



**UNSW**  
SYDNEY

**UNSW**

**HEALTH PROMOTION UNIT**

# **Water Safety Program**

**2023**

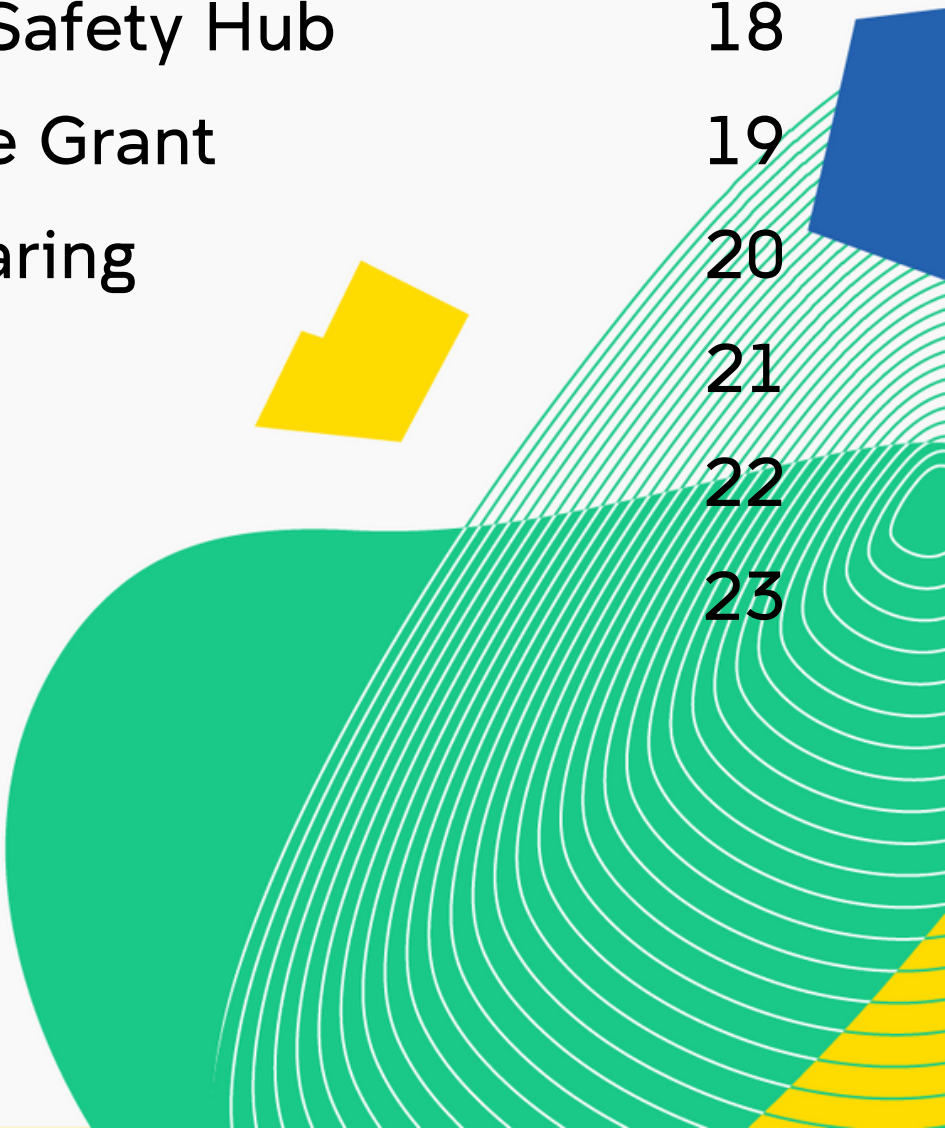






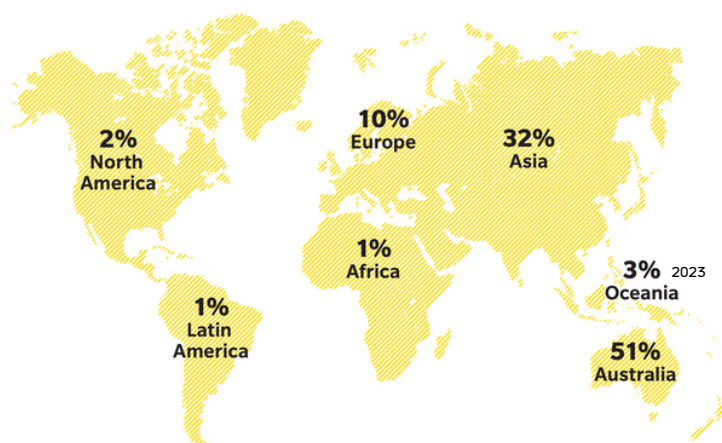
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# Water Safety AT UNSW

