

Global Strategy for Drowning Prevention

Turning the tide on a leading killer

CONSULTATION DRAFT

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Global Alliance for
Drowning Prevention



Global Alliance for
Drowning Prevention

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SECTION 01





INTRODUCTION

Drowning claims the lives of more than 300 000 people a year and impacts the lives of millions more through non-fatal drowning incidents that can cause lifelong disability. Preventing drowning is a multisectoral challenge that can only be addressed comprehensively through a global, coordinated effort focused on all people, all places and all contexts affected.

This first-ever Global Strategy for Drowning Prevention responds to an urgent need to unite a diverse multisectoral and multistakeholder audience through shared goals and a coordinated effort to address the drowning challenge in all its forms. It offers a global-to-local approach, with affected people and populations at the centre of all decisions.

Developed by the Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention, in consultation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and a diverse range of other groups, this Global strategy provides a framework to:

- strengthen coordination and alignment of key actors globally, regionally, nationally and locally;
- develop a shared purpose, common goals and coordinated response among all stakeholders;
- design and deliver effective interventions that address priority risk factors for drowning;
- help countries identify a multisectoral range of partners for effective collaboration;
- promote efficient use of resources;
- promote standardized, evidence-informed approaches to reducing drowning deaths, and their scale-up, tailored to local needs.

Who the Global strategy is for

The Global strategy provides guidance and a structured approach for the following stakeholders:

- **Global-level actors**
United Nations agencies, multilateral agencies, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development partners including banks and donors.
- **Country-level actors**
National governments, ministries and departments, drowning-prevention coordinating mechanisms where they already exist, national NGOs.
- **Community-level actors**
Local authorities, cities and townships, local associations and groups, community members.
- **Groups**
Civil society organizations, academics, donors, private sector organizations.

Stakeholder map



VISION

A world free from the preventable and tragic burden of drowning

OBJECTIVE

To build and sustain country-level momentum to reduce drowning risk and build resilience with a focus on:

- **All people**
Addressing vulnerabilities according to life stage and population
- **All places**
Addressing hazards around the home and immediate surroundings; natural water bodies; waterways used for transport and migration; disaster-prone areas
- **All contexts**
Addressing exposures linked to everyday activities, recreation, work, floods, disasters

GOAL

Unite to reduce global drowning rates – 35% by 2035

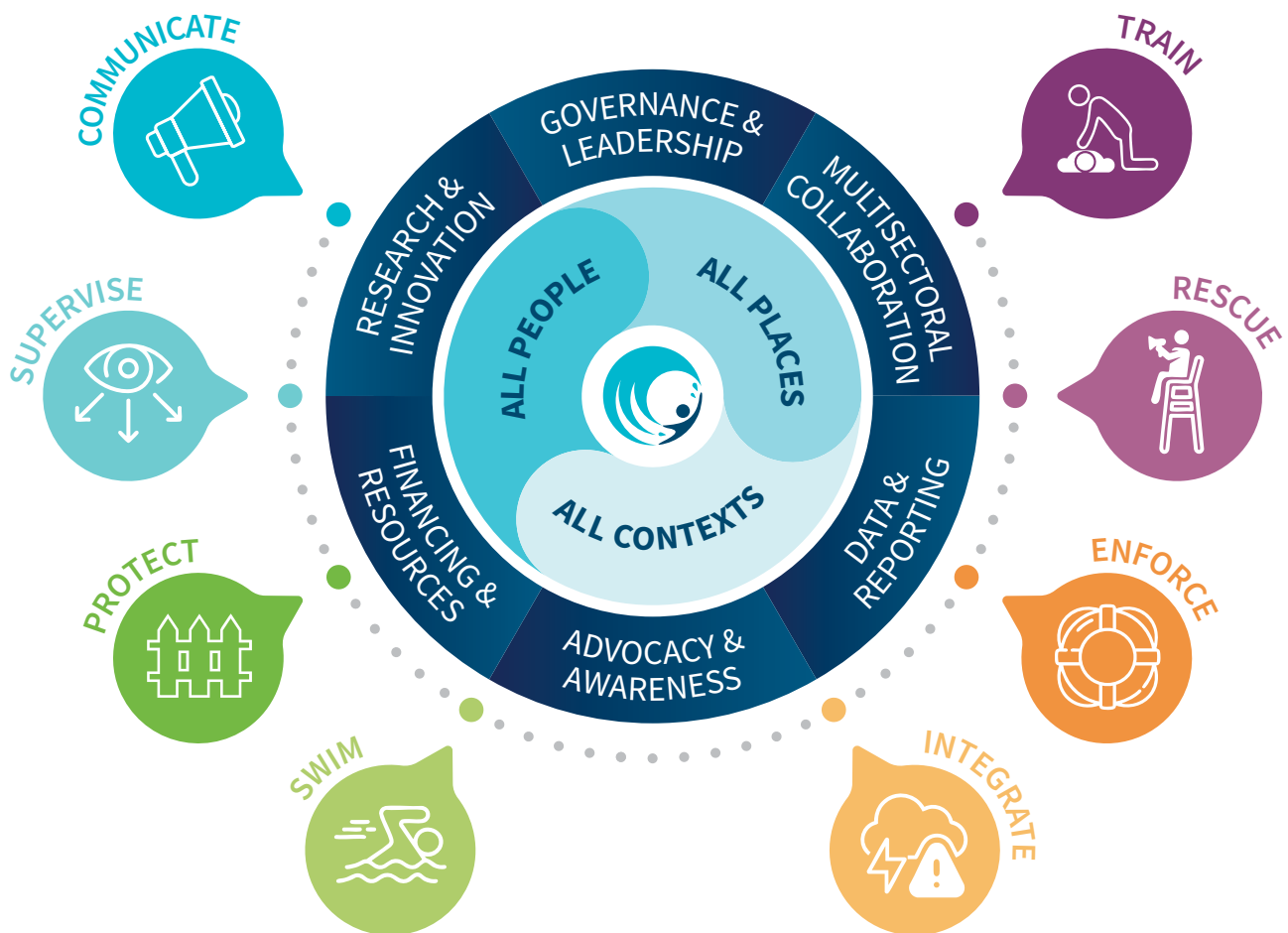
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Equity-driven
- People-centred
- Community-owned
- System-based
- Country-led
- Evidence-informed
- Data-driven
- Multisectoral and collaborative
- Accountable and trackable
- Sustainable and effective

THE GLOBAL STRATEGY

The Global strategy is supported by six strategic pillars and eight priority interventions to guide a global-to-local, evidence-informed, collaborative approach to drowning prevention for the period 2025–2035.

