

## Media Release

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016

### **Victorian Backyard Pool Safety Laws Dangerously Lagging - Western Australia Leads the Nation**

**This year marks 20 years since the ‘Keep Watch’ toddler drowning prevention program was first introduced in Western Australia. An essential part of this ‘Keep Watch’ program was the legislation of mandatory pool and spa barrier inspections in 1992. Since then, there has been a dramatic 85% reduction in the rate of toddler drowning deaths in the state.**

Lauren Nimmo, Senior Manager Health Promotion and Research at the Royal Life Saving Society WA says, “We have some of the most comprehensive home pool barrier legislation in the country which has contributed significantly to this reduction. If the rates of toddler drowning seen 20 years ago had continued, 20 toddlers would have drowned last year. Instead only three toddlers drowned in WA last year. We can’t become complacent, as one drowning is too many. We need to continue to work towards achieving our goal of eliminating toddler drowning.”

The WA Department of Health has supported the ‘Keep Watch’ program since its inception and has contributed significantly to the reduction in toddler drowning rates in WA. Professor Tarun Weeramanthri, Assistant Director General, Department of Health says, “The Department of Health and Royal Life Saving Society WA have had a long standing relationship based on a shared concern for drowning prevention, and it is a partnership that has yielded tangible and life-saving benefits for Western Australians.”

Lauren Nimmo says, “On average, we see a 14% increase in the rate of non-fatal drownings each year in Western Australia. Last year 57 children were hospitalised and a further 77 presented to the emergency department following a non-fatal drowning incident. Unfortunately many parents aren’t told the stories of when a child survives a drowning incident, and are unaware of the impact it has on their family and community. These numbers are alarming and we need to focus on providing more information to parents on the possible outcomes of drowning.”

Western Australia’s ‘Keep Watch’ program aims to prevent drowning deaths of children under five years of age in all aquatic locations. The four key ‘Keep Watch’ actions are:

#### **Restrict Access, Supervise, Water Awareness, Resuscitate**

For more information on Western Australia’s ‘Keep Watch’ program visit:

<http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/programs/keep-watch-toddler-drowning-prevention-program>

### **The Victorian Experience**

Brendan Watkins, CEO of the Swimming Pool and Spa Association of Victoria (SPASA) believes that toddler water safety is not as well orchestrated in Victoria. While SPASA Victoria supports the recently announced Government initiative that every Victorian child will be able to swim 50m by the end of Primary School, he questions where the funding will come from.

Julie Podbury, president of the Australian Principals Federation, she had "no idea" how schools would finance the changes. "I can see the need for this, but God knows how schools will fund it," she said.

The Opposition's education spokesman Nick Wakeling also criticised the government for providing no funding for the life-saving initiative. "If left out of pocket, schools could be forced to cut literacy and numeracy programs," said Mr Wakeling.

"In Victoria, we have a range of water safety organisations promoting several programs independently," Mr Watkins said. "WA has succeeded in a collaborative approach to toddler drowning prevention through their ‘Keep Watch’ program. I believe Victoria is yet to replicate this model."

The current Leader Community News campaign 'Make Pools Safe' has highlighted the fact that tougher pool fencing regulations are urgently required in Victoria. In Leader's online poll of more than 1,728 voters, the majority of readers are in favour of tougher laws. Leader is calling for both a pool register and fencing compliance certificates to be made mandatory as a start to reforms.

"In order to prevent future toddler drowning deaths in this State, SPASA Victoria is strongly of the view that inspections of pool and spa barriers should be mandatory in Victoria. We implore the Victorian Government to pass legislation to:

1. **Immediately make pool barrier compliance certification mandatory for all properties sold or leased in Victoria**
2. **Introduce a mandatory barrier inspection protocol that ensures all residential properties with a pool or spa in Victoria are inspected every three years**

SPASA has always maintained a 'safety first' approach. Swimming pools are wonderful additions to the lifestyle of any Australian home. Exercise - and the social capital provided by a pool or spa - is immeasurable. We just want to promote the safest possible outcome for our kids," Mr Watkins says.

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/mandatory-swimming-lessons-a-stroke-of-luck-for-cashstrapped-parents-20161128-gsz99l.html>

[https://lifesavingwa.com.au/news/community/keep-watch-achieves-85-percent-reduction-in-toddler-drowning/?sc\\_campaign=0BFFAF94F523452A9F2A1FA3292D4647](https://lifesavingwa.com.au/news/community/keep-watch-achieves-85-percent-reduction-in-toddler-drowning/?sc_campaign=0BFFAF94F523452A9F2A1FA3292D4647)

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/news/make-pools-safe-leader-campaign-to-improve-safety-around-backyard-swimming-pools/news-story/507057564e35306921ad83b8d398335d>

### **SPASA's Victorian Mandatory Barrier Inspection Campaign:**

<http://www.spasavic.com.au/about-us/pool-spa-barrier-inspections>

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