Water and beach culture are part of the Australian experience, yet many international students do not know how to swim, lack the confidence to enter the ocean and have little understanding of water safety. The 2022 Surf Life Saving NSW Coastal Safety Report conducted a 10 year analysis from 2012-2022, reporting that 49% of coastal drowning deaths were from people born overseas.<sup>1</sup> The 2023 National Drowning Report states that 21% of all drowning deaths are 18-34 years old.<sup>2</sup>



**21%**  
**18-34 Years**

2023 National Drowning Report<sup>2</sup>

Birth continent is known for 84% of coastal drowning deaths (n=365), of these 51% of decedents were Australian-born (n=185), 32% born in Asia (n=116), and 10% born in Europe (n=38). Diagram and statistics taken from 2022 Surf Life Saving NSW Coastal Safety Report.<sup>1</sup>

As a university that sits within a 5km radius of some of Australia's busiest beaches, UNSW plays an important role in drowning prevention and in removing the barriers for international students to integrate more widely within the Australian community.



# 2023 Aims

1. Expand and enhance the successful Water Safety program to further develop essential swim safety skills
2. Enhance Beach Safety Awareness
3. Broaden the scope to include comprehensive water safety education



# Program OVERVIEW

UNSW's Water Safety Program was developed in collaboration with Surf Life Saving NSW, UNSW Fitness and Aquatic Centre and Coogee Surf Life Saving Club. It aims to provide a quality, targeted and holistic program, designed for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities with limited water safety skills.

It consists of:

- An introductory Coogee to Bondi Walk with a beach safety workshop.
- An award-winning Learn to Swim (LTS) Program
- An innovative Beach Ocean Safe (BOS) Program.

STEP 1

COOGEE  
TO BONDI  
WALK



STEP 2

LEARN TO  
SWIM  
PROGRAM



STEP 3

BEACH  
OCEAN  
SAFE





*The program made me feel comfortable in the water. I had all my fears disappear because the technique taught was so amazing.*

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2023

In 2023 the Water Safety Program had

**3089**  
ENGAGEMENTS

THAT'S A  
**+75%**

increase in engagements in comparison to 2022

WE RAN

**3**

Beach  
Safety  
Walks

**9**

Learn to  
Swim 8 Wk  
Programs

**2**

Beach  
Ocean Safe  
Programs

# Safety Walk

## COOGEE TO BONDI

**440**

**Student Attendees**

**+ 320% YoY Change**

**91%**

**Felt more  
confident about  
Beach Safety**

**88%**

**Learned information  
about Beach Safety  
that they didn't know  
before**

The Beach Safety Walk is a collaboration between HPU and UNSW Peer Connections. It takes place on a trimester basis and acts as the introduction to the overall Water Safety Program. The walk spans from Coogee to Bondi, showcasing the breathtaking beaches of Sydney and promoting beach safety among international students.

During the walk, participants receive a beach safety presentation from trained surf life savers at one of the surf clubs along the route. Key messages include surf hazards, how to stay safe on Australian beaches, analysing the local conditions and evaluating risks. This educational component aims to equip students with essential knowledge and skills to enjoy the beaches safely.



Water Safety





# Learn to Swim PROGRAM

The LTS Program provides 8 subsidised one-hour adult learn-to-swim classes for international students. Students join a large diverse community supported by a mentoring program that encourages cultural-exchange and participation helping to build a sense of belonging.

By providing a safe and supportive environment, the program aims to develop fundamental swimming techniques such as floating, treading water, and various strokes. It also focuses on increasing participants' awareness of basic water and beach safety, empowering them to make informed decisions and enjoy water-based activities safely.