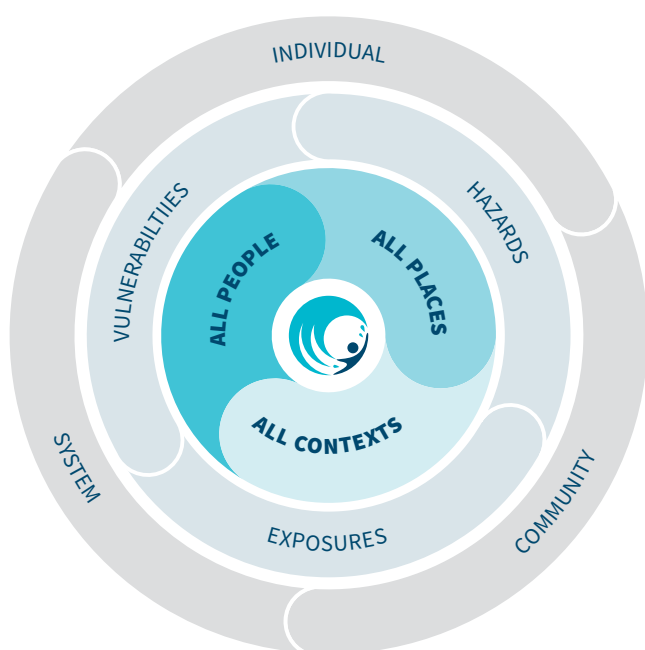
Its primary aim is to help countries effectively concentrate their efforts on a 35% reduction in drowning deaths by 2035, focusing on three broad strategic domains: all people, all places, and all contexts.



THREE DOMAINS

The Global strategy's use of three broad and intersecting domains to address drowning prevention – all people, all places, all contexts – enables it to systematically reduce drowning risk wherever and however exposure occurs, and build resilience across all settings, populations, and stages of life.

REDUCING RISK AND
BUILDING RESILIENCE:



ALL PEOPLE

Within the **all people** domain, the Global strategy's dual focus on **all age groups** (across life stages) and **all population groups** (including marginalized and high-risk groups) ensures drowning-prevention responses can be age-appropriate, equity-driven, and tailored to the different vulnerabilities of each group.

Age groups

Statistics show that children and young people bear the largest burden, with under-fives accounting for the largest single share (24%) of drowning deaths.² A further 19% of deaths occur among **children aged 5–14 years**, and 14% among young people aged 15–29 years. Other age groups are also at elevated risk, including **older people** (particularly the over-70s), and gender also plays a part, with male drowning rates standing at least twice as high as those for females.³

Population groups

Poor and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by drowning. The vast majority of drowning deaths (92%) occur in low- and middle-income countries, where drowning death rates are more than triple those of higher high-income countries. And regardless of a country's economic development, drowning often affects the **poorest and least-educated people who live in rural settings**, especially where people have close daily contact with water for work, transport and agriculture.⁴

Also at higher risk are **occupational groups** (e.g. fishers) who are exposed every day to water hazards; **people with disabilities** who have increased vulnerability because of mobility or sensory limitations; and **indigenous peoples** who may lack culturally appropriate education and community engagement.

Migrants and refuge-seekers resorting to hazardous channels for migration are also at high risk of drowning – not only because of overcrowded, unsafe vessels and treacherous water conditions, but also because when reaching their destination, they are unfamiliar with their new environment and may lack swimming and water safety skills.

ALL PLACES

The Global strategy's **all places** domain ensures that hazards are considered wherever drowning occurs, encouraging setting-specific, location-based interventions that protect those most at risk.

Homes and the built environment

These hazards are present around **homes and communities**, e.g. ponds, wells, ditches, water containers, or unfenced pools; and in **built environments** where there are swimming pools, canals, reservoirs, and stormwater drains.

Natural water bodies and processes

Hazards are also present in **natural water bodies** (rivers, lakes, ponds, beaches, oceans, and floodwaters); and in **physical processes** (e.g. waves, currents, water temperatures and flooding).

Travel on **waterways** or irregular migration across water expose people to drowning risks, as do **disaster-prone areas** in which people live, such as floodplains, coastal zones, and informal settlements near water.

ALL CONTEXTS

The Global strategy's **all contexts** domain addresses exposure to drowning risk – be it for work (including house work), travel, recreation and sport.

Routine daily-life activities such as collecting water, bathing, washing, or crossing water bodies expose millions (especially in low- and middle-income countries) to drowning risk. And many **livelihoods**, from fishing to agriculture and construction, require daily work on or near water, increasing risk for adults and sometimes children. One of the most-impacted **occupational** groups are fishers, of whom 32 000 die every year, with hundreds more injured.⁵

Transport on water – be it on coastal or on inland waterways – is often on substandard vessels, depending on context, while **swimming, boating**, and other leisure activities can also lead to drowning, particularly where safety knowledge, supervision, or rescue systems are lacking.

