



# **WATER SAFETY**

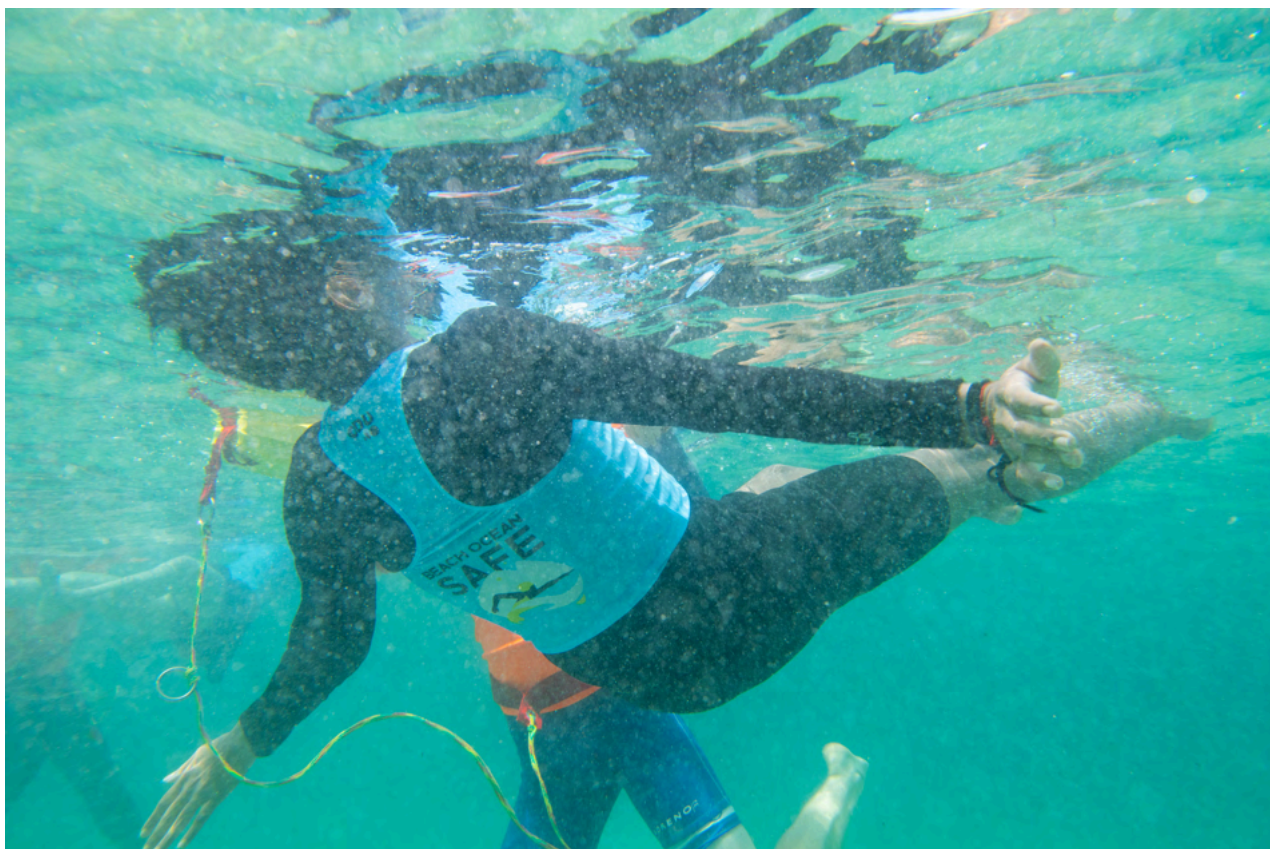
**2024 Annual Report**

**UNSW Health Promotion Unit**



**UNSW**  
SYDNEY





Cover Image: UNSW International Student, Haoming Wang, diving through the waves at Coogee Beach as part of the Beach Ocean Safe (BOS) Program.

Image Above: Students learning how to float during BOS Program.

Credit: Glenn Duffus

## Acknowledgement of Country

UNSW acknowledges the Bedegal, Gadigal, Ngunnawal and Ngambri, who are the Traditional Custodians of, and whose communities remain connected to, the unceded territories upon which the University's main campuses are located. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present for their custodianship of Country, and celebrate the cultural knowledges, stories, songlines, ancestors and dreamings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the First Peoples of Australia.

# Foreword

2024 has been a remarkable year in promoting water safety for international students at UNSW and around New South Wales. Reflecting on this year, we have delivered 3 beach safety walks, 16 learn to swim programs, 2 beach programs and awarded 12 deserving candidates with opportunities to further their swimming skills. Our programs have reached new heights, with 5,755 students engagements—an 86% increase from last year—highlighting the growing need and enthusiasm for water safety among our international community.

Our achievements reflect not only growth in numbers but in innovation and impact. The introduction of the Swimming Safe Grant Program offered six months of free lessons, and five students who started in this program have gone on to make history as UNSW's first-ever international student surf lifesavers. This year, UNSW was also awarded the Study NSW International Education Industry Award, a testament to the commitment and collaboration that drives our efforts.

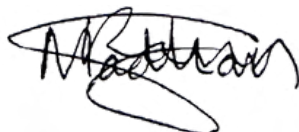
Our successes this year have been fuelled by partnerships and knowledge sharing. Recognising the importance of collective action, we established the Water Safety for International Students (WSIS) Community of Practice. This statewide initiative brings together nine universities, government bodies, councils, and organisations like Surf Life Saving Australia, focusing on a shared mission to improve aquatic safety for all.

We also launched the Beach Ocean Safe (BOS) Program toolkit, which equips surf clubs, educational institutions, and community organisations with essential resources, and our collaborative initiatives, such as the Study NSW-sponsored Joint BOS Program including six different universities, demonstrate our ability inspire and lead in water safety.