**270**

PARTICIPANTS

**2500+**

ENGAGEMENTS

**+51%**

increase in participants YoY

**8.9/10**

Average Rating of the LTS Program

**85%**

of students felt the program equalled or exceeded their expectations.

**94%**

of students would recommend the program to their friends/peers.



Finally learned how to swim and not afraid of the water.  
Big step for me!

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2023



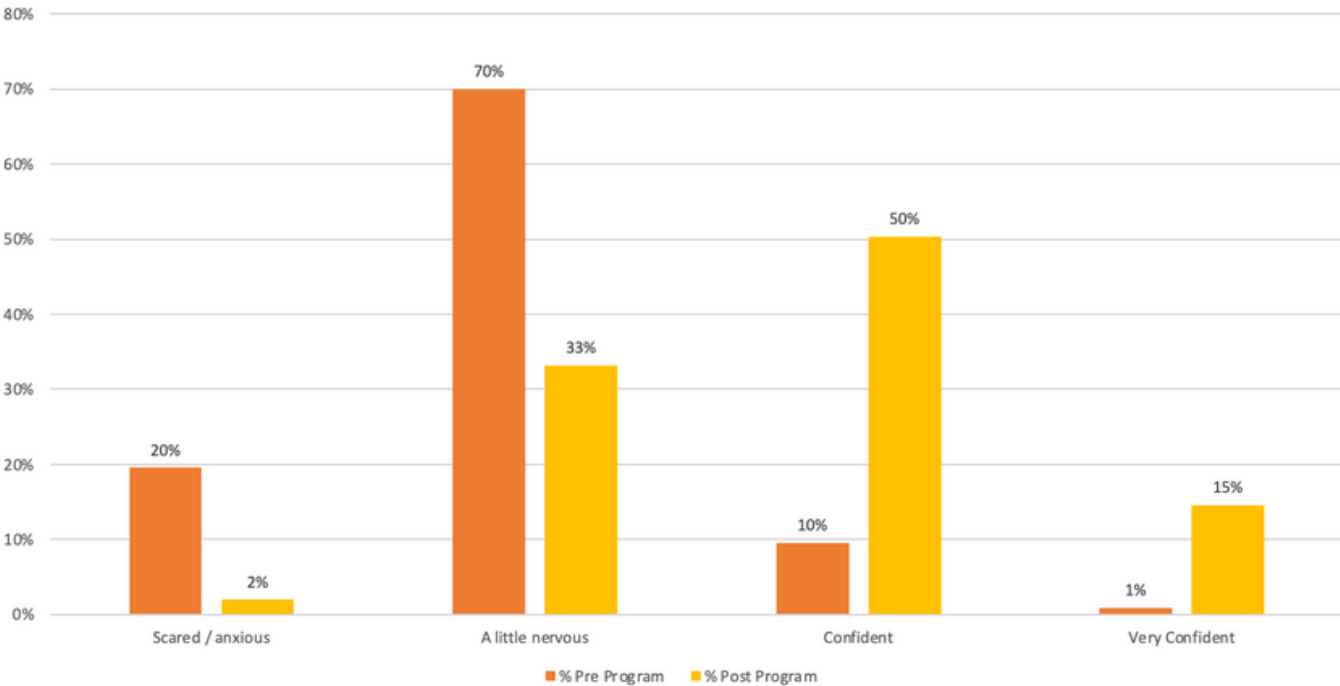
# We've worked hard TO DELIVER MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENTS

- Weekly water safety newsletters
- Digital attendance tracking
- Structured Mentor Program
- Improved water safety workshop
- New merchandise including t-shirts, hoodies, water bottles and water-proof bags
- Improved evaluation and reporting methods aligning with research standards
- Learn to Swim Photoshoot
- New Certificates and Branding



