

2011-2016 Washington State Open Water Drowning Prevention Policy Plan for Children and Youth

FINAL GRANT REPORT

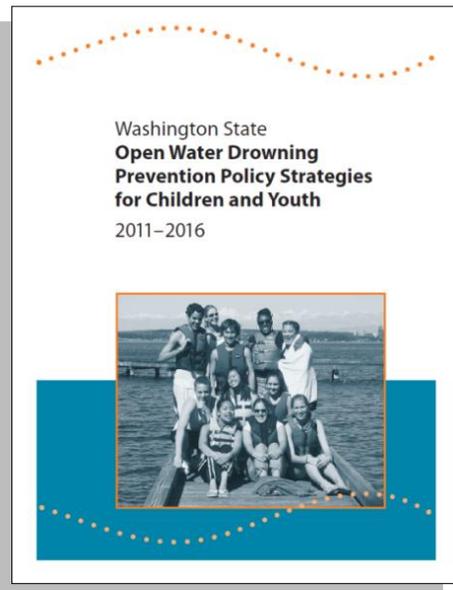
FACTS AND STATS: OPEN WATER DROWNING

- **Drownings in Washington State.** Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death among ages 1 to 17 in Washington State. Like many states, most drowning deaths of those less than 5 years and almost all older children, occur in open water.
- **Drowning rates are higher among diverse racial and ethnic groups.** Lack of familiarity with and access to swimming and/or lower swimming competency are more likely among diverse communities who use open water sites with lower cost and greater availability.
- **Open water drownings are preventable.** In a review of unintentional child and youth drownings from 1999 to 2003, the Washington State Child Death Review (CDR) determined that 85% of those drownings were preventable. Interventions, such as life jacket use and lifeguards, could have prevented those deaths.

From 2011 to 2016 Seattle Children’s Hospital and the Washington State Department of Health Injury Prevention Program collaborated on a 5-year Washington State Violence and Injury Prevention grant funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to test, implement, and evaluate open water drowning prevention policy priorities identified in the Washington State Open Water Drowning Prevention: Policy Strategies for Children and Youth, 2011 to 2016. This final report focuses on the strategies, accomplishments and lessons learned from this grant.

BACKGROUND

From 2009 to 2010, with funding from the CDC, Seattle Children’s Hospital and the Washington State Department of Health Injury Prevention Program convened a task force consisting of experts from health care, public health agencies, law enforcement agencies, parks and recreation agencies, other community organizations and family members of children who had drowned to identify, develop, and implement policy and systems changes to improve water safety for children and youth in Washington State. Using the [Haddon Matrix](#); data; policy criteria, and feedback from multiple stakeholders, the Task Force developed the “Washington State Open Water Drowning Prevention: Policy Strategies for Children and Youth, 2011-2016”, a policy plan that outlines short and long-term state and local policy strategies focused on seven priority areas for policy, system and environmental change.



The Washington State Open Water Drowning Prevention: Policy Strategies for Children and Youth 2011–2016 identifies seven priority areas for policy change:

1. **Safer Water Recreation Sites**
2. **Life Jackets**
3. **Boating Under the Influence (BUI) and Open Water Enforcement**
4. **Surveillance**
5. **Swimming Skills and Water Safety Education**
6. **Physical Open Water Barriers**
7. **Partnerships**

For each priority area, the Washington State Child and Youth Open Water Drowning Prevention Policy Task Force, together with the Washington State Drowning Prevention Network and local and national resource representatives, identified short- and long-term strategies. These strategies provide communities, organizations, cities, counties, and Washington State with specific ways to prevent open water drownings and to improve open water safety and water recreation opportunities in Washington State.

From 2011 to 2016, Seattle Children’s Hospital, the Washington State Department of Health, and their partners worked together to design, implement and/or evaluate the policy strategies for each of the seven priority areas which has resulted in a number of achievements including the development of the Washington State Designated Swim Area Guidelines, a revised law that adds implied consent for boating under the influence, the development of a Drowning Reporting Tool, and a change in policy to allow women’s only swim programs in the city of Seattle.

From 2007 to 2010, the drowning rate for 0 to 17-year-olds was .95/100,000. From 2011 to 2014, it was .97/100,000. Given the bulk of the work occurred between 2013 and 2016, it will be several years before the drowning data can be assessed for changes.

Grant Accomplishment Highlights

SAFER WATER RECREATION SITES

- Published and updated the Designated Swimming Area Guidelines (DSAG). Several counties and agencies in the state reported they used the DSAG to assist with site development and policy changes at swimming beaches.
- Developed report cards for communities and swim sites. Safe Kids coalitions used the report cards to identify opportunities for both program and policy change in several communities.
- Used the DSAG to recommend changes to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) which regulates bathing beaches.