In sharing these accomplishments at national conferences, UNSW is solidifying its role as a leader in water safety education for international students.



**Oliver Jackson**

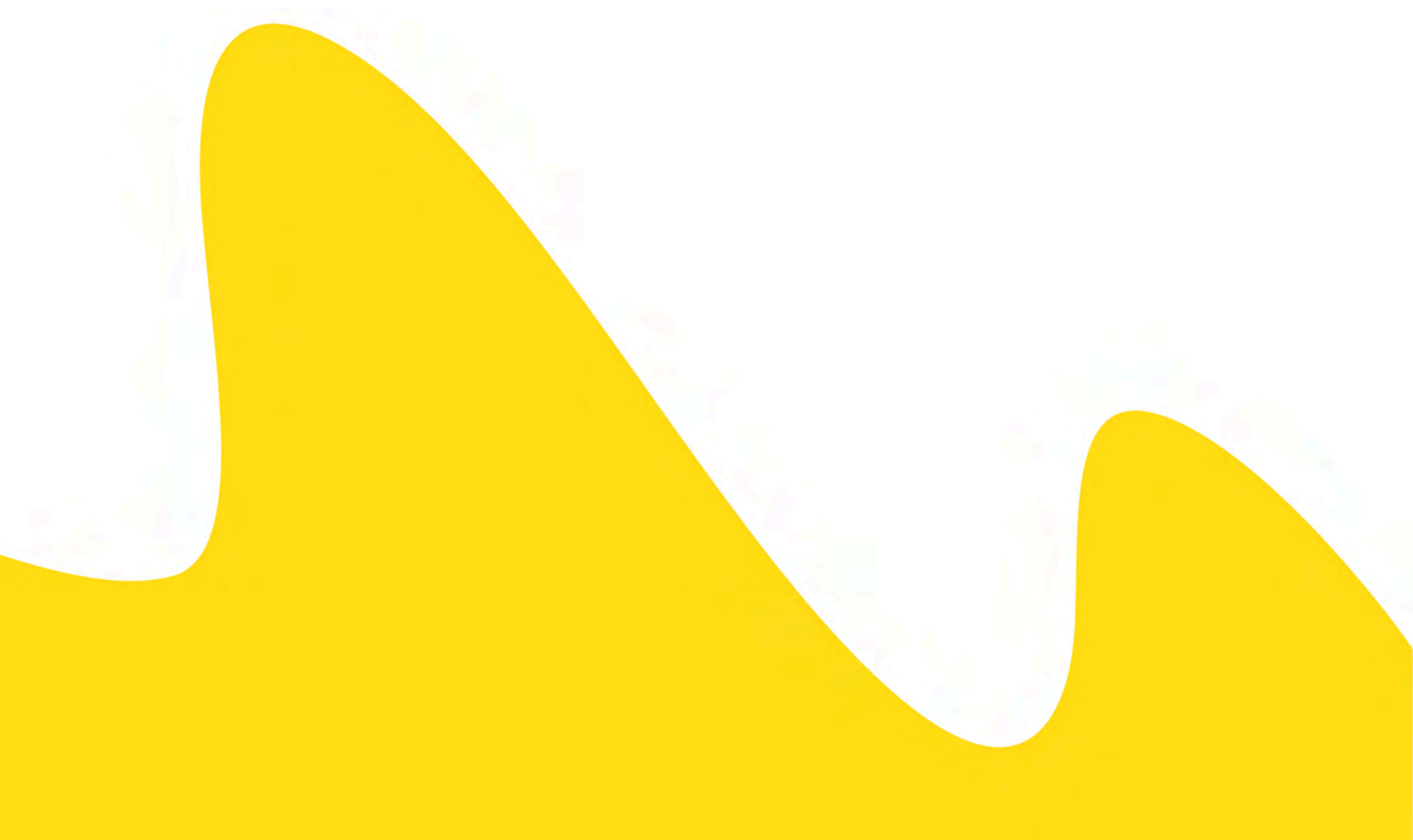


**Madhav Raman**

*UNSW Water Safety Team*

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# WATER SAFETY AT UNSW

Australia's water and beach culture are iconic, yet navigating these environments safely requires awareness, skills, and confidence — knowledge most international students do not arrive with when commencing university in Australia. At UNSW, we know that water safety education goes beyond simply learning to swim; it's an invitation to fully participate in Australian culture, make meaningful connections, and gain a sense of belonging. Through our water safety programs, we not only equip students with essential skills but also provide pathways to employment, community involvement, and a stronger sense of purpose while they're far from home.

“Becoming a surf life saver is by far the proudest moment in my life. This journey has enriched my entire life since I moved to Australia.”

ELLIE TALEBI, 2024



ELLIE TALEBI, INTERNATIONAL STUDENT  
FROM IRAN  
CREDIT: SI CHEN

In 2024, Ellie became a surf life saver at Coogee Surf Life Saving Club, immersing herself in Australia's most iconic volunteering community. She also became a swimming instructor at UNSW FAC, gaining employment by teaching new international students vital water safety skills. Remarkably, just two years ago, Ellie couldn't swim.



# AWARD-WINNING PROGRAM

The UNSW Water Safety Program is the proud winner of the  
Study NSW International Education Industry Awards  
Educational Provider



*This award means so much in recognition of the years of hard work that have gone into making one of the most successful and effective water safety programs for international students in the country*

OLIVER JACKSON, WATER SAFETY OFFICER,  
2024

UNSW HEALTH PROMOTIONS UNIT ACCEPTING THE AWARD  
CREDIT: STUDY NSW

# UNSW SPORT AWARDS

UNSW Water Safety Ambassador, Swimming Safe Grant Participant and now Coogee Surf Life Saver, Harsha Dwarakacharla won the Medibank International Student Sports Award. Since February 2024, Harsha has volunteered within the water safety program at UNSW and also dedicated time to Health & Wellbeing Ambassador program initiatives, completing over 50+ hours.

