



WORLD CONFERENCE ON DROWNING PREVENTION 2011

VIETNAM
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Building a global platform to reduce drowning

Committed to a world free from drowning
Final Conference declaration

Presented by



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50 Countries. 400 delegates.

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Introductory Statement

The International Life Saving (ILS) World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 (WCDP 2011) was held in Danang, Vietnam by the hosts Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and The Alliance For Safe Children. Vietnam was selected above Sydney or Melbourne for three simple reasons:

1. Vietnam has high rates of drowning, particularly in children and is representative of the drowning issue in other low and middle income countries in Asia;
2. The Government of Vietnam had recognised the issue, initiated partnerships with UN agencies and non-government organisations (NGO's) and moved to frame policies and plans to prevent drowning;
3. Vietnam is not only a beautiful and rich tourism destination, but provided delegates with an opportunity to immerse themselves in the challenges of reducing drowning in a LMIC context.

WCDP2011 had a primary goal of raising the profile of drowning as a public health and development issue globally, in Asia and in Vietnam. Secondary goals included a focus on diversity of stakeholders and perspectives, presentation of significant research, policy and examples of practice; to expose delegates to the issues specific to LMICs including child drowning prevention, flooding and disaster risk reduction, and transport related drowning.

The conference was attended by over 435 delegates from over 52 countries, along with representatives of WHO and UNICEF. Organisers secured over 75 full scholarships for researchers, policy makers and practitioners from LMICs in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. This reinforced a diversity of perspectives and gave weight to its focus on drowning in LMICs.

Critical to the success of the conference was the WCDP 2011 legacy program. Key features included the scholarships, regional and national workshops conducted in the 12 months leading into the event, and ongoing drowning intervention research in Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Perhaps the most significant of the legacy program activities was the development of a conference declaration titled Building a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning. Conference participants engaged in drafting this declaration in the months prior to the event, in further workshops throughout the event including a conference stand for brainstorming and drafting statements, and in follow-up and review post event.

The document that follows presents the WCDP 2011 Conference Declaration - Building a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning. It consists of four sections:

1. Framing the need for a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning
2. Guiding themes of a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning
3. The Framework for a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning
4. The Call to Action for a World Free from Drowning

The conference declaration calls to action international agencies, governments, national and sub-national, non-government organisations, research centres, donors and corporates. It encourages all those with an interest and dedication to reducing the burden of drowning in the regions, nations, provinces and communities of the world to dedicate their time and energy to collaboration.

We thank all those who participated in WCDP 2011 and this declaration process. We acknowledge that WCDP 2011 and this declaration represent a single milestone in our long held and shared ambition of a world free from drowning. We look forward to seeing you at the World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2013 in Potsdam, Germany.

Justin Scarr

Convenor - World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011
Chair - ILS Drowning Prevention Commission





1. FRAMING THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL PLATFORM TO REDUCE DROWNING

- Drowning is a global problem
- Drowning is often under-estimated and prone to limitation in data and definitions
- Drowning needs strong national and international advocacy
- Drowning disproportionately impacts low and middle-income countries
- Drowning is a leading cause of mortality in children after infancy
- Drowning may be a barrier to achieving UN Millennium Development Goal 4 in some LMICs
- Drowning remains a significant problem in high-income countries
- Drowning is often non-fatal with survivors suffering lifelong effects
- Drowning needs action in Asia and more studies are required in Africa
- Drowning is a community problem needing community based solutions
- Drowning risk increases during disaster
- Drowning is synonymous with water transport incidents
- Drowning risk increases for refugees

2. GUIDING THEMES OF A GLOBAL PLATFORM TO REDUCE DROWNING

Having formed the scale, impact and scope of the global burden of drowning, World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 delegates then focused attention on the guiding themes for a global platform to reduce drowning:

- Urgency, consensus and action
- Multi-sectorial collaboration
- Drowning data is a priority
- Focus on vulnerability
- Prioritise drowning risk reduction
- Policy Standards and legislation
- Drowning and disaster risk reduction
- Drowning and child survival programs

3. THE FRAMEWORK OF A GLOBAL PLATFORM TO REDUCE DROWNING

After framing the problem, and exploring the guiding principles of a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning, the following framework for reducing drowning is proposed:

- Prioritize drowning prevention and risk reduction strategies
- Foster multi-sectorial collaboration
- Ensure evidence supports responsive, adaptive and effective interventions
- Create drowning safe homes, communities and environments
- Promote universal survival swimming and drowning prevention education
- Build community drowning prevention resilience
- Build policy, legislation and standards that reduce drowning

4. THE CALL TO ACTION

The organizers of the World Conference on Drowning Prevention, together with the conference partners and all who attended WCDP 2011 call upon all those with an interest and dedication to reducing the burden of drowning in the regions, nations, provinces and communities of the world to dedicate the time and energy to a World Free from Drowning:

- Take necessary steps to raise the profile of drowning prevention
- Establish drowning as an issue in community, national and international health and development agendas
- Establish drowning prevention focused partnerships and multi-sectorial collaboration
- Increase and mobilize funds and other resources to reduce drowning
- Stimulate research for drowning and design and test further interventions
- Increase the scale and scope of intervention programmes, particularly in LMICs
- Build drowning prevention focused capacity across all sectors
- Establish and strengthen standards specific to the varying aspects of drowning prevention in different development settings

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1.

