
Drowning prevention: Challenges and prospects for global progress

Dr David Meddings¹

World Health Organization¹

Drowning is a major global public health challenge. Progress on infectious diseases over the last decades has unmasked drowning as an important threat to child survival. Continued progress on the child survival agenda will require that countries implement intervention programming that responds to the child morbidity and mortality epidemiology in their setting. For many countries this should mean re-orienting child survival programming and funding to include a major focus on drowning prevention.

This poses a series of challenges to the drowning prevention field, which is characterized by a complex injury issue with a history of both policy and research neglect and which is subject to important differences in terms of the risk factors for drowning in high income versus low-and middle-income countries. A number of these issues will be discussed within the context of the global epidemiology of drowning, and the current state of, and prospects for, drowning prevention research. A number of thoughts will be advanced with regard to the opportunities for catalysing a genuine and sustained global interest in addressing drowning prevention, including some potential pitfalls to be avoided; the challenges and timing of taking interventions to scale; the need for collaboration around a prioritized research agenda; and the role of normative institutions and frameworks such as the prospect of a World Health Assembly resolution on child injury prevention.

Corresponding Author

Dr David Meddings, FRCPC (C) MHSc
Department of Violence and Injury Prevention and Disability
Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health
World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland
Email: meddingsd@who.int
Telephone: +41 22 791 2064 +41 22 791 3798 (direct)