“Water safety has not only changed my life but has given me the opportunity to make a meaningful impact in my community. My journey is proof that it's never too late to learn, and I'm excited to keep advocating for water safety, hoping to inspire others to take the plunge as well.”

HARSHA DWARAKACHARLA, MEDIBANK AWARD RECIPIENT



HARSHA ACCEPTING THE AWARD  
ALONGSIDE UNSW VC ATTILA  
BRUNGS  
CREDIT: UNSW SPORT





UNSW SWIMMING SAFE GRANT PARTICIPANTS ON SLS PATROL  
CREDIT: SI CHEN

# Aim

Support the safe participation of international students in water-based activities. Develop a supportive community where international students feel safe to explore and learn water-based skills.

# Objectives

- 1 Promote water safety awareness.
- 2 Provide opportunities to learn basic swimming techniques.
- 3 Build skills and confidence for a safer ocean experience.
- 4 Foster integration into Australian beach culture, creating a sense of belonging.
- 5 Create a network of Water Safety Ambassadors dedicated to advancing water safety within their communities.

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## 5755

ENGAGEMENTS

## +86%

INCREASE IN ENGAGEMENTS  
COMPARED TO 2023

UNSW's Water Safety Program is a step-based model developed collaboratively with Surf Life Saving NSW, UNSW Fitness and Aquatic Centre, and Coogee Surf Life Saving Club. Grounded in research and data from the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group, this evidence-based program offers a comprehensive, targeted approach tailored to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities with limited water safety skills.

STEP 1

COOGEE  
TO BONDI  
WALK



STEP 2

LEARN TO  
SWIM  
PROGRAM



STEP 3

BEACH  
OCEAN  
SAFE



STEP 4

SWIMMING  
SAFE  
GRANT



BOS PARTICIPANTS  
CREDIT: GLENN  
DUFFUS





# SAFETY WALK

## COOGEE TO BONDI

492

Student Attendees  
+ 12% YoY Change

94%

Felt more confident to visit  
Australia's beaches safely

92%

Felt they learnt more about  
water and beach safety

92%

Felt more connected to the  
international student  
community

92%

Felt like they had a chance  
to make meaningful  
connections

94%

Would recommend this  
event to other students in  
the future

The Beach Safety Walk is a collaboration between UNSW Health Promotion Unit and UNSW Peer Connections. It takes place on a trimester basis and acts as the introduction to the overall Water Safety Program. The walk spans from Coogee to Bondi, showcasing the breathtaking beaches of Sydney and promoting beach safety among international students.

During the walk, participants receive a beach safety presentation from trained surf life savers at one of the surf clubs along the route. Key messages include surf hazards, how to stay safe on Australian beaches, analysing the local conditions and evaluating risks. This educational component aims to equip students with essential knowledge and skills to enjoy the beaches safely.





“It is a great opportunity to meet new people of different cultures and get along with the student community. Loved the experience.

T3 COOGEE TO BONDI WALK STUDENT





A photograph of two students in a swimming pool. In the foreground, a female student is floating on her back, wearing a black swimsuit and a blue swim cap, holding a green inflatable ring. In the background, a male student is sitting inside a yellow and pink inflatable ring. The pool has blue water and a red lane line is visible in the upper left corner.

# 03. LEARN TO SWIM



# LEARN TO SWIM PROGRAM

In its 7th year, the UNSW Learn to Swim Program reached an all-time high in popularity, with its largest offering yet—16 sessions available to over 500 international students. Registrations sold out in record time, underscoring the program's appeal among students eager to engage in water safety and swim skills. This year's enhancements included "Mindfulness Minutes" at the start of each swim class, helping students centre themselves, improve focus, and reduce anxiety in the water. The program continues to foster cultural exchange and a sense of belonging through a robust mentoring structure that unites a diverse community of learners in a safe, supportive environment.

**500**

PARTICIPANTS

**4633+**

ENGAGEMENTS

**+85%**

increase in participants YoY

**9.0**

Average Rating of the LTS Program

**96%**

of students felt the program equalled or exceeded their expectations.

