



Regional Status Report on Drowning in the **Western Pacific**

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Foreword



The Western Pacific Region is a diverse region, with many people, including Mekong communities and Pacific Islanders, living near or along rivers, the sea and other bodies of water. While there's great beauty and benefits to living near water, there are also great risks to the health and safety of those living along the shoreline. From overcrowded boats carrying passengers travelling long distances in hazardous weather conditions, to climate change-related flash flooding impacting families living in homes built on the banks of water channels, or fishing and fisheries striving to provide livelihoods and nutrition for many communities – the risk of drowning presents itself in many different aspects of life for people living in our Region.

Drowning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury deaths in the Western Pacific, after road traffic injuries and falls. In 2019 alone, almost 74 000 deaths in the Region were attributed to drowning. However, the true burden is unknown as reporting does not include climate-related extreme weather events or disasters. Children are some of the most vulnerable. In fact, drowning kills more children in the Western Pacific under the age of 15 than HIV/AIDS, meningitis, malaria, dengue, malnutrition, respiratory disease and hepatitis combined.¹ However, the greatest proportion of drowning deaths (34%) occurs among people aged 65 years and older, with men experiencing a greater burden of drowning than women.

As we move forward in our shared vision for the Western Pacific to become the healthiest and safest region, drowning prevention must not go unrecognized. If we do not make significant transformations now to ensure water safety, in 10 years' time, almost three quarters of a million more people in the Region may drown.

In order to reduce drowning in our Region, we recognize that the risk of drowning cuts across many different sectors: health, transport, maritime safety, tourism, farming and more, with many different partners and stakeholders. To save lives, strong multisectoral collaborations and integrated drowning prevention interventions across broader regional, national and local agendas is required. Through coordination, strong leadership and the implementation of evidence-based, low-cost water safety interventions, we can reduce the burden of drowning in the Region.

As part of the first Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention passed in April 2021 by the United Nations General Assembly, the global community has already taken steps to recognize the immense burden of drowning. Now it's our duty to keep people safe as they

¹ Global health estimates: leading causes of death. In: Global Health Observatory [website] (<https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/mortality-and-global-health-estimates/ghle-leading-causes-of-death>, accessed 1 May 2021).

interact with water throughout their daily lives, jobs and recreational activities.

We are pleased to present the first regional assessment of drowning prevention and water safety in the Western Pacific Region. This report is a significant step forward to accelerating advocacy and action to minimize and avoid these preventable deaths. This important work builds upon the global strategies to end drowning, outlined in the *Global Report on Drowning: Preventing a Leading Killer* (2014). It showcases examples of leadership, innovation and strong partnerships within and beyond the health sector, and celebrates the progress Member States have made across the Region. My sincere thanks to all those Member States who participated in the preparation of this report.

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