



Curtin University

# STUDENTS ON THE MOVE: PROFILING WATER SAFETY KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES & PRACTICES AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM SOUTH & EAST ASIA

COLLABORATION FOR EVIDENCE, RESEARCH & IMPACT IN PUBLIC HEALTH



# INTRODUCTION

Globally, migration is acknowledged as a risk factor for drowning, including for young people (1, 2), with drowning prevention among adolescents and young adults a complex public health issue. In countries such as Australia, preventing drowning among young migrants requires a range of additional considerations. Health outcomes for migrant populations are affected by the circumstances surrounding the relocation (e.g. rationale, duration of stay), in addition to a range of individual, social, economic, environmental and other determinants that can change and evolve throughout individual movement trajectories. However, in many areas of public health, migration has been poorly considered a factor influencing health. This is despite the fact that one in two Australians (or their parents) were born overseas (3) and the significant numbers of short- and long-term overseas visitors to Australia each year (1, 3).

The most common reasons to visit Australia are a holiday, to visit friends and relatives, and to study (1). However, overseas visitors, including students, are at higher risk of injury or death when travelling to unfamiliar areas, with most travel-related morbidity and mortality among international visitors being from injuries, such as water-related incidents (4). Recent research suggests over 70% of visitors go to the beaches and engage in activities in and around the waterways (4). The causes of drowning vary by visitor status e.g. data suggests that beaches were the most common location for drowning among overseas tourists, whilst inland waterways posed a greater risk for international students (1).

Accordingly, young migrants, specifically international students from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) background are a priority population for drowning prevention efforts. In January 2024, 82,890 international students arrived in Australia, an increase of 23,660 students compared with the corresponding month of the previous year (5). Considering this data, there is a real need to explore normative beliefs, knowledge, settings, and risk-taking behaviours when planning strategies to prevent drowning among international students from CaLD backgrounds.

Since 2004, Royal Life Saving Society WA (RLSSWA) has been funded by the Department of Health WA (DoHWA) to coordinate the Youth Water Safety Program (YWSP). The program targets young people aged 15-24 years to increase knowledge and skills regarding the prevention of drowning; including awareness about the risks associated with consuming alcohol and other drugs in and around water. The current program comprises several strategies including a state-wide media campaign, 'Be a Mermate', school and community presentations and resource distribution. Currently, there are no materials for international students from CaLD backgrounds, who are an emerging priority area.

This report presents insights garnered from an exploration of the perspectives, motivations and profiles of international students from CaLD backgrounds to inform the next steps of the Youth Water Safety Program (YWSP).

## ***International students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds***

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) is a common term used by the Australian government and non-government sector to describe people of non-Anglo-Celtic origin.

The term international student refers to someone studying who is not an Australian or New Zealand citizen, an Australian permanent resident, or a holder of an Australian permanent humanitarian visa. While most international students arrive on a student visa, some international students may have lived in Australia for several years prior and/or are studying on a different visa.

Together, these terms reflect students from diverse backgrounds, including cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or religious diversity. For readability, we have used the term 'student' to reference international students from CaLD backgrounds.

*Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022*

# METHODS

Using a range of methods, the research examined water safety and drowning prevention with international students from South and East Asia. Insights explored swim ability; recreational activities in and around the water; knowledge, attitudes and norms; risk; and campaign awareness and acceptability. This work was undertaken in four parts:



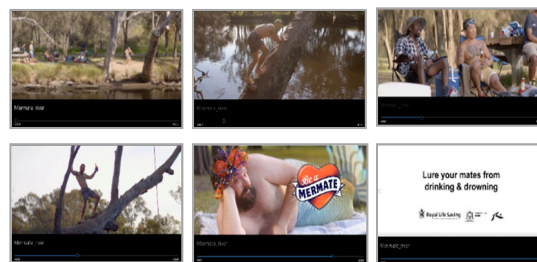
Multiple data sources were synthesised to provide a rapid review locating existing Australian campaigns, resources and guidelines for international and/or CaLD audiences and determine design considerations for materials for international students from CaLD backgrounds.

Semi-structured interviews (n=9) and qualitatively driven surveys (n=15) were conducted. The short 10-minute survey was administered to complement interviews and gain perspectives from those unable to take part in the interviews. Domains of enquiry included: Western Australia as a destination, aquatic locations, water-based activities, water safety, messages and imagery. Ads and posters from the current 'Be a Mermate' campaign (shown below) were assessed by participants. Deductive thematic analysis was undertaken on qualitative data and frequencies were generated from quantitative data for demographic characteristics.

Advertisement - Pool



Advertisement - River



Posters



## Contact

### **Collaboration for Evidence, Research & Impact in Public Health**

Curtin University  
PO Box U1987  
Bentley Western Australia 6845  
Tel: +61 8 9266 7988  
Web: [ceriph.curtin.edu.au](http://ceriph.curtin.edu.au)