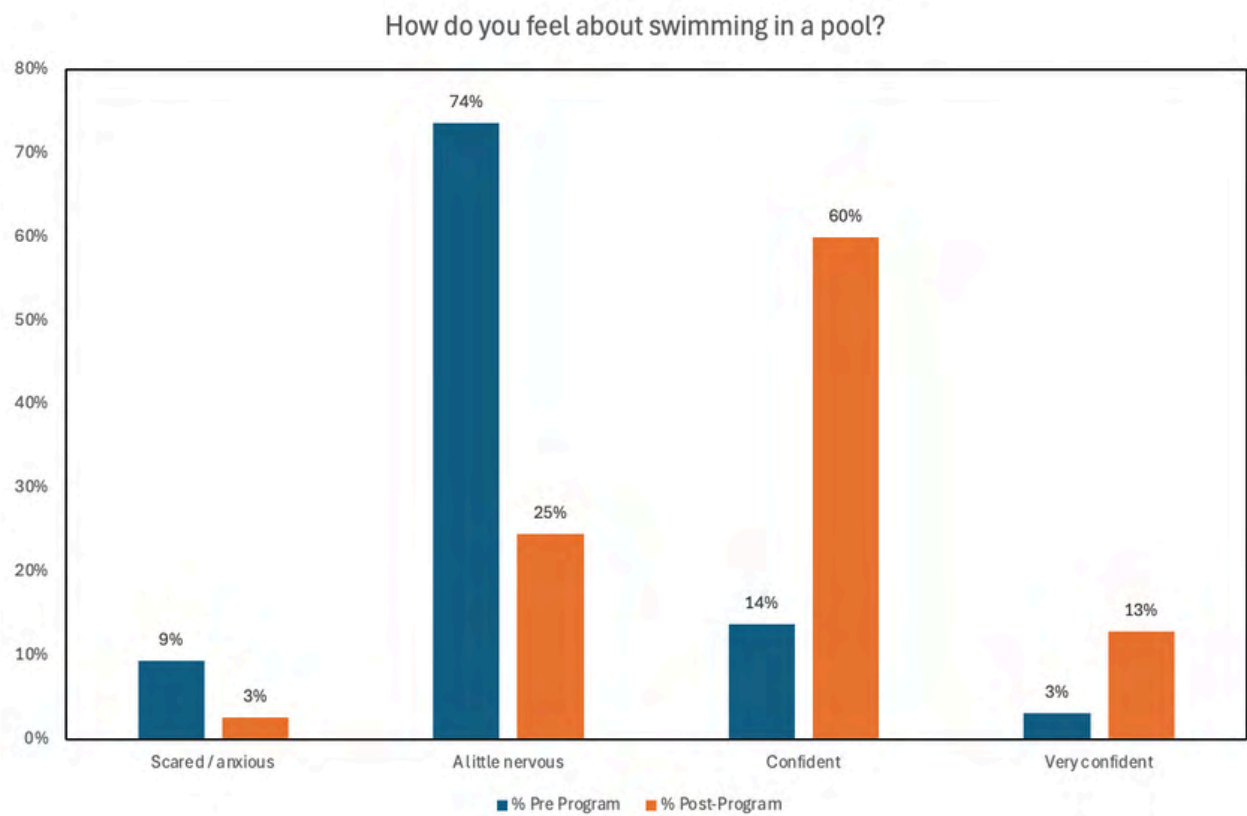
**96%**

of students would recommend the program to their friends/peers.

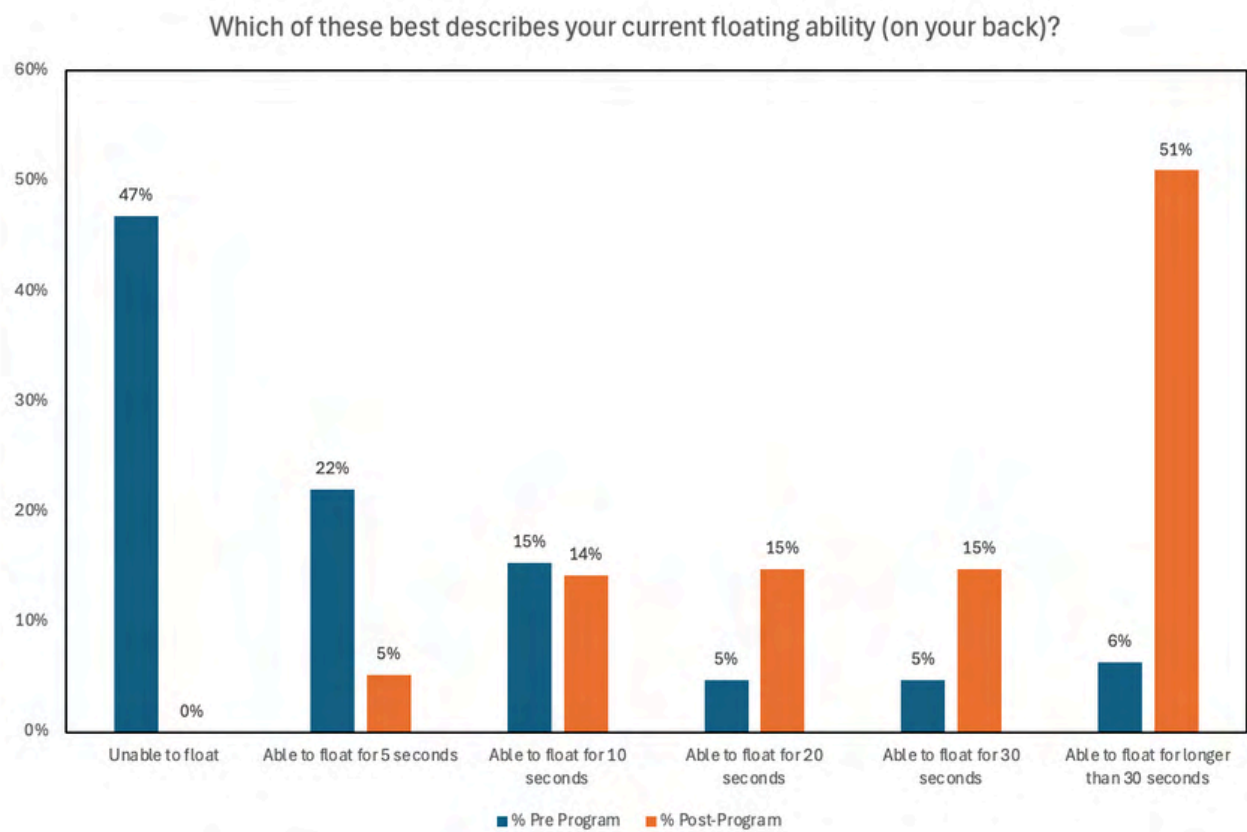


*If u don't know how to swim, this is the best and most fun way to start!*

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2024



Before the program 83% of students were scared or nervous about swimming in the pool in comparison to 73% who were confident or very confident at the conclusion of the program.



