

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations
in Advance of the 2019 Budget

By: Stephen B. Beerman, MD, co-Chair and Lisa Ouellette, Project Manager,
Canadian Drowning Prevention Coalition

Recommendations

Research & Data Collection

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$25M over five years to support the Canadian Drowning Prevention Coalition in 1) conducting research and data collection (\$2M/year); 2) providing prevention services (\$2M/year); and, 3) policy development, reporting/accountability, and governance (\$1M/year).

Service Delivery

- **Recommendation 2:** That the government implement the *Swim to Survive* program for all new Canadians within three (3) years of arrival.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government amend Small Vessels Regulations¹ (SOR/2010/91 – 204(a)/310(1)(a)(i)/302 for small vessels under 9m to require that an inherently buoyant personal flotation device or lifejacket must be worn by each person on board.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the government implement mandatory cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training with driver's license (new or renewal).
- **Recommendation 5:** That the government implement a Drowning Review Board.
- **Recommendation 6:** That the government implement consistent pool fencing legislation across Canada.

“Ensuring Canada’s Competitiveness”

Drowning is a tragic preventable public health issue. Drowning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury death worldwide. Drowning has resulted in the death of more than 10,000 Canadians and more than 50,000 non-fatal drownings in the past 20 years. This translates to approximately 500 people fatally drowning in Canada annually, and more suffering a non-fatal drowning incident often resulting in long-term consequences. This morbidity and mortality burden **has devastating effects on families and communities.**² In 2010, drowning cost the Government of Canada and Canadians \$187 million³- the result of 369 deaths, 247 hospitalizations, 1,251 emergency room visits, 37 permanent partial disabilities, 4 total disabilities; and over \$175 million dollars in indirect costs³.

Drowning mortality in Canada has declined over the past 20 years, as evidenced by data collected by Lifesaving Society Canada (LSC) and the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) over the last 25 years. Data also clearly indicates that **drowning has not declined in all sectors and not in all regions.** There remains a disproportionate burden among Canada’s Indigenous peoples, new Canadians, rural/northern Canadians, children 1 to 4-years of age, and young adult males for both intentional and unintentional water entries in various settings such as: the Canadian North, cold water, rural communities, supervised settings, and in situations involving water transport.²

Canada needs a multi-sectoral drowning prevention plan to facilitate drowning burden reduction.

The plan needs effective implementation within communities at risk and outcome data that enables evaluation and learning. The Canadian Drowning Prevention Coalition (CDPC) aims to create recommendations and actions that reduce drowning through the Canadian Drowning Prevention Plan (Plan). The CDPC will focus on becoming a facilitator for action and impact. The Plan will serve as the tool that outlines the effort and expectations.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) released the *Global report on drowning: preventing a leading killer.*⁴ The goal of that report was to galvanize attention for the drowning issue by high-lighting how preventable drowning is, and how collaboration across sectors, can save lives. The report includes 10 actions to prevent drowning. Two of these are especially relevant to the CDPC – *coordinate drowning prevention efforts with those of other sectors and agendas* (p.35); and, *develop a national water safety plan* (p.36). The report makes 4 recommendations. Especially relevant to the CDPC is – *all countries should aim to develop a national water safety plan* (p.43).

The CDPC was formed in response to the call to action from the WHO’s report. Drowning is a multi-sectoral issue that requires collaboration among all stakeholders that shape drowning risk.

The purpose of the Canadian Drowning Prevention Coalition is to establish and implement a multi-sectoral and multiyear plan to reduce drowning in Canada.

To accomplish this task, the CDPC brings together many stakeholders in the Canadian drowning prevention effort, including: government, NGO’s, academics, industry, citizen groups, and media to provide broad multi-sectoral input and leadership. Coalition participants are varied and diverse in mandates, missions, and goals; represent many geographic areas, populations, and service providers; and, bring varying perspectives and experiences.²

Canada should be a leader in developing a multisectoral drowning prevention plan. The 1st edition of the Plan was presented at the World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2017 in Vancouver, BC (October 2017). There were 806 participants from 60 nations. Participants from around the globe heard about the multi-sectoral CDPC and the Plan as Canada's response to the WHO Global Report on Drowning. They learned that this *Made in Canada* strategy follows the framework established by the WHO; and, that the Plan is dynamic, changing as often as every six months to reflect the progress of data, actions, and outcomes.