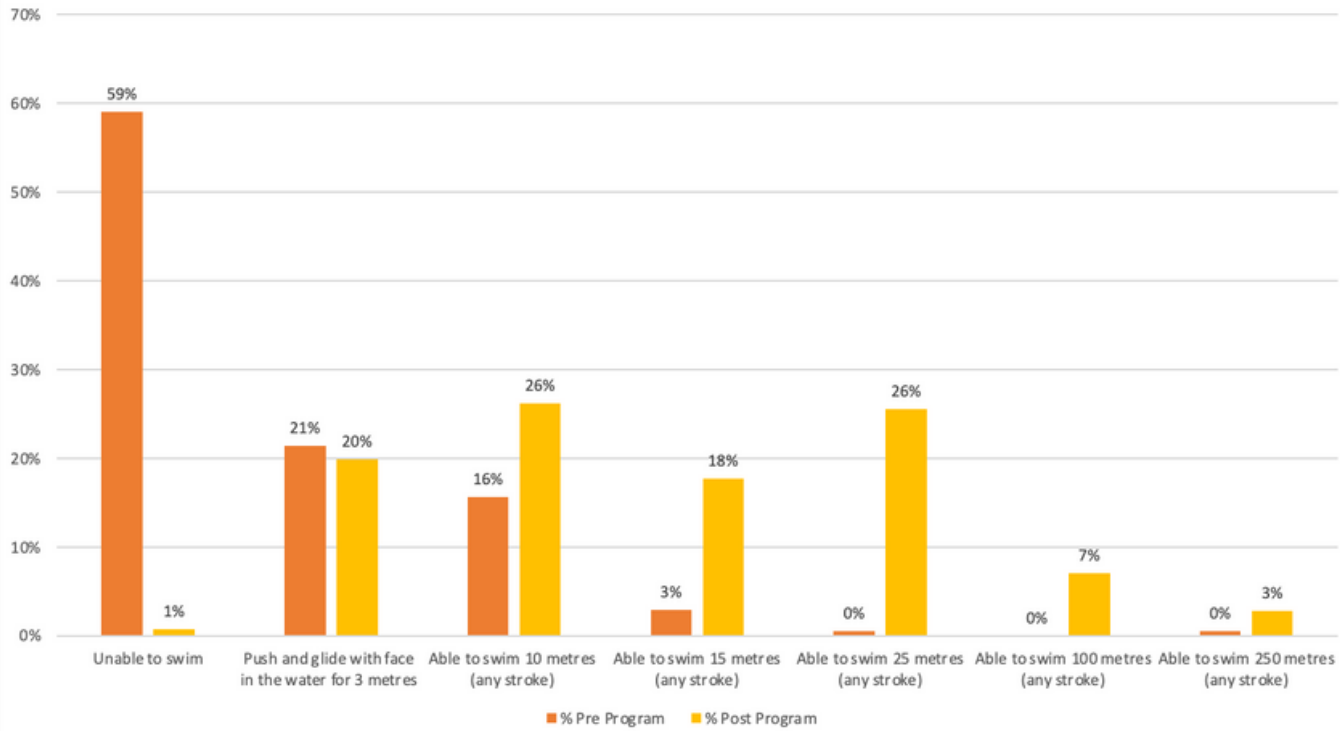
Results 

# Swimming Confidence



Before the program, 90% of students were scared or nervous in comparison to 65% who were confident or very confident at the conclusion of the program.

# Swimming Ability



Before the program, 96% of students were unable to swim 10 metres in comparison to 80% who could swim 10 metres or more at the conclusion of the program.





# Beach Ocean SAFE

The Beach Ocean Safe Program was designed in collaboration with UNSW and Coogee Surf Life Saving Club (CSLSC), targeting members of the UNSW CALD community who lack confidence and skills in the ocean. It serves as the transition step between the Learn to Swim program and active participation in ocean-based activities. The program received an official endorsement from Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW), further underscoring its credibility and alignment with recognised water safety standards. The BOS Program consists of a proficiency session, 2 sessions covering both theoretical and practical components, and an assessment/ graduation ceremony.

**41**

**PARTICIPANTS**

**9.71**

Average Program Rating

**190**

**ENGAGEMENTS**

**62%**

swam at an Australian Beach for the first time

**100%**

of students felt the program equalled or exceeded their expectations.

**100%**

of students would recommend the program to their friends/peers.