Living near water in places that lack barriers or signs around water hazards such as unsafe crossings, open wells, uncovered manholes and ditches in low- and middle-income countries poses a risk. Many homes in these settings are on lakes or riverbanks – some are built over the water – and this, along with poor flood-disaster protection, puts local people at greater risk.⁶



SECTION 02





SIX STRATEGIC PILLARS

The Global strategy is underpinned by six supporting, organizational pillars: governance and leadership; multisectoral collaboration; data collection and reporting; advocacy and awareness raising; financing and resources; and research and innovation.

This section outlines how these pillars can be strengthened globally, regionally, and at country and local level to reduce drowning deaths and injury.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Enable shared leadership, accountability and partnerships to drive and scale-up effective drowning prevention actions

MULTISECTORAL COLLABORATION

Align agendas and establish coordination mechanisms to unify and advance multisectoral drowning-prevention efforts

DATA AND REPORTING

Identify challenges, inform and build solutions, track and report drowning prevention progress

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS

Raise awareness and drive commitment to drowning prevention among stakeholders at every level

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

Ensure sustained funding for drowning prevention, including resource pooling across aligned sectors

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Advance research capabilities and foster the creation of innovative, evidence-informed solutions for drowning prevention

KEY FACTS:

Why these pillars matter

Of countries surveyed for the WHO Global Status Report on Drowning Prevention 2024:

53%
have a government-
appointed national
focal point for
drowning prevention

38%
engage with research
organizations and
academic institutions

40%
report having a
national mechanism
for multisectoral
coordination on
drowning prevention

>50%
have comprehensive
national reporting,
especially in
low-income settings

26%
have a government-
led strategy specific to
drowning prevention

65%
report collecting
drowning data through
civil registration and
vital statistics systems

31%
collect detailed data
on activity at time
of drowning and
waterbody type

>50%
have a national
drowning
prevention strategy

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Image

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

WHAT TO DO?

Enable shared leadership, accountability and partnerships that can drive and scale-up effective drowning-prevention actions

WHY?

Effective governance for drowning prevention ensures interventions are better integrated into, and aligned with, cross-cutting agendas led by various sectors and organizations, thereby amplifying reach, sustainability, and impact. It also fosters shared ownership and accelerates scale-up of proven actions, making drowning prevention more effective. Leading action on drowning prevention requires global, national and local mechanisms and strategies.

ACTIONS

Global level

Increase global and regional governance and leadership:

- The Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention deepens and expands partnerships with UN agencies and international NGOs to align and integrate drowning prevention with agendas such as child health and development, youth education, climate resilience, and occupational safety, among others.
- Drowning prevention is better understood across relevant international fora and within relevant international agendas.
- Networks of national focal points from government and civil society are supported to ensure high-burden countries receive technical and financial assistance for drowning-prevention policy development and implementation.

Country level

Establish national and subnational governance mechanisms and plans to drive drowning-prevention efforts:

- National drowning prevention plans are drawn up and are evidence-informed, monitored and adjusted as necessary, and aligned to the Global strategy.
- National actors take a lead in setting up governance mechanisms, generating support, harmonizing resource allocation and incentivizing alignment and integration of drowning prevention into broader (related) cross-cutting agendas.
- Drowning prevention is embedded in national and subnational policies for a range of sectors and integrated into relevant frameworks (e.g. those for disaster risk reduction, maritime and fishery safety sector, child health and development, education and youth development, and climate adaptation).

Local level

Ensure local action aligns with national plans and engages with the full spectrum of local actors, including affected communities:

- Community leaders are supported and empowered to galvanize local drowning-prevention advocacy and action.
- Local communities are engaged, ensuring they have a sense of the main elements of national and subnational plans that impact them and an opportunity to engage in local implementation and decision-making around drowning prevention.
- Local leaders and community groups coordinate and communicate with each other to maximize their drowning-prevention efforts, and are supported to ensure their actions are compatible with local governmental prevention strategies.

CASE STUDY:

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OUTCOMES

- **Increased recognition of drowning as a preventable global killer, with attendant strengthening of global mechanisms and frameworks and an increased capacity to support countries.**
- **Countries have, or are on track to have, national and subnational drowning prevention focal points, operational coordination mechanisms, and national water safety plans.**
- **Local-level implementation aligns with national and subnational plans and involves all relevant stakeholders, including affected communities themselves.**

Image

MULTISECTORAL COLLABORATION

WHAT TO DO?

Align agendas and establish coordination mechanisms to unify and advance multisectoral drowning-prevention efforts

WHY?

A wide range of sectors can contribute to drowning prevention, including health, education, transport, disaster management, and others. Coordinated action brings relevant partners together and ensures the issue is integrated within all sectors' agendas.

ACTIONS

Global level

Strengthen mechanisms bringing global partners together:

- The Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention is supported to increase alignment, share resources and coordinate action between UN agencies, governments, development banks, NGOs, and academia.
- Collaboration is strengthened across UN agencies and their Member States to address drowning-prevention priorities (e.g. between the IMO and transport ministries to strengthen ferry safety; or between UNICEF/UNESCO and education ministries to promote swim-skills curricula), fostering a range of sector-specific strategies and creating accountability for action.

Country level

Facilitate multisectoral collaboration nationally and subnationally to generate and sustain momentum for broad approaches to drowning prevention:

- Coordination mechanisms exist and are context-specific, unite government and non-government groups, and link sectors with direct and indirect influence over interventions that reduce drowning risk, and build resilience to water-related risks.
- Mechanisms facilitate periodic exchange (of knowledge and experience) and reporting across national partners working in sectors relevant to drowning prevention.
- Cross-sectoral interventions and collaborations are developed to strengthen progress, especially where single-sector approaches are challenged by reach, scale and impact.

Local level

Maximize and amplify the benefits of national policies and interventions to reduce drowning locally:

- Drowning-prevention awareness is raised as part of local infrastructure programmes – e.g. addressing equity of access to safe places to swim, and bridge/levee/water-course design that reduces exposure to drowning risk for children, communities in low-lying areas, and those working around water.
- Awareness is raised about the co-benefits of addressing drowning for socially and economically disadvantaged communities (e.g. rural, remote communities, first nations peoples, migrants and refugees).