Before the program 47% of students were unable to float in comparison to 95% who were able to float for 10 seconds or more at the conclusion of the program. Floating is a critical survival skill in the water.





LEARN TO SWIM STUDENTS  
PARTICIPATING IN THE WATER SAFETY  
WORKSHOP



An underwater photograph of a person diving down in clear turquoise water. The person is wearing a black swim cap and a blue and black swimsuit. They are positioned in the center-right of the frame, moving downwards. The water is very clear, showing some bubbles and the sandy bottom in the distance. A large blue geometric shape is overlaid on the bottom left, containing the text.

# 04. BEACH OCEAN SAFE

HARSHA DIVING DOWN AT COOGEE BEACH  
CREDIT: GLENN DUFFUS



# BEACH OCEAN SAFE

The Beach Ocean Safe Program, now in its second year, has seen tremendous growth and popularity. Designed in collaboration with UNSW and Coogee Surf Life Saving Club (CSLSC), it targets members of the UNSW CALD community who lack confidence and skills in the ocean. It is the transition step between the Learn to Swim program and active participation in ocean-based activities.

The BOS program is a critical driver in strengthening the existing partnerships with external stakeholders. These partnerships are crucial in delivering successful sessions to our students as we heavily rely on volunteer surf lifesavers who come out in huge numbers to support our students bringing their skills to the theory sessions and keeping them safe in the water during the practical sessions at the beach.

**66**

PARTICIPANTS

**240**

ENGAGEMENTS

**9.6**

Average Program Rating

**58%**

swam at an Australian Beach for the  
first time

**100%**

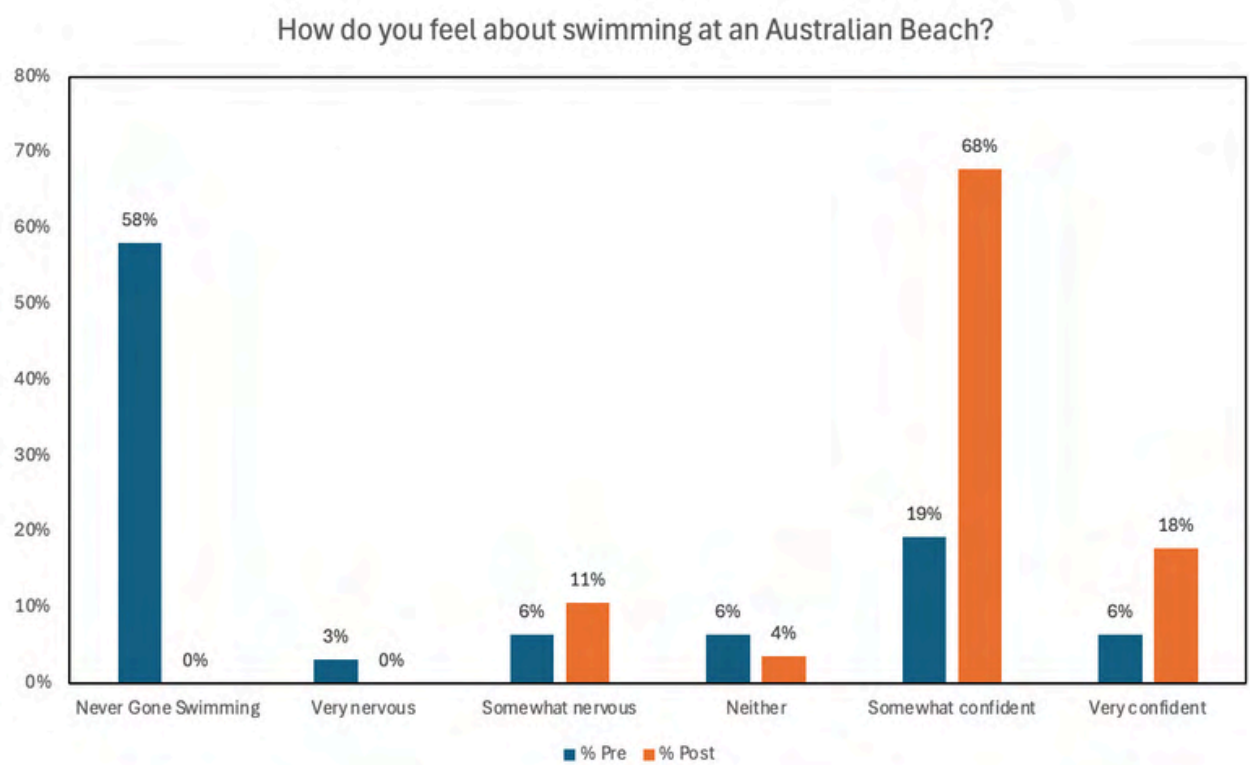
of students felt the program equalled or  
exceeded their expectations.

