

## Summary

Active participation in water-related activities provides substantial benefits for children, young people and adults supported by Life Without Barriers, including:

- Recreational enjoyment
- Health and fitness
- Encouraging social inclusion
- Building life skills
- Physical development and movement
- Physical and psychological therapeutic outcomes.

Water safety is a key consideration for our staff, contractors and volunteers when undertaking water-based activities with people for whom we provide direct and indirect support. Our approach to water safety reflects the circumstances and associated risks of the water-related activity along with the physical, emotional and psychological needs of the clients. Hence, activities in any body of water require prior planning and risk assessment to ensure the safety of everyone involved.

## Who should read this document?

This Policy Guideline is relevant for clients across all sectors in Australia engaging in water activities and applies to all staff, contractors, carers and other volunteers supporting water-based activities.

## The meaning of terms and words used in this document

In the context of this Policy Guideline, the following definitions apply:

**Client** is any child, young person or adult being supported directly or indirectly by Life Without Barriers under any program.

**Direct Support** is provided when staff, contractor, carer or other volunteer are engaged directly with a client to plan a water activity, including the completion of a risk assessment, and provide support/supervision during the activity.

**Indirect Support** is provided when a client is either self-selecting to engage in a water activity or being supported/supervised by others independent of LWB. Where indirect support is provided staff, contractors, carers or other volunteers could be involved in the planning and risk assessment for an activity.

**Water Activities** include an activity in any body of water where drowning is a potential risk, such as household bodies of water (baths, troughs etc.), swimming pools and spas (public or home), rivers, dams, lakes, creeks, and at the beach. It also includes fishing and any type of boating activities, water parks, spas, snorkelling, scuba diving, canoeing/kayaking and jet/water skiing.

**Water Competency** is the assessed level of skill and ability of an individual to swim and/or engage in water activities.

**Water Safety Qualification** means AustSwim or Royal Life Saving Society Bronze Medallion or Cross.

## What is our aim?

This Policy Guideline provides direction on the planning, assessment and support of clients, staff, contractors, carers and other volunteers when engaging in activities in any body of water.

## Guiding Principles

All staff, contractors, carers and other volunteers share the responsibility to support clients to engage in water-based activities in accordance with the following guiding principles:

1. It is our responsibility to provide and support clients with safe and appropriate water activities of their choice.
2. We recognise the need to prevent and minimise the effects of the sun (Sun smart – Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek, Slide).
3. Clients should always swim with another person – never swim alone.
4. Water competency and safety awareness is a desirable goal for all clients.
5. Children must always be actively supervised when engaged in water activities.
6. The risk of drowning must be considered when a client engages in a water activity.
7. Before entering the water a risk assessment must be conducted to consider any foreseeable risks (based on the water competency of clients and other circumstances) and to determine the appropriate level of support and supervision or other control measures.
8. The preferred location for water activities in public locations is a body of water where professional life guards are on duty.
9. Any water activities we undertake and equipment used must adhere to all legislative safety standards or requirements (including compliance certificates for pools located in private residences).
10. We encourage clients to be aware and understand potential hazards and risks through education and learning opportunities such as swimming lessons, surf safety education, or water safety qualifications.
11. Access to therapeutic support by a professional with water safety qualifications must be considered in accordance with the individual funding arrangement of clients.
12. The level of support and supervision for water activities must reflect the water competency of clients, their physical, psychological and emotional functioning and any known medical condition or impairment.
13. Some medical conditions or impairments may impact on the capability of a client to safely engage in water activities e.g. intellectual, physical, respiratory, cardiovascular, autonomic nervous system (such as epilepsy, seizure activity, diabetes and polydipsia).

## Water Safety Qualifications

In supporting clients to undertake water activities, staff, contractors, carers and other volunteers will need to have a level of water competency. Where they have to undertake the role of swimming companion they must be a strong swimmer. They are not required to hold any Water Safety Qualification to undertake their role.

At patrolled beaches and other bodies of water and public swimming pools, the life guard on duty should be accessed by staff, contractors, carers and other volunteers as required when they are supporting clients to engage in water activities.

When a client requires the individual support of a professional with Water Safety Qualifications to be able to safely engage in a water activity, this should be planned with a client and/or their guardian (if relevant) to facilitate how this support can be provided within their individual funding and program of support.

## **Review of this Policy Guideline**

This policy will be subject to review every 2 years, or as required and in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements.

## **Related Documents**

- Risk Assessment and Management Policy Statement
- National Water Safety Procedure
- Water Safety Activity Guides for Disability Carers
- Water Safety Activity Guide for OOHC Carers
- Water Safety Activity Guide for Staff and Contractors
- HSE-07-03-003 Client Activities Risk Assessment – Water Safety