CASE STUDY:

Feature, Highlight Title

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OUTCOMES

- **The Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention has expanded UN engagement and affiliations across sectors, and stakeholders are collaborating to reduce drowning.**
- **Countries report increased coordination, engagement and impacts across sector and cross-sector policies and plans.**
- **Non-government stakeholders contribute at national and subnational level to drowning-prevention planning.**

Image

WHAT TO DO?

Identify challenges, inform and build solutions, track and report drowning-prevention progress

WHY?

Robust data collection and reporting provides valuable information that helps target prevention efforts towards people and populations with the greatest vulnerabilities, measure progress, and guide policy and resource allocation effectively. Better data also raises awareness among decision-makers, supports international collaboration, and ensures that interventions are evidence-informed, making drowning-prevention strategies more effective and accountable.

ACTIONS

Global level

Improve global data availability and understanding of the drowning problem:

- Periodic global and regional status reports assessing drowning-prevention efforts are produced.
- Agreement across sectors on aspects such as minimum datasets for capturing information on drowning and best practices for data collection is established.
- Awareness of the scale of the problem is raised by communicating the best drowning data available.

Country level

Establish and strengthen data collection and data-sharing systems, including linking relevant data from sectors and stakeholders:

- Existing data collection systems are strengthened to gather appropriately detailed information on drowning events, such as place of drowning and activity at the time of drowning.
- Data-sharing agreements across sectors are established, and where possible, combined systems linking data from various sectors.
- Gaps and duplication in existing data-collection efforts are identified.
- Publish national drowning reports that track progress, highlight key challenges, identify priorities and outline proposed solutions.

Local level

Support high-quality data collection by relevant stakeholders:

- Participation in local data collection to feed into national reports is encouraged, ensuring timely and high-quality data provision.
- Local data custodians are engaged and updated through periodic training and support.

CASE STUDY:

Feature, Highlight Title

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OUTCOMES

- WHO and other UN agencies produce periodic global and regional status reports.
- Countries capture as much detail as possible on drowning incidents through their civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, and have forged links between multiple data sources to better inform prevention nationally and subnationally.
- Leaders and community groups respond strategically to findings of national/subnational drowning reports, adjusting local implementation accordingly.

Image

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS

WHAT TO DO?

Raise awareness and drive commitment to drowning prevention among stakeholders at every level

WHY?

Advocacy can influence how governments, NGOs, educators, and the private sector collectively shape policy and mobilize resources, and can help drive effective, widely accepted interventions. Raising awareness and promoting action among all stakeholders is also essential to build understanding, encourage uptake of evidence-informed measures, drive coordinated drowning-prevention efforts, and align drowning prevention with global health and sustainable development goals.

ACTIONS

Global level

Engage in global advocacy to expand and sustain high-level support, and ensure alignment with key UN agendas:

- Global action is catalysed and commitments are secured to link drowning prevention to broader agendas by UN agencies and Member States at high-level meetings and events.
- World Drowning Prevention Day clearly shows the importance of global action, resourcing effective interventions, amplifying community-led solutions.

Country level

Coordinate country-level advocacy to generate support and integrate drowning prevention into relevant national agendas:

- Government and non-government sectors are mobilized to advocate for political and policy action on drowning prevention, using reliable data and evidence of drowning prevention co-benefits for multiple sectors.
- Mass-media awareness campaigns are periodically run to strategically promote new policies and enforce regulations.

Local level

Implement campaigns to raise awareness and change behaviours:

- Public awareness and behaviour-change initiatives are run to target specific risks, reduce exposure, and build individual and community resilience to prevent drowning in context-appropriate ways.
- Diverse approaches are used – traditional media, digital platforms, community events, schools, and engagement with community leaders – to reach all audiences and stakeholders, and evaluate campaign impact.
- Targeting awareness campaigns at context-relevant issues (e.g. use of alcohol around water) is considered, alongside sharing stories of those affected to communicate the impact of drowning on families.

CASE STUDY:

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OUTCOMES

- World Drowning Prevention Day generates activities in all countries, amplifying drowning-prevention messaging and evidence-informed, community-led solutions.
- Countries run advocacy campaigns targeting policy-makers and promoting evidence-informed drowning-prevention measures.
- Countries and local groups report behaviour-change public awareness campaigns (e.g. on dangers of consuming alcohol around water, or child drowning).

Image

WHAT TO DO?

Ensure sustained funding for drowning prevention, including resource pooling across aligned sectors

WHY?

Integrated, sustained and innovative resourcing enables countries to pool expertise, funding, and solutions across sectors including health, education, disaster management, and rural development for greater impact. Linking drowning prevention to broader health and development agendas unlocks new funding and partnerships, making efforts more sustainable, adaptable, and effective at saving lives.

ACTIONS

Global level

Increased global-level funding and investment in drowning prevention:

- Drowning prevention is seen as a development and equity issue by linking it with high-priority investment agendas such as the sustainable development agenda, fishery and maritime sector safety, climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- Development banks and global donors fund drowning prevention activities with a wide range of drowning-prevention partners.

Country level

Increase country-level funding and investment in drowning prevention:

- Country and subnational drowning-prevention plans, policies and initiatives are supported by budget allocations across multiple ministries and sectoral departments.
- Budgets are tracked and reports published to ensure accountability across all stakeholder groups.
- Integrated and innovative country-level approaches to financing drowning prevention are developed to:
 - stimulate upstream investment at all levels by highlighting the shared social, health and economic gains for non-drowning prevention fields;
 - highlight co-benefits for priority agendas such as climate change, child health, safe transport, and occupational safety;
 - help align investment for greater impact.