FRAMING THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL PLATFORM TO REDUCE DROWNING

Throughout WCDP 2011 delegates discussed and debated the global burden of drowning across the themes of research, prevention, rescue, medical and disaster. The following key points emerged to frame the drowning issue.

Drowning is a global problem

Drowning is a significant public health problem in both High Income Countries (HIC) and Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs). Relatively high drowning rates have been reported in communities, nations and regions across the globe, in island as well as landlocked nations, in tropical, temperate and cold climates, and in six of seven continents.

Drowning is often under-estimated and prone to limitations in data and definitions

World Health Organisation estimates that there are 400,000^{1,2} preventable drowning deaths each year. There is now growing evidence to suggest that the true burden of drowning is likely to be much higher. Factors for this systemic under-estimation include; large gaps in official data^{3,4}; limitations in hospital-based data collection⁵; and the exclusions of drowning by flooding, cataclysm and in transportation.

Drowning needs strong national and international advocacy

Drowning needs skilled and committed advocates to promote meaningful, sustainable and achievable evidence based action to reduce the burden.

Drowning disproportionately impacts low-and-middle-income countries

More than 96%² of drowning mortality occurs in LMICs where child drowning is often described as a hidden epidemic. The social, economic, political and cultural conditions make prevention complex in LMIC settings.

Drowning is a leading cause of mortality in children after infancy

Drowning is a leading cause of mortality in children aged one to 17 and the leading single cause of mortality in children aged one to four in many countries in Asia⁵. In HICs such as Australia and the United States of America child drowning has been targeted for many years with some success.

Drowning may be a barrier to achieving UN Millennium Development Goal 4 in some LMICs

A failure to address drowning may be a barrier to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal 4; Reduce Child Mortality in some LMICs^{6,7}. Investment in interventions and research, and the integration of drowning prevention into child survival interventions is urgently needed.

Drowning remains a significant problem in High Income Countries

Key drowning prevention issues in HICs include drowning in children^{8,9}, adult males, people aged over 50 years⁹, migrant¹⁰, refugee and indigenous populations¹¹, in inland waterways, swimming pools and at beaches¹². Many HICs have formed drowning prevention or water safety councils or committees to address drowning and some have developed national plans and strategies^{13,14}.

Drowning is often non-fatal with survivors suffering lifelong effects

Research in Australia estimates that for every fatal drowning there are between 1 to 4 non-fatal drowning incidents⁹. Non-fatal drowning comes at a huge medical, personal and societal cost, with individuals often suffering significant impairment.

Drowning needs action in Asia and more studies are required in Africa

Studies in Asia are illuminating drowning epidemiology and showing rates ranging from two-to-four times higher than previously reported, predominately in everyday life, and in rural communities^{5,15-24}. Similar studies are needed in other regions including Africa, where anecdotal reports point to similar rates of drowning.



Drowning is a community problem needing community based solutions

Community perceptions and culture are a known factor in drowning and its prevention^{10, 25, 26}.

Studies²⁷⁻²⁹ in Bangladesh show that many communities recognise drowning as a leading cause of death in children but are often unaware of its preventability. The risk factors for drowning identified in these studies show increases in risk during the wet season, proximity of dwelling to a pond or river, and during the busy times of the day when adults are preparing meals or working.

Engaging communities in the design, development and piloting of interventions has led to high levels of community acceptance of drowning prevention packages in Bangladesh³⁰. These studies reinforce the need to look beyond standardised conceptual frameworks, largely based on prevention in a HIC context, when seeking to develop interventions in LMICs.

Drowning risk increases during disaster

Drowning as a result of disasters may be increasing despite significant public, government and donor support for disaster risk reduction strategies in recent years. Drowning is thought to account for a high proportion of mortality during flooding, tsunami and storm surge based disasters, although drowning estimates are difficult to establish.

Drowning is synonymous with water transportation incidents

Water transportation incidents attract much public attention, whether they involve large passenger ferries or incidents in the smaller boats commonly found in delta communities of the world. Preventing drowning in this context is complex and responsibility often rests in sectors not currently engaged with the drowning prevention community.

Drowning risk increases for refugees

The risk of drowning is increased for refugees fleeing persecution, war or disease. Many refugees drown in transit across water in unseaworthy and overcrowded vessels, or by wading or swimming across dangerous waterways.

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2. GUIDING THEMES OF A GLOBAL PLATFORM TO REDUCE DROWNING

Having framed the scale, impact and scope of the global burden of drowning, World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 delegates then focused attention on the guiding principles for a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning:

Urgency, consensus and action

WCDP 2011 acknowledges the growing awareness, consensus, concern and need to act to prevent drowning and reduce its burden on communities across the world.

Multi-sectoral collaboration

WCDP 2011 acknowledges that no single sector can reduce drowning alone. Drowning is a complex issue that requires multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration, and partnership between international agencies, governments; national and sub-national, non-government organisations, research centres, donors and corporates.