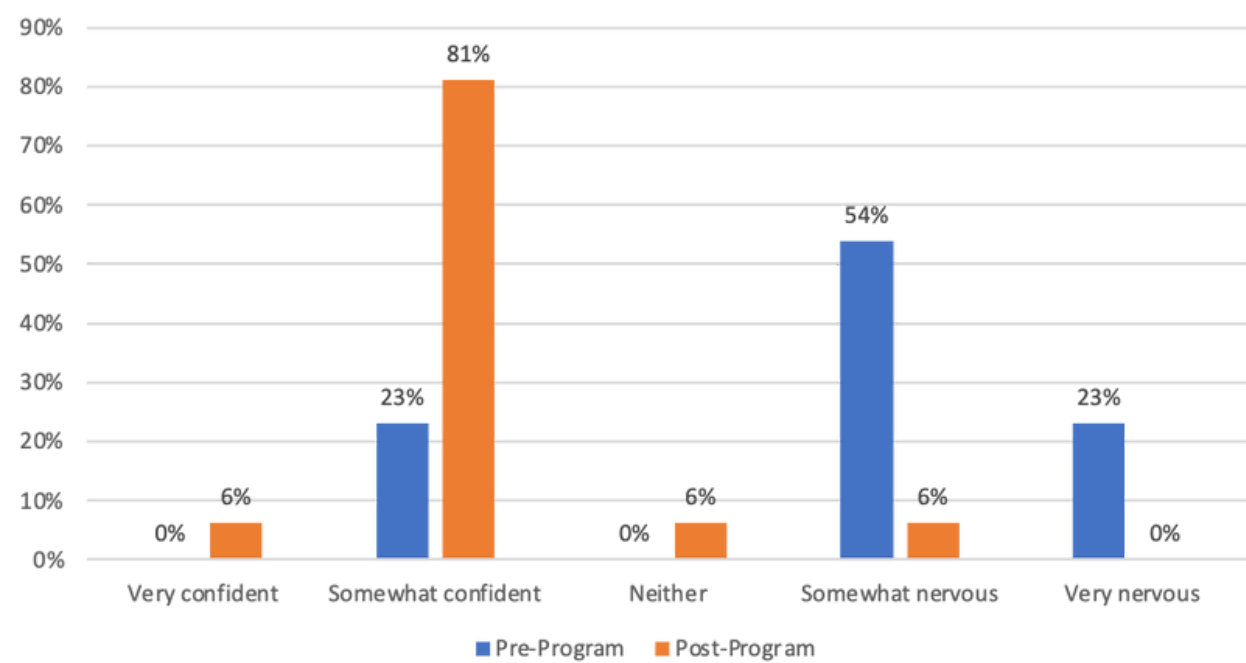


*This is a once in a lifetime experience which'll impact not just us, but all people around us!*