Local level

Increase local-level investment in drowning prevention:

- Local programmes and interventions are supported by civic leadership, donors, community members and the private sector.
- Case studies showcasing programme success and impacts are shared widely to generate further support.
- Local fundraising ensures community hazards are addressed, and that no-one misses out on access to drowning-resilience programmes.

CASE STUDY:

Feature, Highlight Title

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OUTCOMES

- Increased government, donor and private sector funds and resources allocated to drowning-prevention efforts.
- Country-level funds and resources are boosted as a result of drowning prevention being folded into shared agendas, raising the profile and scale of these efforts.
- Innovation in drowning prevention generates buy-in and commitment of all stakeholders to include drowning prevention when allocating investments, budgets and resources.
- Infrastructure planning and investments increasingly take account of drowning prevention by incorporating measures that reduce drowning risk.

Image

WHAT TO DO?

Advance research capabilities and foster the creation of innovative, evidence-informed solutions for drowning prevention

WHY?

Building research capabilities is essential to develop new, evidence-informed measures and generate the data and understanding necessary to identify drowning risks, tailor interventions, and evaluate what works in different contexts. A strong research agenda helps build consensus, inspire action, and align drowning prevention with broader health and sustainable development agendas, making global efforts more effective and sustainable. And given the dynamic nature of drowning risks (closely linked with factors such as climate, the environment, and social, economic and political shifts) a strong research agenda can help monitor how changing context influences drowning and help identify and respond to emerging risks in as they arise.

ACTIONS

Global level

Promote the generation, sharing and effective utilization of new knowledge relating to drowning prevention:

- The Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention works with academic networks to coordinate and develop a global drowning-prevention research agenda.
- Global stakeholders share advances in evidence to catalyse and inform investments, especially those targeting people and populations with complex vulnerabilities.
- World Drowning Prevention Day and other global mechanisms bring together people to share knowledge advances in fields that share agendas with drowning prevention.

Country level

Build national and subnational approaches to strengthening the evidence base, understanding country needs and implementation challenges, and share results through publications and relevant fora:

- Where relevant, academic partners are integrated into implementation of drowning-prevention programming.
- Research is funded to explore and share context-specific understanding of the drowning burden and generate evidence for improved implementation of interventions.

Local level

Invest in helping subnational stakeholders across sectors understand and make maximum use of existing data and evidence:

- New technologies, data systems, and approaches are explored to fill gaps in understanding local challenges and become adaptable to diverse local contexts.
- The capabilities of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to communicate with data and evidence to affect change in awareness, behaviours and action to support drowning prevention at local level are strengthened.

CASE STUDY:

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OUTCOMES

- A global research agenda helps communicate and share evidence and advances on what works to prevent drowning, and provides an overall direction for deepening the evidence base for drowning prevention.
- Countries integrate research as part of their national plans on drowning prevention, and fund research to strengthen interventions.
- Local interventions are improved by stronger, more integrated use of existing data to improve awareness and generate behaviour change.

Image

SECTION 03





EIGHT PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

The Global strategy aims to build resilience to drowning risk through eight priority, high-impact, evidence-informed and sustainable interventions to prevent drowning.

While this set of recommended interventions may evolve over time (along with the Global strategy and the drowning burden itself), they all share key attributes that are essential to any drowning-prevention intervention: they are evidence-informed; scalable; address disparities and barriers to access; involve community engagement and co-design; and draw on innovation guided by science.



KEY FACTS:

Why these interventions matter

Of countries surveyed for the WHO Global Status Report on Drowning Prevention 2024:

20%
implement barriers near
water at a national scale

28%
run national daycare
services for
pre-school children

22%
provide swimming
and water safety
training for children
in school curricula or
national programmes

33%
offer first responder
training for bystanders

73%
report community
flood risk management
initiatives

38%
provide lifeguard services
at the national level

42%
are building community
disaster resilience

73%
report national search
and rescue services

46%
run national mass media
campaigns focused on
drowning prevention

71%
have national disaster
warning systems

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COMMUNICATE

WHAT TO DO?

Raise awareness and change behaviours

WHY?

Raising awareness about drowning prevention and implementing campaigns designed to change behaviour are essential because they build public understanding of drowning risks, promote proven safety measures, and drive uptake of interventions.

Strategic communications and education campaigns help shift attitudes and behaviours (such as improving child supervision, encouraging lifejacket use, and reducing risky practices around water), ensuring prevention efforts are effective and sustainable. These campaigns can also engage key stakeholders, support policy change, and create the foundation for scaling up successful interventions globally.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can promote World Drowning Prevention Day, and integrate drowning prevention into other UN world days to increase awareness.
- Countries can fund large-scale, comprehensive, evidence-informed awareness and behaviour-change campaigns on critical aspects of drowning-prevention relevant to all people, places and contexts.
- Communities can nominate local drowning-prevention champions and change-makers to target specific community-based drowning risks through direct advocacy, education and civic engagement.
- Individuals can mobilize to share awareness of drowning risks and prevention with family members, friends and neighbours.



SUPERVISE

WHAT TO DO?

Promote supervision and safe places for children

WHY?

Ensuring that young children are always watched by a capable adult when near water by providing secure environments such as community day care centres or playpens where children are kept away from water hazards is a critical approach for drowning prevention.

This approach addresses two major vulnerabilities for child drowning: lack of close supervision and easy access to open water. Evidence shows that supervised childcare and safe play areas can dramatically reduce drowning risk for young children, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors (e.g. those focused on early child development) can advocate for structured supervision of pre-school children by modifying existing programmes to include it.
- Countries can implement policies that promote access to childcare, especially in populations vulnerable to drowning, and implement large-scale campaigns promoting awareness of the importance of constant child supervision around water.
- Communities and local NGOs can provide access to quality supervised community daycare by providing drowning-prevention materials (including on the benefits of daycare) direct to parents.
- Individuals can closely keep watch of children around water and/or enrol their children in daycare or childcare.