This initiative represents a national collaborative effort that is innovative in terms of its multi-sectoral framework, public health perspective, and evidence-informed decision-making, which includes distilling and disseminating the best available evidence from research, practice and experience and using that evidence to inform and improve policy and action.⁵ Using this approach, knowledge regarding programs, best practices, and interventions will inform action steps to reduce drowning in each key focus area with a emphasis on eliminating drowning amongst/in:

KEY FOCUS AREAS

New Canadians

New Canadians are 4 times more likely to be unable to swim than those who were born in Canada.⁶ Risk of drowning is highest in recent immigrants who live in Canada for fewer than five years.⁷ Youth aged 11 to 14 new to Canada are 5 times more likely to be unable to swim than their Canadian born classmates. Despite this, 93% of new Canadians of this age indicate that they participate in activities in, on, or around water. Results suggest that risk is higher for new Canadians aged 11 to 14 years who have lived in Canada for less than five years.⁸ *Swim to Survive* skills are needed.

Indigenous peoples

Drowning in the Indigenous population is reported to be 6 times higher than the Canadian average, and as much as 15 times higher in children.^{9,10} Indigenous peoples comprise about 4% of the Canadian population, but account for approximately 26% of drowning cases that involve a snowmobile, 16% of drowning cases after a fall into water, 10% of recreational drowning fatalities, and 9% of boating related drowning deaths.¹⁰ Increased risk of drowning in Indigenous populations is attributed to: proximity to open water, low use of personal flotation devices, and alcohol use.¹¹ Research by/on/for Indigenous peoples is needed.

Water transport-related drowning

Water transport-related deaths in Canada are more frequently associated with boating than any other activity.¹² The most common factor associated with boating deaths in the last two decades is the non-wearing of personal flotation devices.¹² The vast majority of boating related drowning deaths occur among males between 15 and 74 years of age.¹² Amended lifejacket legislation is needed requiring all individuals on small vessels under 9m wear a lifejacket.

Northern Canada, rural areas, and cold water

Drowning rates are highest in Canada's Territories.¹³ Drowning risk in Northern Canada is increased by exposure to water and lower water temperatures.¹¹ Rural residence has been associated with a higher risk of drowning.¹⁴ More drowning fatalities have been occurring in rural areas in recent years than in the past.¹⁵ Canada has an abundance of natural bodies of water, many of which sustain very cold temperatures year-round. Immersion death in cold water is frequent in northern countries such as Canada. Approximately 200 people die because of cold water immersion each year.¹⁶

Children one to four years of age

In Canada, drowning is a leading cause of unintentional injury death among children 1 to 4 years of age.¹⁷ The burden of non-fatal drowning is among the highest in this age group; children under five are more likely to suffer a non-fatal drowning requiring an emergency department visit and/or hospitalization than a fatal drowning.¹⁸ Private backyard pools are the most common setting where children 1 to 4 years of age fatally drown in Canada.¹³ Consistent pool fencing legislation is needed.

Drowning in supervised settings

Approximately 6% of all unintentional water-related fatalities in Canada occur during occupational activities and approximately 1% occur under lifeguard or instructor supervision.¹³ Both cases represent seemingly safe environments where the number of drowning deaths should be zero. Protocols for critical incident debriefing and review to create recommendations for future prevention exist in some provinces but there is currently no national engagement on this issue. A Drowning Review Board is needed.

Unintentional water entry

Over a 20-year period (1991-2010), 1951 people drowned in Canada as the result of an unexpected fall into water.¹⁹ Children and young men are highest risk of death with children 1 to 4 years of age accounting for approximately 21% of fatalities related to unexpected falls into water. Among individuals 15 years and over, alcohol consumption was a contributing factor in at least 38% of these drownings.¹⁹ Mandatory cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training is needed.

Young adult males

In Canada, young adults 20 to 34 years of age consistently have high unintentional water-related fatality rates relative to other age groups, (an annual average of 1.5 per 100,000 in 2010-2014). Within this age group 20 to 24-year-olds have the highest death rate (1.9 per 100,000).¹³ Approximately 1 in 2 young adults who fatally drowned had consumed alcohol.¹⁴ Over 80% of drowning fatalities occur among men and the greatest proportion of male drowning deaths occurs among young adults 20 to 34 years.¹³ More research on alcohol use is needed.

CONCLUSION

The CDPC serves as a policy, data and implementation leadership community on drowning prevention. Its partners (i.e., the CRC and LSC) lead the provision of drowning prevention services. Lifesaving Society Canada is the lead organization in policy development with the Government of Canada, and project governance and reporting, while the CDPC applies for charitable status.

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