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2023

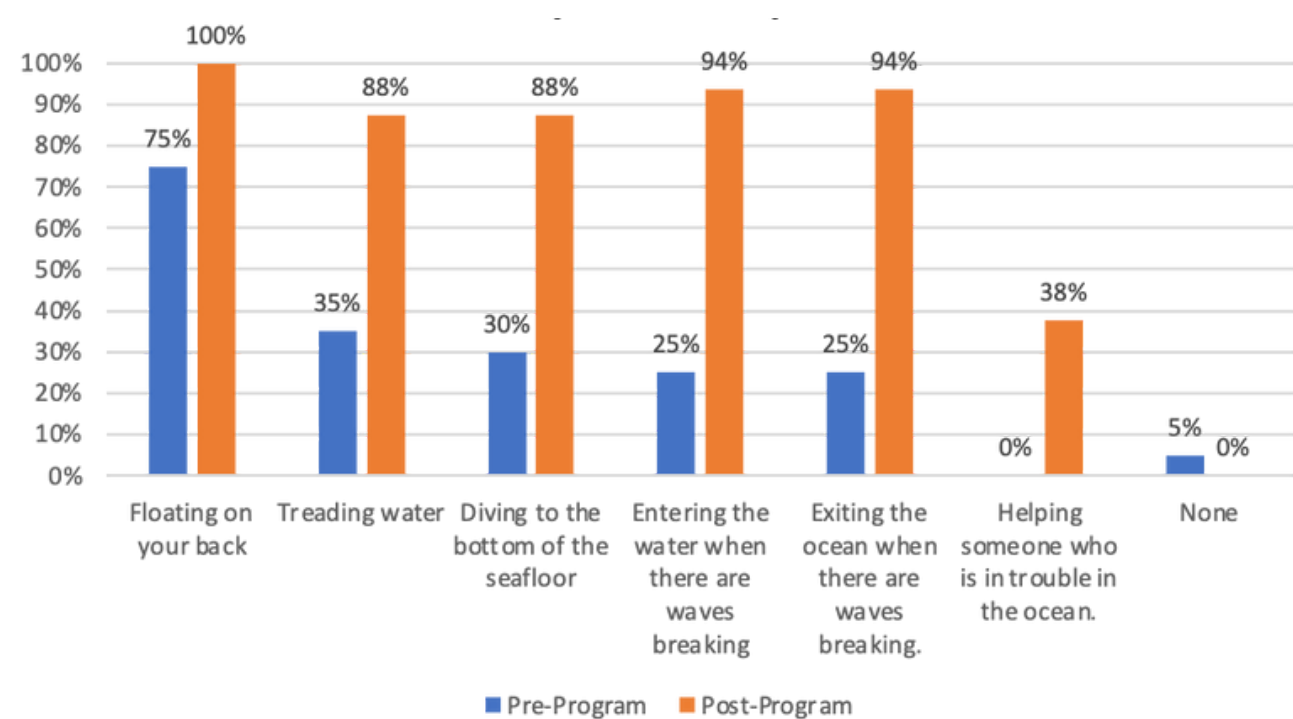


# Confidence Swimming at an Australian Beach



Before the program, 77% of students were nervous about swimming at an Australian beach in comparison to 87% who were confident at the conclusion of the program.

# Activities in the Ocean



52% average increase in important water safety activities in the ocean





The program didn't just involve swimming; it taught me about beach safety, first aid, CPR, understanding ocean conditions, water rescue techniques, and much more.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2023





# Beach Safety RESEARCH GROUP

The Beach Safety Research Group at UNSW is a multidisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners dedicated to keeping people safe at the beach. In 2023, the Health Promotion Unit formalised a partnership with the BSRG to deliver two projects by the conclusion