

# Establishing New Zealand's water safety research strategy and online research bibliography

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## Background

During 2008/2009 Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) established the Research Advisory Group (RAG). The RAG identifies, prioritises and addresses gaps in current data sources and knowledge working to enhance the evidence base of effective interventions and programmes in New Zealand. It further provides for the coordination and support of New Zealand-specific research into water safety. The RAG has produced a research strategy that contains the national objectives and outcomes for the next three–four years.

## Methods/Implementation

In order to establish the research objectives and outcomes needed, a critical review of New Zealand and international research published since 1990 was completed. The review investigated the RAG's main areas of inquiry, focusing specifically on published, unpublished and in-progress research on the following topics:

- Drowning causation, including fatal and non-fatal drowning;
- Water safety education, including:
  - discussion on the effectiveness of water safety education in reducing the risk of drowning and other water related injuries. This will include identifying and discussing the features of effective water safety education;
  - identifying and reviewing research and evaluations on past and current water safety education programmes, both in New Zealand and comparable countries overseas, that may have assisted in reducing the incidence of drowning. This will include identifying common key success factors and factors that promote and inhibit the sustainability of programmes;
  - drawing on the findings from the literature reviewed to identify gaps and overlaps from the New Zealand water safety stocktake (2008, August)
- Policies and training, including qualification and certification procedures. Describing and discussing the wider components of water safety activities that impact on, provide context for and support effective water safety education.

The completed literature review was processed into an annotated bibliography which is available in an online research search tool at [www.watersafety.org.nz](http://www.watersafety.org.nz). In order to understand what gaps of knowledge were present from a national perspective a comprehensive gap analysis was completed. The research strategy was based on the completion of the Literature Review and the Gap Analysis results. The aim 'to be the leading water safety knowledge base for the strategy was taken as it was the primary research goal from WSNZ's Strategic Direction 2007–2012 that was approved by WSNZ's membership. Supporting the strategy's aim are three principles:

1. To promote a culture of research and evaluation within the water safety sector;
2. To provide the sector with research that informs the practitioners working alongside the academic community;
3. To ensure that research is responsive and readily available to the community and sector.

These three principles support three key research objectives:

1. Socio economic and cultural factors and how these impact on water safety;
2. Research into preventing the cause of drowning incidents and looking at what increases the chance of people surviving drowning;
3. Produce outcome and evaluation monitoring tools.

Alongside the three research objectives are two research priorities:

1. Reducing the risk of drowning in young and old males;
2. Learn to Swim and Survive.

A two way hierarchical relationship exists between the principles, objectives and priorities. For each priority area key objectives/research topics have been established around a budget of \$150,000 per annum. All objectives/research topics have had desired outcomes and timelines set for completion.

## References

1. RNZ, An analysis of water safety research and research priorities identified by water safety organisations in New Zealand, 2009
2. RNZ, Drowning and water safety: A review of international and New Zealand research, 2009

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