PROTECT

WHAT TO DO?

Install barriers limiting exposure to water bodies

WHY?

Barriers are a practical, scalable, and evidence-informed intervention that saves lives. Installing barriers to limit exposure to water bodies is essential because they reduce the likelihood of young children and other people vulnerable to drowning from being exposed water (especially in settings where adult supervision may lapse), or to limit unintentional water entry (e.g. falls from rocks or bridges).

Physical barriers such as pool fencing, playpens, doorway gates, and covers for wells or cisterns have been proven to prevent children from accessing dangerous water sources near homes and communities. This approach is particularly effective for children under five, who are most vulnerable to drowning, and is adaptable to most contexts.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can integrate drowning-prevention perspectives on hazards, vulnerability and exposure into infrastructure development programmes.
- Countries can implement policies that scale-up effective measures such as compulsory swimming pool fencing and infrastructure that restricts access to water.
- Communities can audit exposure to open water bodies including on routes to school, in playgrounds, at leisure venues and during flooding, and act to create barriers and redesign environments to reduce drowning risk.
- Individuals can create secure child-safe environments away from water hazards by using barriers like pool fences, safe play areas, playpens, well covers and gates that block child access.



SWIM

WHAT TO DO?

Boost swimming, water safety and self-rescue skills

WHY?

Boosting swimming, water safety, and self-rescue skills is essential as these skills can be protective during exposure to water hazards.

Teaching basic swimming and self-rescue skills significantly reduces drowning risk, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where most drowning deaths occur and formal swimming instruction is scarce. Integrating these skills into school curricula and community programmes is a proven, scalable intervention that saves lives and supports broader health and social outcomes.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can strengthen global frameworks, curriculum and capacity building, and advocate for universal access to swimming, water safety and self-rescue skills training.
- Countries can establish policies and allocate resources for universal access to swimming, water safety and self-rescue skills, building swimming pools, training teachers and supporting inclusion in school curricula, ensuring national reach.
- Communities can set up and support local swimming and lifesaving programmes and generate support to ensure no child misses out; raise the awareness of local people about the benefits of swim skills and water safety training for children; and encourage participation in accredited training programmes where available.
- Individuals, including parents, can seek local opportunities for swim-skills training (for themselves and/or any eligible children) and enrol in swimming programmes as trainee instructors or learners.



TRAIN

WHAT TO DO?

Train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation

WHY?

Training bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation is essential because most drowning incidents are sudden and happen far from professional help, making immediate action by those nearby critical for survival.

Proper training equips bystanders to respond safely (reducing risk to themselves) and to perform effective rescues and resuscitation such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), which can mean the difference between life and death. This approach is especially vital in low-resource settings, where emergency services may be limited, and ensures that communities are empowered to save lives when every second counts.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can strengthen the knowledge-base, technical resources and advocate for drowning-prevention awareness in global CPR guidelines.
- Countries can develop policies that support CPR and safe rescue education and training in settings including schools, youth groups, and workplaces.
- Communities can encourage local swimming clubs, youth organizations and community leaders to raise awareness of accredited training programmes; establish public rescue equipment stations; integrate CPR and safe rescue into community-based disaster responses; and boost safe-rescue training availability.
- Individuals can learn CPR and safe-rescue skills through accredited programmes, update their skills regularly and take preventative action to minimize the need to use such skills.



RESCUE

WHAT TO DO?

Strengthen lifeguarding systems

WHY?

Strengthening lifeguarding systems is essential because lifeguards provide immediate, skilled supervision and rapid response in emergencies, significantly reducing the likelihood of fatal or nonfatal drowning.

Lifeguards are trained to identify hazards, enforce safety rules, and perform rescues and resuscitation, making swimming areas safer for everyone.

Effective lifeguarding systems help raise public awareness about water safety and support broader prevention efforts, especially in recreational settings. Their presence is a scalable intervention that saves lives and supports comprehensive drowning-prevention strategies worldwide.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can strengthen the technical capacity of governments and expand the evidence base for lifeguard-system effectiveness and implementation.
- Countries can support national lifeguarding services at all designated public swimming locations, with trained lifeguards, best-practice equipment, integrated into emergency, municipal, or tourism services.
- Communities and local organizations can raise the profile of lifeguard services, lobbying government for greater awareness and support, and running training and recruitment programmes to develop or strengthen local lifeguard services. Communities can advocate to ensure lifeguards are in places with high exposure, target populations with known vulnerabilities and have the resources needed to protect the public.
- Individuals can enrol, where appropriate, on volunteer lifeguard training programmes and join local group efforts to promote awareness of the need for lifeguard services. Individuals can boost their swimming, water safety and lifesaving skills, and follow lifeguard advice and instructions at all times.



WHAT TO DO?

Enforce maritime, ferry, and boating regulations

WHY?

Enforcing maritime, ferry, and boating regulations is essential because water-transport incidents, especially on overcrowded, poorly maintained, or unregulated vessels are a major cause of mass-drowning events, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Effective regulations ensure vessels are seaworthy, not overloaded, equipped with lifejackets, and operated by trained personnel, while also restricting travel in hazardous weather. Enforcement of these safety standards significantly reduces the risk of fatal incidents for passengers and crew, making water travel safer and preventing large-scale loss of life.

RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can strengthen regulations and work to build capacity at regional and country levels.
- Countries can set and enforce maritime, ferry, and boating safety regulations and standards (including for transport and domestic passenger systems) and promote a culture of training and safety for crew.
- Communities can ensure national regulations for maritime safety, ferry traffic and boating are effectively delivered and enforced locally.
- Individuals can wear lifejackets, maintain their boats and watercraft, ensure they have the skills to use them, and take all safety precautions, including understanding weather forecasts.



INTEGRATE

WHAT TO DO?

Integrate drowning prevention with disaster risk reduction

WHY?