of 2024. The scope of this partnership includes conducting high-quality research that informs the development and implementation of effective beach and water safety initiatives, the evaluation of existing programs, and communicating and translating beach safety science in a way that is accessible and useful to those responsible for saving lives and making the beach a safe place to be.

## Project 1

Impact of water and beach safety knowledge programs on belonging and social integration of CALD communities



Rob Brander  
**Professor,**  
**School of BEES**

## Project 2

Evaluate the effectiveness of UNSW's Water Safety Program in improving the skills, and confidence of international students and those from CALD communities.



Amy Peden  
**Research Fellow,**  
**School of Population Health**

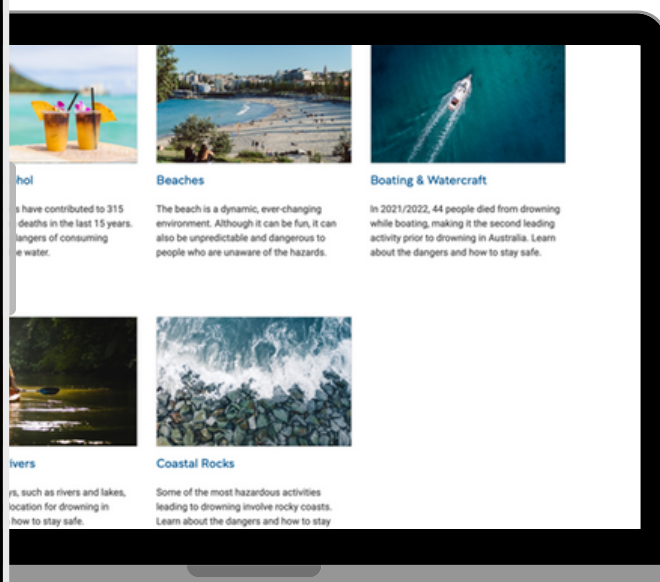
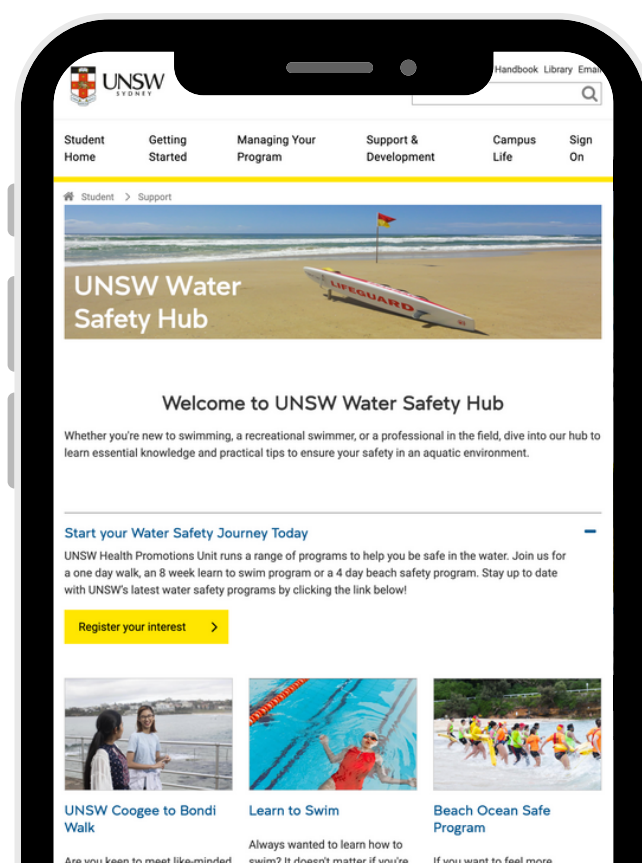
Find out more about the UNSW BSRG by clicking [here](#) 