**100%**

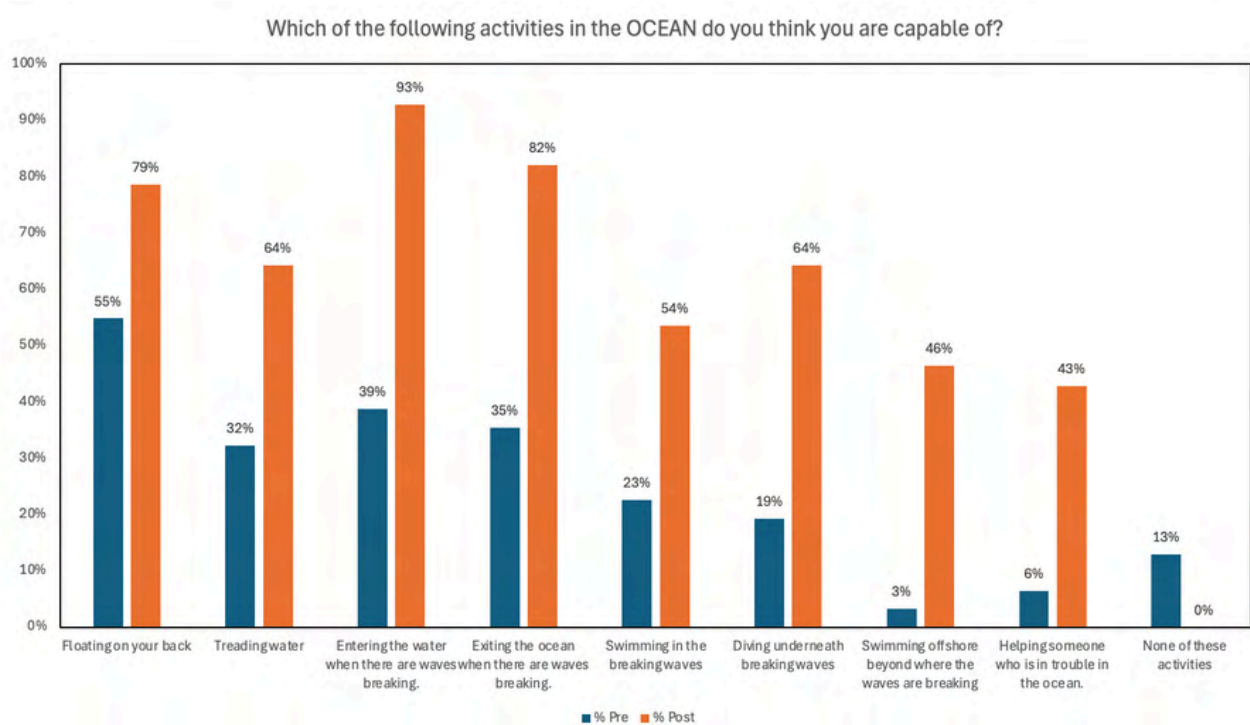
of students would recommend the  
program to their friends/peers.

“I had fear of water since my childhood and I am proud that I was able to overcome that fear.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2024



Before the program, 58% of students had never gone swimming at an Australian Beach in comparison to 86% who were somewhat or very confident about swimming at the beach by the conclusion of the program.



39% average increase in practical beach safety skills



“The structure of the course is designed in such a way that even beginners will feel confident enough by the end of the program

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2024







# 05. SWIMMING SAFE GRANT



# SWIMMING SAFE GRANT

12  
PARTICIPANTS

The Swimming Safe Grant (SSG), piloted in 2024, involved 12 students from various countries including Australia, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Vietnam. The grant provided these students with free access to swimming facilities and adult swimming classes, fostering their ongoing development and enhancing their aquatic skills.

As part of the Swimming Safe Grant, students were required to do a minimum of 20 volunteering hours with UNSW and one of three partner organisations who assist students on their water safety journey.



“This program trains people to become a new swimming instructors and surf lifesavers, who can then share essential water safety knowledge within their communities.

RAVINDRA KOKATE, 2024

# SWIMMING SAFE GRANT

## 288

FREE SWIMMING  
LESSONS

## 100%

of students felt the program equalled or exceeded their expectations.

## 100%

of students felt the program influenced their interest to become a swim instructor or surf lifesaver

## 240+

VOLUNTEERING  
HOURS

## 100%

of students feel more confident in being a water safety ambassador in their community or home country

## 100%

of students enjoyed volunteering in water safety related events and felt that the volunteering was useful

As volunteers, students gained skills in:



Leadership (80%)



Event Management (100%)



Mentoring (80%)



Communication (100%)



Public Speaking (80%)



UNSW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURF LIFE SAVERS  
CREDIT: SI CHEN

Through the Swimming Safe Grant, 5 international students became surf life savers at Coogee Beach. They are the first ever UNSW international student surf life savers!

“For me, this program has opened the door to becoming a surf lifesaver, giving me the skills and knowledge to make a positive impact on beach safety.

ELNAZ TALEBI, 2024





# Participant Feedback

"Beyond the physical and technical skills, one of the most valuable aspects has been the friendships I've made; this program has created a strong sense of community, where we support one another and truly feel like a family."

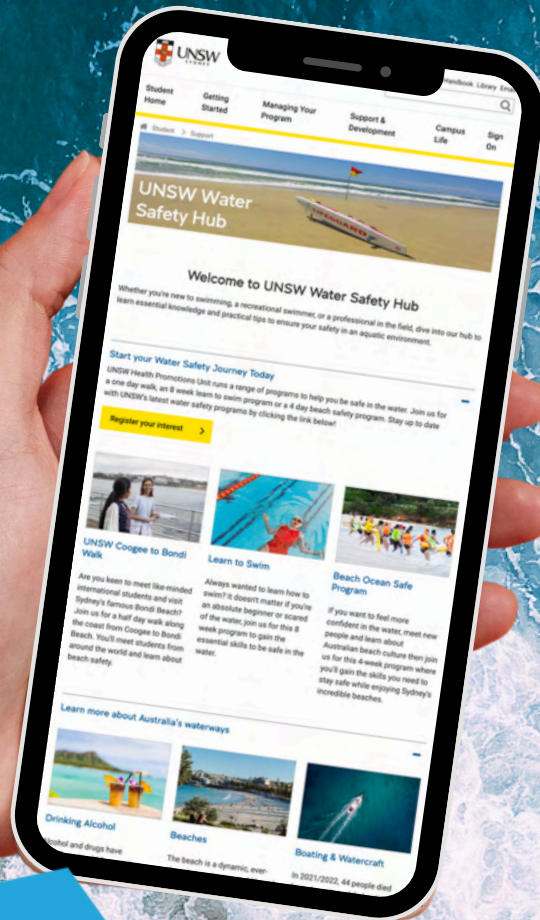
"I think this program is a real game changer for international students."