Integrating drowning prevention within disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts is essential because many drowning deaths occur during floods, storms, and other water-related disasters, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

By embedding drowning prevention in DRR policies and planning, countries can address the root causes of exposure, such as unsafe housing near water, lack of early warning systems, and inadequate emergency response, thereby reducing vulnerabilities and exposures before disasters occur.

This integration also supports broader resilience and climate-adaptation goals, maximizes the impact of multisectoral action, and ensures that lifesaving interventions reach the people and populations with complex vulnerabilities to drowning.

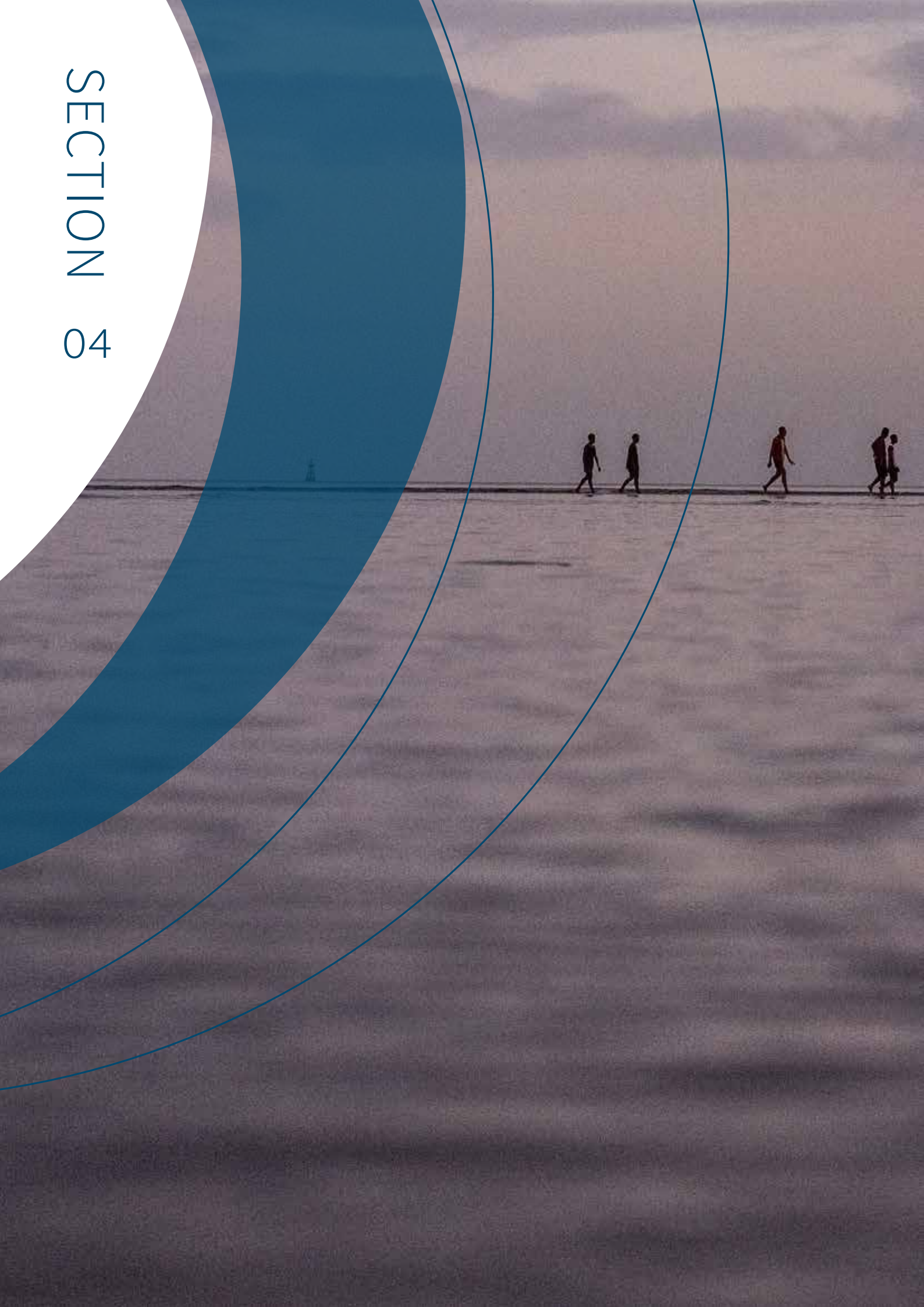
RESOURCES

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ACTIONS

- Global actors can advocate for the integration of drowning prevention into DRR policies and planning.
- Countries can integrate drowning prevention into disaster risk reduction systems at national and subnational levels.
- Communities can create disaster safe places and evacuation centres, mitigate local hazards, and boost community resilience in readiness for disaster events.
- Individuals can make and implement a household emergency plan, and understand and follow instructions in times of flash flooding, inundation and storm surge.

SECTION 04





IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

Implementing the Global strategy requires global and country-level operational frameworks; a commitment to act on the part of all global stakeholders, governments, NGOs and communities; and strong accountability measures.

OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

1. Global stakeholder engagement, advocacy and agenda alignment

Global stakeholder engagement and alignment is possible across many areas of drowning prevention, including advocacy, data collection, evidence-building and research, and design and implementation at all levels. Within the UN, many agencies have the capability to integrate drowning prevention into their strategies and plans and thereby forge links with multiple health, equity, and sustainable development agendas.

The Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention can act as a platform to unite UN partners and NGOs working to address drowning at the global level. It will support collaboration and enhance multisectoral coordination for effective, sustainable, cross-cutting drowning prevention efforts to accelerate of country-level action to reduce the burden of drowning.

2. Country-level planning, technical guidance and implementation

At country level, drowning-prevention efforts begin with prioritization and planning, involving situational assessments to establish national and subnational drowning profiles and the current drowning-prevention landscape. It will also include a stakeholder and resource analysis.