# UNSW Water SAFETY HUB

In 2023, UNSW launched a Water Safety Hub, recognising the paramount importance of fostering water safety awareness and skills within its diverse community. The hub serves as a centralised resource, offering a comprehensive platform for education, training, and community engagement in water safety. It provides a collaborative space where students, staff, and community members can access vital information, participate in training programs, and engage in initiatives aimed at promoting responsible aquatic practices.



<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/water-safety>





“If we really want to catalyse change, we need to remove the barriers for international students, and swimming capability is a huge one

OLIVER JACKSON, 2023

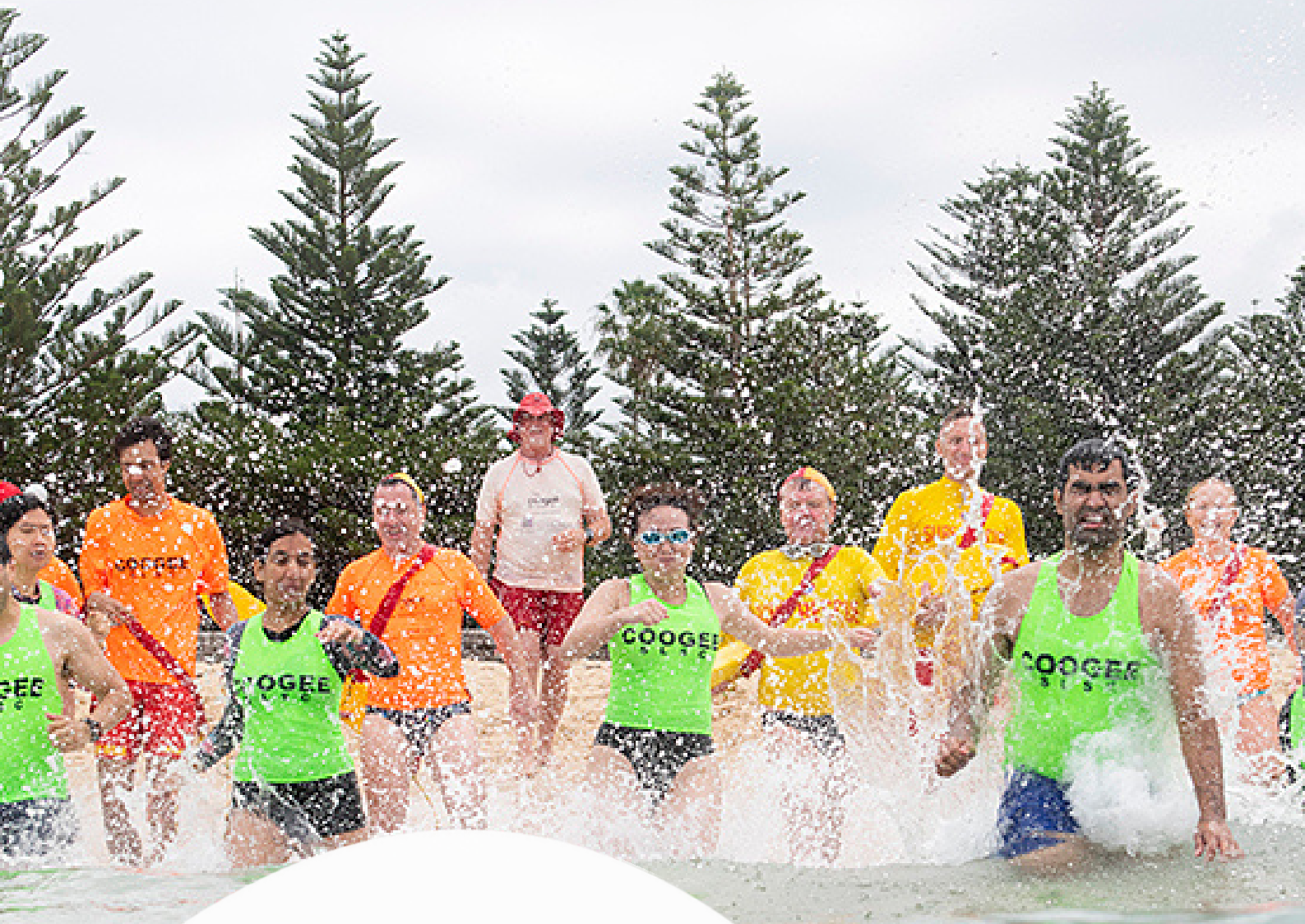
# Swimming SAFE GRANT

To truly impact drowning rates within the CALD community in Australia, greater representation of CALD community members is required within the Surf Lifesaving community and as swim instructors. An opportunity exists to support students interested in becoming Water Safety Ambassadors locally and as global citizens to create meaningful change in water safety education.

In 2024, we want to launch the Swimming Safe Grant, designed to provide grants to students who have completed the UNSW Water Safety Program and wish to further develop their swimming and beach safety skills. The program aims to provide fully subsidised access to swimming facilities and adult learn-to-swim classes, enabling participants to continue their learning journey and enhance their proficiency in the water.

As a pioneering initiative, the Swimming Safe Grant serves as the concluding phase of the innovative UNSW Water Safety Program, uniquely designed to address the specific needs of international students.





# Knowledge Sharing

UNSW is proud to be leading the way in developing innovative water safety programs, conducting cutting-edge research, and providing comprehensive, targeted initiatives for the safety of international students studying in Australia. To extend our impact, we want to share our knowledge and learnings with others.

In 2024 we will prioritise the development of toolkits and resource distribution to enhance water safety practices across diverse communities and institutions.



# A huge thank you to

**medibank**



Coogee Surf Life Saving Club



Surf Life Saving NSW



**UNSW**  
SYDNEY

Fitness and Aquatic Centre



UNSW Beach Safety Research Group

## AND ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS!

# GOT A QUESTION?

**Oliver Jackson**

Water Safety Program Assistant

**Madhav Raman**

Engagement Officer



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[@unswhealth](https://www.instagram.com/unswhealth)



# References

1. 2022 Surf Life Saving NSW Coastal Safety Report, accessed 4/12/2023  
<https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/09/2022-Surf-Life-Saving-NSW-Coastal-Safety-Report.pdf>
2. National Drowning Report, accessed 4/12/2023  
[https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/76824/National\\_Drowning\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/76824/National_Drowning_Report_2023.pdf)

## Website Links

[UNSW Water Safety Hub](#)  
[Learn to Swim Website](#)  
[Beach Ocean Safe Website](#)  
[Beach Safety Walk Website](#)

## News and Articles

[UNSW BOS Program Video](#)  
[SLS NSW Article](#)  
[InsideUNSW BOS Program Article](#)  
[Coogee Ocean Events Blog](#)  
[Echo News Article](#)  
[Nimish's Swimming Journey](#)  
[InsideUNSW Water Safety Article](#)



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