LIFE JACKETS

- Developed the first statewide list of life jacket loaner programs and a Google Map to facilitate ease of locating them.
- Saw at least a 10% increase in the number of loan programs each year.
- Developed a standardized user friendly loaner board and increased the use of this board at life jacket loaner sites across the state.
- Discussed and evaluated new legislation to increase life jacket wear among teenagers and paddle craft users.
- Published four research articles on life jacket use that documented how policy impacted use and why boaters wear or do not wear a life jacket.¹⁻⁴

BOATING UNDER THE INFLUENCE (BUI) AND OPEN WATER ENFORCEMENT

- Improved the BUI law in Washington State to include implied consent and increased fines/penalties.

SURVEILLANCE

- Identified and added validated questions on swimming to the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey and evaluated the response to these questions and questions about life jacket use in small boats.
- Developed an open water Drowning Investigation Reporting Tool that was positively received by sheriff marine patrol and coroners.
- Conducted observation studies of life jacket use by those in a.) boats, being towed, and personal watercraft and b.) swimming and/or wading at multiple sites across the state.

SWIMMING SKILLS AND WATER SAFETY

- Identified and shared swimming policies and programs in schools.
- Increased access to swimming and water recreation among low-income and culturally diverse communities through scholarship improvements for swimming lessons, screening and referrals from community health clinics and single gender swim opportunities during public swim times.

PHYSICAL OPEN WATER BARRIERS

- Identified engaged organizations, like the Washington State Extension Service Office, who work with families in rural areas and are interested in physical barriers as an approach to water safety.

PARTNERSHIPS

- Sustained and built the membership of the Washington State Drowning Prevention Network.
- Added a permanent position to the Washington State Parks Boating Safety Advisory Committee for someone with an injury prevention background.
- Worked with numerous organizations on the development of initiatives in all policy areas.

CHALLENGES

Since 1994, the Washington State Drowning Prevention Network has worked towards preventing drownings through education, outreach, and advocacy. However, there is no formal infrastructure and no coordinated plan to prevent open water drownings at the state level. Creating a formal infrastructure and coordinated plan is a challenge because of ownership and authority to regulate open water. No single federal, state, or local agency oversees open water. Open water, similar to parks, can be owned, operated, and regulated by federal, state, county, city, or private agencies. In addition, unlike public pools, which are highly regulated, there are few regulations for public designated swim areas, or bathing beaches.

Given the lack of a mandate to conduct drowning surveillance or drowning prevention, no agency oversees drowning data collection, evaluation and prevention. Agencies limit sharing data they collect on drownings because of concern for violation of HIPAA.

Increasing life jacket use by mandating wear among high risk groups, like teenagers and those in human powered craft like canoes and kayaks, remains difficult given existing cultural norms and lack of political will.

DROWNING PREVENTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT - LESSONS LEARNED

- Find the balance between the values of liberty and public safety in identifying potential policies.
- Make sure that stakeholders representing diverse viewpoints and organizational perspectives are involved from the start.
- Start with guidelines vs. policies to build buy-in.
- Consider the political environment, such as budget constraints.
- Frame policy as part of a comprehensive approach and model such as the Spectrum of Prevention (www.preventioninstitute.org) .
- Put to use tragedies that may spur policy development and passage.
- Persevere, be patient and be willing to compromise - people and political will do change over time.
- Create strong links between policy, education and programs
- Provide training and technical assistance around policy and system change. Many people who work in drowning prevention have not had experience with promoting and/or developing policies.
- Consider policies at both a local and state level.

OTHER KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is great value for public health agencies and health care organizations to work with non-traditional partners.
- Using “The Spectrum of Prevention” is an effective way to orient non-traditional partners to public health.
- Using a “Logic Model” can help guide partners and work.

RESOURCES

- Visit www.seattlechildrens.org/dp for resources and information on open water drowning prevention and water safety in Washington State. Find information on the following:
 - Safer water recreation sites
 - Life jackets (loaner programs, etc.)
 - Drowning prevention policy and program development (BUI, Everyone Swims, etc.)
 - Swimming and water safety education for parents and professionals
 - [Washington State Open Water Drowning Prevention: Policy Strategies for Children and Youth, 2011-2016](#) (PDF)

RESOURCES CONTINUED

- [SERICN Presentation: Policy Strategy to Prevent Open Water Drowning in Washington State](#) (PDF)
- [Haddon Matrix for Open Water Drowning Prevention](#) (PDF)

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To submit a request, please call 206-987-5718