

Accelerating action on global drowning prevention

The Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly,

Having considered the consolidated report by the Director-General;¹

Recalling resolution WHA64.27 (2011), which recognized drowning as a leading global cause of child death from unintentional injury,² requiring multisectoral approaches to prevention through the implementation of evidence-based interventions;

Recalling also resolution WHA74.16 (2021), which recognized the need to strengthen efforts to address the social, economic, gender-related and environmental determinants of health,³ including the need to address the consequence of the adverse impact of climate change, natural disasters and extreme weather events;

Recalling as well the adoption of resolution 75/273 (2021) by the United Nations General Assembly on global drowning prevention,⁴ inviting WHO to assist Member States in their drowning prevention efforts and to coordinate actions within the United Nations system among relevant United Nations entities;

Recalling further the publication by the WHO Secretariat of the Global report on drowning,⁵ as well as subsequent guidance⁶ showing that drowning is a serious and neglected public health issue that can be prevented with feasible, low-cost, effective and scalable interventions;

Deeply concerned that drowning has been the cause of over 2.5 million preventable deaths in the past decade but has been largely unrecognized relative to its impact, and that peak drowning rates are among children;

¹ Document A76/7 Rev. 1.

² Resolution WHA64.27. Child injury prevention. In: Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly, Geneva, 16–24 May 2011. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2011 (https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA64/A64_R27-en.pdf).

³ Resolution WHA74.16. Social determinants of health. In: Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly, Geneva, 24 May–1 June 2021. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA74/A74_R16-en.pdf).

⁴ Resolution 75/273. Global drowning prevention. In: 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 2020–2021. New York: United Nations; 2021 (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3925005?ln=en>).

⁵ Global report on drowning: preventing a leading killer. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2014 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/644433/retrieve>).

⁶ Preventing drowning: an implementation guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1083494/retrieve>) and Preventing drowning: practical guidance for the provision of day-care, basic swimming and water safety skills, and safe rescue and resuscitation training. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1415756/retrieve>).

Recognizing the interlinkages between drowning and development, and noting that over 90% of deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries;¹

Noting with concern that the official global estimate of 235 000 deaths per annum² excludes drownings attributable to flood-related climatic events and water transport incidents, resulting in a significant under-representation of drowning deaths;

Underlining that drowning has connections with the social determinants of health, including through increased vulnerabilities to the effects of climate change, in particular flooding events, which are predicted to increase in severity and frequency, unsafe modes of water transport and inherently riskier livelihoods dependent on exposure to water;

Underlining further that in all countries other connections with the social determinants of health include drowning being a high risk in poor rural communities with close proximity to water bodies, where poverty prevents implementation of drowning-prevention interventions, livelihood needs may lead to children being unsupervised and where long-term economic and social impacts of drowning exacerbate and prolong socioeconomic marginalization;

Emphasizing that drowning prevention requires the urgent development of an effective coordinated response among relevant stakeholders in this regard,

1. WELCOMES the invitation of the United Nations General Assembly¹ for WHO to assist Member States, upon their request, in their drowning prevention efforts, and further accepts for WHO to coordinate actions within the United Nations system among relevant United Nations entities and to facilitate the observance of World Drowning Prevention Day³ on 25 July each year;
2. URGES Member States:
 - (1) to assess their national situations concerning the burden of drowning, ensuring targeted efforts to address national priorities, including through the appointment of a national drowning prevention focal point, as appropriate, and assuring that resources available are commensurate with the extent of the problem;
 - (2) to develop and implement national multisectoral drowning-prevention programmes, with a focus on community, including emergency response planning and linkage with community first aid response and emergency care systems, as appropriate, in line with WHO recommended interventions, particularly in countries with a high burden of drowning;
 - (3) to ensure that policy planning and implementation across sectors such as health, education, environment, climate adaptation planning, rural economic development, fisheries, water transport and disaster risk reduction, particularly policies that address the underlying drivers of increased flood risk, are undertaken in a manner that reduces drowning risks;

¹ Resolution 75/273. Global drowning prevention. In: 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 2020–2021. New York: United Nations; 2021 (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3925005?ln=en>).

² Global Health Estimates. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 (<https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/mortality-and-global-health-estimates>).

³ United Nations: World Drowning Prevention Day [webpage] (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/drowning-prevention-day>, accessed 3 February 2023).

(4) to promote drowning prevention through community engagement and public awareness and behavioural change campaigns;

(5) to promote capacity-building and support international cooperation by sharing lessons learned, experiences and best practices, within and among the regions;

3. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1) to encourage research on the context and risk factors for drowning, facilitate adaptation of effective drowning prevention and safe rescue and resuscitation measures that can be applied in local communities, and evaluate the effectiveness of drowning-prevention programmes;

(2) to prepare a global status report on drowning prevention by the end of 2024 to guide future targeted actions;

(3) to provide Member States, upon their request, with technical knowledge and support to implement and evaluate public health, urban and environmental policies and programmes for drowning prevention and mitigation of its consequences;

(4) to foster capacity-building and facilitate knowledge exchange among Member States and relevant stakeholders, promoting dissemination and uptake of evidence-based guidance for drowning prevention;

(5) to establish a global alliance for drowning prevention with organizations of the United Nations system, international development partners and nongovernmental organizations;

(6) to report on progress in the implementation of this resolution to the Health Assembly in 2025, to include reporting on the global status report on drowning prevention and reflect on contributions to the agenda of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, and subsequently in 2029, to include reporting on achievements of the global alliance and intersections with broader agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

Ninth plenary meeting, 30 May 2023
A76/VR/9

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