"As a water safety ambassador, I believe I can make a meaningful impact in reducing drownings and water-related incidents within my community. "

"I found the program to be very well organised, and the execution was perfect. "

"This program helps us enjoy the water more safely but also foster a sense of inclusion within the broader community by building our skills and awareness."





# 06.

# Communications



# LEARN TO SWIM NEWSLETTER

After the successful implementation of a weekly water safety newsletter in the Learn to Swim Program in 2023, we worked with the Student Communications Team to deliver targeted campaigns with very successful results.

## Welcome Newsletter

**91.3%**

AVERAGE OPEN RATE

**+36.6%**

higher than the UNSW Average

**67.6%**

AVERAGE CLICK RATE

**+61.5%**

higher than the UNSW Average

## End of Program Newsletter

**74.2%**

AVERAGE OPEN RATE

**+19.5%**

higher than the UNSW Average

**18.8%**

AVERAGE CLICK RATE

**+12.6%**

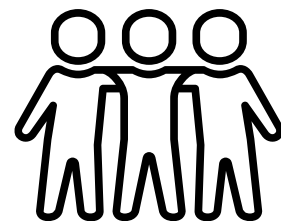
higher than the UNSW Average

# SOCIAL MEDIA



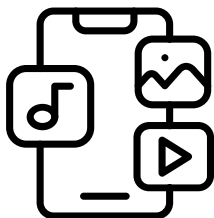
11

POSTS



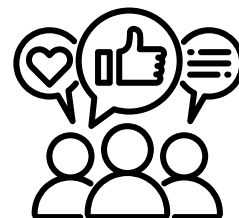
8245

REACH



10,426

IMPRESSIONS

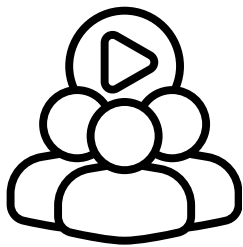


614

ENGAGEMENTS

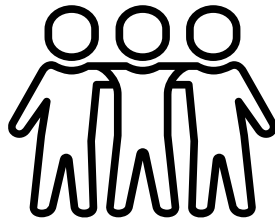


# WATER SAFETY HUB



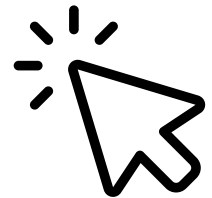
838

VIEWS



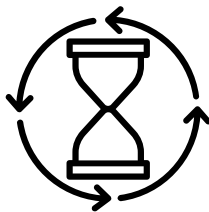
505

USERS



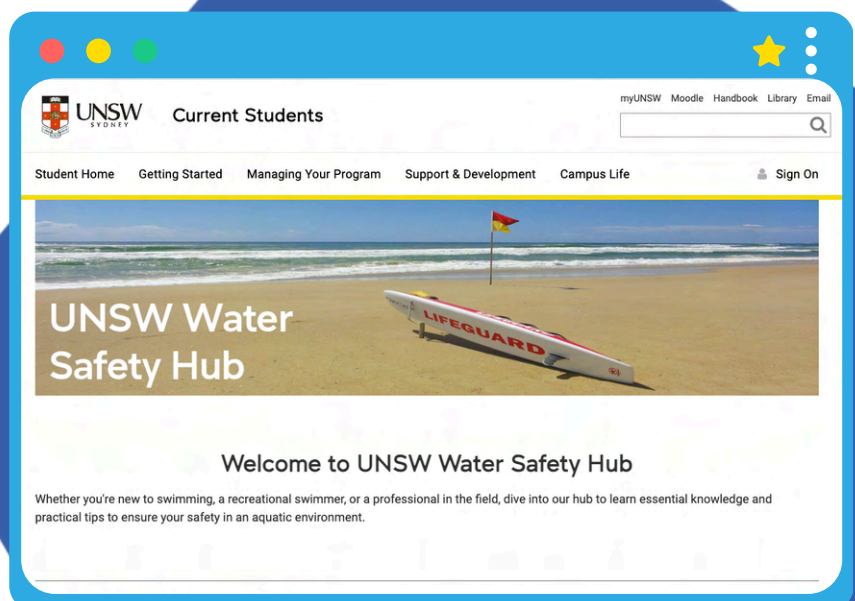
484

CLICKS



18.8s

AV. ENGAGEMENT TIME



# PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS

Watch the journey of five UNSW international students as they became surf life savers. This was made possible by the UNSW Swimming Safe Grant in partnership with Coogee Surf Life Saving Club.



Watch the video by clicking [here](#)





# WHAT IS THE WSIS COP?

**Water Safety for International Students (WSIS)  
Community of Practice (CoP)**



Recognising the need for improved water safety for international students across NSW, and the leadership and collaborations that exist at UNSW within this space, UNSW Health Promotion Unit established the Water Safety for International Students (WSIS) Community of Practice (CoP) in Term 1 2024, to share knowledge and advocate for change. WSIS brings together nine universities across the state, as well as government, local council, NSW Police, Surf Life Saving Australia, and other community organisations to focus on international student aquatic safety. The CoP had five meetings in 2024 which saw key stakeholders engage within the state.

