

Evaluation of the Open Water Grey Medallion program: A beach safety education program for older adults

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Background



High drowning rate

Among Victorian adults aged 55+

Overrepresented

30% of the total drowning deaths

More drowning events

26% increase in 2014/15 vs. ten year average (2004-2014)

Slips, trips and falls

Unintentional entry is the most common factor contributing to drowning incidents

Other factors

- reliance on skills gained earlier in life,
- overestimation of ability,
- reduced fitness,
- increased exposure

Urgent action

Number of Victorians aged over 55 predicted to grow by 63% by 2031

Addressing the issue



- Following the success of an aquatics and health promotion program targeted at older Victorians across metropolitan aquatic facilities, the Open Water Grey Medallion (OWGM) program was piloted at Torquay beach on the Surf Coast.
- Focus on personal survival techniques, accredited CPR training, developing confidence and competence to safely enjoy open water environments.

The OWGM program

1. Rip currents and other hazardous aspects of open water
2. Personal safety when recreating around open waterways
3. Safety and lifesaving equipment
4. Basic rescue principles
5. Basic emergency care
6. Basic Resuscitation qualification





Aim

To increase the water safety skills and knowledge of participants, and empower them to recreate safely and confidently in, on or around water.





Methods



- The program was piloted over six sessions in February and March 2017 at Torquay Beach on the Surf Coast.

Evaluation:

- Pre-post cohort survey of 12 OWGM participants measured
 - changes in water safety skills and knowledge,
 - intended future participation in lifesaving and community activities.
- Two semi-structured post-program focus group sessions covered detailed program impacts.



Participant characteristics

Who?

- 12 adults
- Aged 59-68 years
- 58% (7) male
- 75% (9) retired



How?

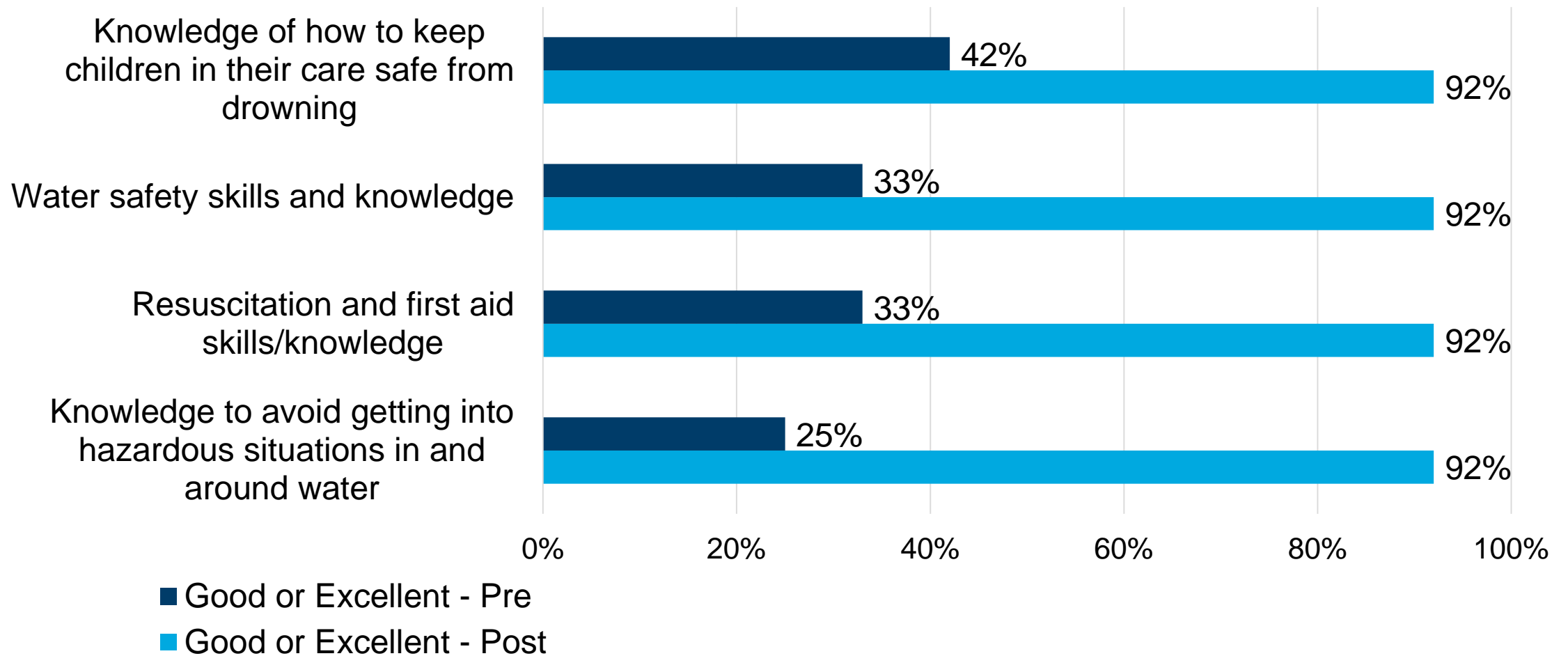
- local newspaper (42%)
- community group (33%)

Why?

- personal development (100%)
- to learn about resuscitation (75%)



Results - Water safety skills and knowledge





Results – Confidence and enjoyment in water

92%

- described increased confidence participating in aquatic activities and applying water safety knowledge

83%

- considered participating in further activities including joining their local lifesaving club in support roles, formal First Aid training and recreational swimming



- new friendships, improved happiness and motivation to increase activity levels



"I haven't been in this sort of water for over 20 years. This has really brought back a number of things that I need to address... and this was stressed in the course. Know your limitations."

"I'm a confident swimmer, I swim every day at the beach; but what it taught me was that you can be over-confident. It's given me a reality check and a different way of approaching water safety."

"It's made me happier in general and it's been reassuring. Yeah, it was great."

"When you retire there are fewer opportunities to engage in training... I felt quite proud that I was in this course and I told other people and they were interested."

"...before I was very fearful of going in the water but now I know what to look out for. It's given me a lot more confidence."

"I've been at this beach for 45 years ... but it was good to become aware of things that you didn't really appreciate and understand: currents, tides, resuscitation... it was exactly what I needed."

"I plan to become actively involved in my local lifesaving club. I don't want to do the Surf Bronze but now I know there are plenty of other options to become involved."

What next

Recommendations

- More water-based activities
- Additional volunteer lifesavers to assist people lacking confidence in the water
- Modify session length and program timing

The future?

- Funding sought for program expansion
- Approach other SLSCs
- Investigate cost subsidies to enable wider community access

"I have already told people about the program. They're lining up at the door!"

Conclusion



- The OWGM improved the water safety skills, knowledge and confidence of participants around open water environments.
- By providing education, formal training, and practical skills and experience in open water, expansion of the OWGM has the capacity to reduce the number of older adults drowning through preventable aquatic incidents.