Royal Life Saving Society UK                  |
| • Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group | • Royal National Lifeboat Institution           |
| • Leeds Trinity University                                    | • Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents |
| • Maritime and Coastguard Agency                              | • Surf Life Saving GB                           |
| • National Fire Chiefs Council                                | • Swim England                                  |
|                                                               | • The Crown Estate.                             |

Finally, we are grateful to all individuals and organisations who provided feedback during the member and public consultation process. Appendix Two provides a full list of member organisations that support this strategy.





# Appendices

## Appendix One – Notes on the data

### WAID data

All data used are from WAID 2019 to 2023 (v2) unless otherwise noted.

Population rate figures use ONS mid-year data from the Mid-2024 edition of the data.

Overall water-related fatalities include: accidental, suicide, crime and inconclusive. Accidental fatalities refers to suspected/confirmed accidental causes and natural water-related causes.

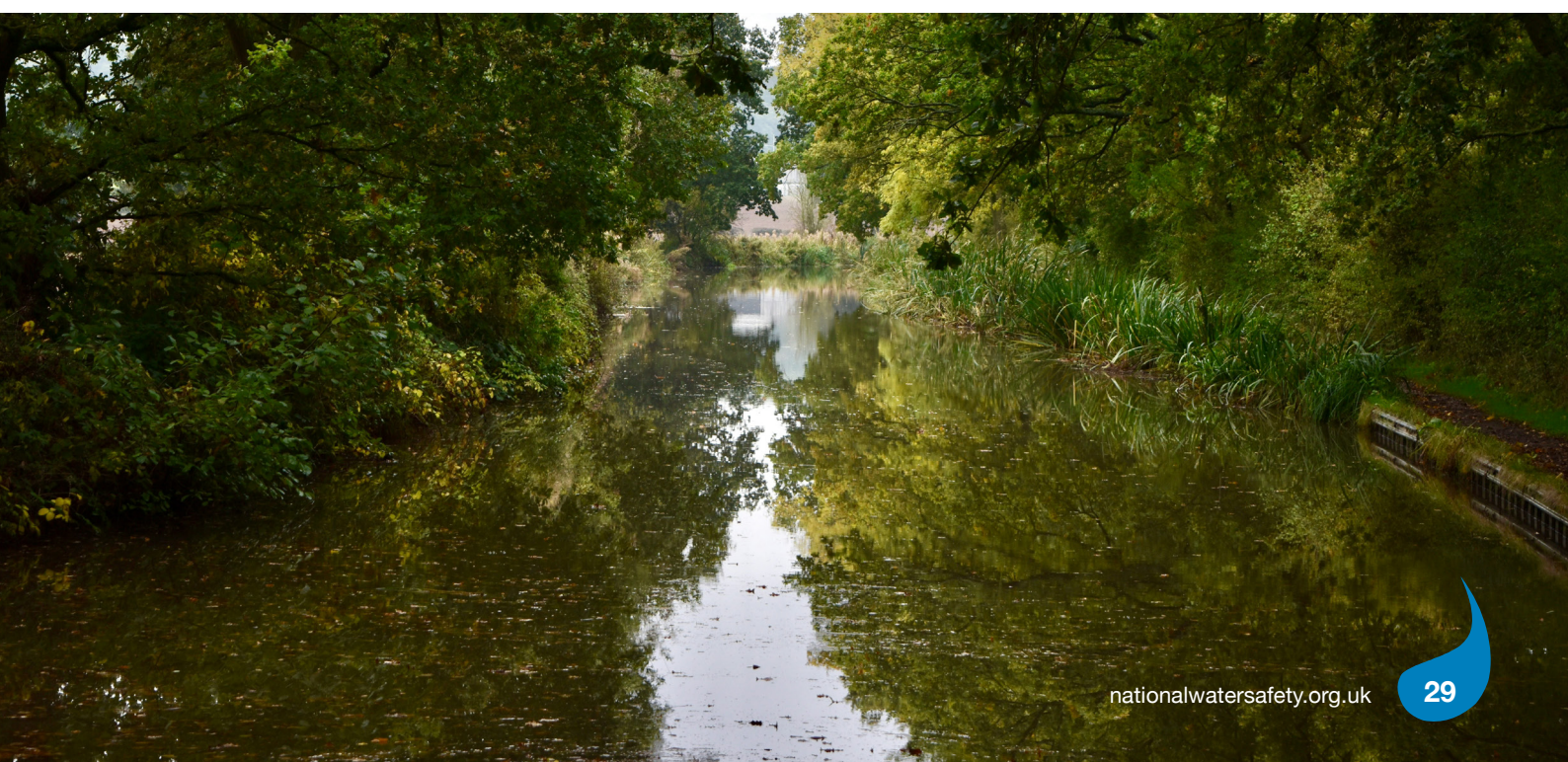
Suicide fatalities refers to suspected/confirmed suicide causes.

Inconclusive refers to incidents where intent has not been able to be categorised.

Where figures have been excluded due to limited information, this has been clearly indicated by category (e.g. n=394; 13 excluded).

WAID taxonomies for activity:

- Commercial activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded as commercial
- Domestic activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded in a domestic/residential setting
- Everyday activities where the deceased did not intend to be in the water (e.g. people who were walking, running and cycling next to water)
- Exceptional activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded as exceptional e.g. person/animal rescue
- Recreational activities where the activity was recorded as sports or a water-based activity.



## Appendix Two – WSE member organisations supporting the Strategy





# References

- i. National Water Safety Forum (2016). The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016–2026. Available online: [nationalwatersafety.org.uk/media/1005/uk-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf](https://nationalwatersafety.org.uk/media/1005/uk-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf)
- ii. Based on 2023 v2 (enhanced) WAID data and government analysis indicating that each year of life lost is valued at £60,000, as per HM Treasury guidance in The Green Book: Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation (2022).
- iii. United Nations General Assembly (2021). Global drowning prevention: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/75/273), 29 April 2021.
- iv. Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention (2025). Global strategy for drowning prevention. Available online: [who.int/publications/m/item/global-strategy-for-drowning-prevention--turning-the-tide-on-a-leading-killer](https://who.int/publications/m/item/global-strategy-for-drowning-prevention--turning-the-tide-on-a-leading-killer)
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- vi. Samaritans (n.d.) Media guidelines for reporting suicide. Available at: [samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide](https://samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide)



water safety  
England