Drowning data is a priority

WCDP 2011 supports the prioritisation of drowning data collection and analysis to ensure that international agencies, governments; national and sub-national, non-government organisations, research centres, donors and corporates take action. This drowning data must inform policy and prevention measures to ensure an effective and coordinated response.

Focus on vulnerability

WCDP 2011 calls for a focus on the most vulnerable groups in all communities, nations and regions of the world. Reducing drowning in children in early and middle childhood, indigenous, migrant and ageing populations in both LMIC and HIC settings represents the greatest challenge.

Prioritise drowning risk reduction

WCDP 2011 calls for the prioritisation of drowning risk reduction at global, national, provincial and community levels. Drowning must be reduced through initiatives to analyse and mitigate causal factors, reduce exposure to hazards, lessen vulnerability in communities, and modify environmental factors.

Policy standards and legislation

WCDP 2011 reinforces the need for increased focus on policy, standards and legislation that reduce drowning risk and environmental hazards.

Drowning and disaster risk reduction

WCDP 2011 points to the need for the drowning prevention sector to embrace the UN International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction to reduce drowning during tsunami, flooding or storm surge events, and in transportation incidents.

Drowning and child survival programs

WCDP 2011 cites opportunities to integrate drowning prevention interventions within existing child survival, community development and other aid programs in LMICs.



3. THE FRAMEWORK OF A GLOBAL PLATFORM TO REDUCE DROWNING

After framing the problem and exploring the guiding principles of a Global Platform to Reduce Drowning, the following framework for reducing drowning is proposed:

Prioritise drowning prevention and risk reduction strategies

Regional, national, provincial and community leaders must prioritise drowning risk reduction and initiate, review and extend actions aimed at reducing drowning and its burden.

A global campaign to raise awareness and commitment among international agencies, governments; national and sub-national, non-government organisations, research centres, donors and corporates for action to reduce drowning must be enacted.

Steps must be taken to advocate and integrate drowning prevention within key global health and international development programs including but not limited to those related to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Foster multi-sectoral collaboration

Multi-sectoral collaboration recognises that drowning is a complex problem requiring a wide range of sectors, disciplines and partnerships with international agencies, governments; national and sub-national, non-government organisations, research centres, donors and corporates.

A Global Platform to Reduce Drowning has been initiated, and further steps must be taken to strengthen alliances, formulate plans and to increase global, regional and national investments in drowning prevention interventions, campaigns and research to realise the vision of a world free from drowning.

Ensure evidence supports responsive, adaptive and effective interventions

Drowning prevention interventions in HICs are relatively well established and accepted, though a sustained commitment to furthering the understandings, as well as deploying effective interventions must be maintained.

Drowning prevention interventions in LMICs are gaining more attention; the science is emergent and promising. A cautious and measured increase in scope and scale must be a priority, as are investigations of partnership models with child survival, community development, disaster and water sector programs.

Create drowning safe homes, communities and environments

In both HICs and LMICs drowning in children under five most frequently occurs in close proximity to the home environment. Pool fencing, safe play areas, use of water pumps not wells, and supervision all contribute to creating drowning safe home environments for young children.

Risk reduction programs to increase safety at aquatic venues and environments; urban and rural must be priority for global, national, provincial and community drowning prevention.

Promote universal survival swimming and drowning prevention education

Access to survival swimming, lifesaving and drowning prevention education is a basic right of every child. Skill sets that include survival swimming, basic rescue, lifesaving and the knowledge to avoid drowning and protect others must be delivered in partnership with schools, community groups and the private sector world-wide.

Build community drowning prevention resilience

A community resilient to drowning is one which has the necessary skills and resources to protect its citizens from drowning in everyday life, recreation or disaster. Such communities are capable of organising its citizens to identify and respond to drowning risk in a proactive, as well as, if necessary, a reactive manner. These skills and resources extend to both formal and informal systems and serve to protect and reduce the impact of drowning.

Global, national, provincial and community drowning prevention sectors must take steps to foster lifesaving and drowning prevention skill development, facilitate drowning risk reduction programs and integrate with existing disaster risk programs in order to support community resilience to drowning.

Build policy, legislation and standards that reduce drowning

Global and national standards that regulate practice in the management of natural and developed water environments are urgently required. Ensure policy, legislation and standards are based on good quality evidence, and fully implemented and enforced throughout the community.

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4.

THE CALL TO ACTION

The organisers of the World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011, together with the conference partners and all who attended WCDP 2011 call upon;

- **the international agencies,**
- **governments; national and sub-national,**
- **non-government organisations,**
- **research centres,**
- **donors and corporates,**
- **the over 435 attendees from over 52 countries, and**
- **all those with an interest in and dedication to reducing the burden of drowning in the regions, nations, provinces and communities of the world**

To dedicate the time until to the World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2013 to the following actions:

- Take the necessary steps to raise the profile of drowning prevention
- Establish drowning as an issue in community, national and international health and development agendas
- Establish drowning prevention focused partnerships and multi-sectoral collaboration
- Increase and mobilise funds and other resources to reduce drowning
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