Technical guidance on the most appropriate, evidence-informed interventions for a given setting (be it national or subnational) as set out in the Global strategy and other WHO drowning-prevention guides can help stakeholders select context-appropriate remedies, accompanied by implementation guidance to generate multisectoral collaboration, public awareness, national plans and research.

3. Research, innovation and capacity planning

Drowning prevention can be advanced through well-designed qualitative and quantitative research to better understand drowning risk factors. Research enables the best possible programmes to be developed, modified and monitored, tailored to local contexts, and outcomes to be assessed. Research can also help with building human resource capacity for drowning prevention.

A GROUNDSWELL OF COMMITMENTS

To achieve lasting progress in drowning prevention, all stakeholders must take coordinated and sustained action. Below are suggested commitments for group and actions groups can take, to help to generate momentum.

UN System, Multilaterals, and Regional Organizations can:

- Elevate the profile of drowning prevention and ensure coordinated action and resource allocation across the UN system.
- Establish shared platforms for accountability, collaboration, and continuous learning.
- Develop and promote guidelines informed by the latest evidence to address key drowning risks.
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge and proven approaches among stakeholders.
- Monitor progress, identify shortcomings, and drive greater alignment and action.

Governments, Ministries, Policymakers, and Elected Officials can:

- Acknowledge drowning prevention as a public health and development priority.
- Lead and support multisectoral, multistakeholder frameworks for effective collaboration.
- Develop, adopt, and operationalize comprehensive drowning prevention strategies and plans.
- Integrate evidence-informed approaches into cross-sectoral policies.
- Allocate funding for priority actions, research, and systems that ensure accountability.
- Strengthen the skills and capacities of both government and civil society partners.

Communities and Affected Populations can:

- Advocate for action based on locally identified drowning vulnerabilities, hazards and exposures.
- Prioritize the specific needs of populations at greatest risk.
- Co-design and actively participate in developing tailored, context-specific solutions.
- Champion and lead implementation of interventions within communities.

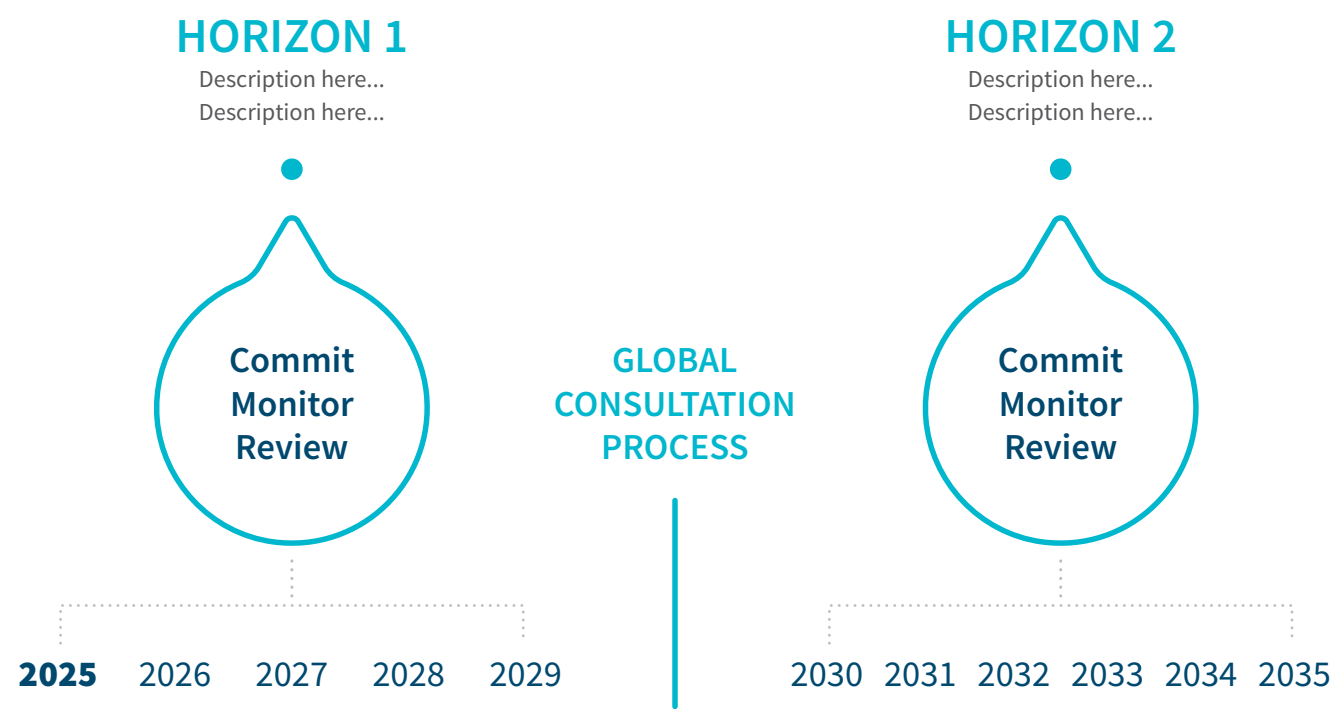
Civil Society Organizations, Businesses, Academic and Research Institutions can:

- Promote greater attention, investment, and concerted action for drowning prevention.
- Enhance workforce skills and implement effective, evidence-informed initiatives.
- Create, communicate, and apply knowledge to inform and improve practice and policy.
- Build networks among practitioners, researchers, and advocates to foster coordinated progress and knowledge sharing.

TRACKING SUCCESS

Achieving sustained progress requires strengthened global and country-level commitments, and collective action across all relevant stakeholders. The following (illustrative) list suggests some key commitments that could be expected from different stakeholder groups.

TBC



TBC

REFERENCES

Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention

Secretariat

World Health Organization

Geneva Switzerland

GADP@who.int

who.int/groups/gadp



**Global Alliance for
Drowning Prevention**