## OUR OBJECTIVES



**Educational  
Initiatives**



**Foster Cross-Sector  
Partnerships**



**Policy  
Advocacy**



**Monitoring and  
Evaluation**



# STUDY NSW SPONSORSHIP



Study NSW



## FUNDING AMOUNT: \$10,000

The UNSW Health Promotion Unit, on behalf of the WSIS CoP were awarded a Study NSW Sponsorship to deliver the Beach Ocean Safe (BOS) Program, a three-day immersive beach safety event held on November 1-3 in collaboration with Coogee Surf Life Saving Club and partnering universities. Recognising water safety as a critical issue for international students, StudyNSW awarded this sponsorship to UNSW, acknowledging the university's commitment to student wellbeing.

The program, attended by 42 students from six different NSW educational providers, taught comprehensive safety training and facilitated social cohesion and intercultural exchange.

“I am proud to have challenged myself beyond my comfort zone...and to be introduced to a generous, welcoming, and passionate community

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK 2024



PARTICIPANTS IN THE JOINT  
BOS PROGRAM  
CREDIT: GLENN DUFFUS

# BEACH OCEAN SAFE TOOLKIT



The Beach Ocean Safe (BOS) Toolkit is a comprehensive resource that equips surf clubs, educational institutions, and community organisations with the tools needed to implement the BOS Program. The toolkit was developed by UNSW HPU in collaboration with Coogee Surf Life Saving Club and Surf Life Saving NSW.

This toolkit has the potential to be replicated nationally, extending beyond universities to community organisations across Australia. Its adaptability and success have generated interest in expanding the program on a broader scale, as evidenced by plans to roll it out state-wide.



DOUG HAWKINS PRESENTING THE TOOLKIT TO SLS NSW  
CREDIT: GLENN DUFFUS

Read the toolkit by clicking [here](#) 





# 07. RESEARCH & CONFERENCES

OLIVER JACKSON SPEAKING ABOUT UNSW WATER SAFETY  
CREDIT: GLENN DUFFUS

# BEACH SAFETY RESEARCH GROUP

The Beach Safety Research Group at UNSW is a multidisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners dedicated to keeping people safe at the beach. In 2023, the Health Promotion Unit formalised a partnership with the BSRG to deliver two projects by the conclusion of 2024. The scope of this partnership includes conducting high-quality research that informs the development and implementation of effective beach and water safety initiatives, the evaluation of existing programs, and communicating and translating beach safety science in a way that is accessible and useful to those responsible for saving lives and making the beach a safe place to be.

## Project 1

Impact of water and beach safety knowledge programs on belonging and social integration of CALD communities



Rob Brander  
**Professor,**  
**School of BEES**

## Project 2

Evaluate the effectiveness of UNSW's Water Safety Program in improving the skills, and confidence of international students and those from CALD communities.



Amy Peden  
**Research Fellow,**  
**School of Population Health**

Read more about the [UNSW BSRG](#) 



# NATIONAL MULTICULTURAL WATER SAFETY FORUM

In Term 2, UNSW Water Safety presented at the National Multicultural Water Safety Forum in Melbourne run by the Royal Australian Life Saving Society and Life Saving Victoria. The workshop discussed and reinforced the importance of:



Collaboration and  
Respectful  
Partnerships



Evaluation and  
research of  
existing programs



Developing skill's  
based programs  
outside of the pool



Inclusive and  
diverse aquatic  
workforce at all  
levels



Sustainable and  
consistent funding

# AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

In October, The Health Promotion team presented at the Student Support and Protection Insights session, showcasing their work in an abstract titled Diving Deep: Transforming Water Safety Education for International Students.

Madhav Raman highlighted UNSW's step-based model for water safety, emphasising the responsibility of universities to reduce drowning fatalities and foster inclusivity within water and beach culture for international students. Nimish Ukey, a PhD student in the School of Computer Science and Engineering and an active participant in the Water Safety Program, shared his personal journey from overcoming a fear of water to becoming a proficient swimmer and instructor. Nimish emphasised the program's transformative impact on his university experience and expressed his dedication to giving back to the UNSW community.



HPU WITH MEDIBANK  
FROM L TO R: BECKY HYDE, NIMISH UKEY,  
SABRINA GU & MADHAV RAMAN



# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (ISANA)

In December 2024, HPU in partnership with SLS NSW will be presenting at the upcoming ISANA Conference in Adelaide, delivering an oral presentation titled Making Waves: Changing the Way Beach Safety is Delivered.

The conference provides an excellent platform to share our work, exchange knowledge, and strengthen ties within the international education and health promotion community.



HEALTH PROMOTION UNIT TEAM (OLIVER JACKSON & MADHAV RAMAN) & SLS NSW (MIKE ANDERSON) WHO WILL BE PRESENTING AT ISANA  
CREDIT: STUDY NSW

# STUDY NSW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

The WSIS CoP, led by our UNSW Water Safety Team, was invited to present at the Study NSW International Student Experience Consultation Committee Meeting on 4 July. The presentation focused on international students' water safety. Our partners, Surf Life Saving New South Wales, joined us to emphasise the importance of drowning statistics and education's role when targeting people born overseas.

The committee appreciated the work being done in the water safety space by all stakeholders and acknowledged that more needs to be done to ensure our international students have a safe student life when they arrive in NSW for their studies.



MADHAV RAMAN SPEAKING ABOUT WATER SAFETY AT COOGEE SLSC  
CREDIT: GLENN DUFFUS





The UNSW Water Safety Program would not be possible without the support, dedication and vision of our partners



### Medibank

We would like to acknowledge the generous support and partnership with Medibank, our key sponsor of the program.



### Surf Life Saving NSW

SLS NSW is a key partner in many of our programs and we acknowledge their expertise and commitment to international student water safety.



### Coogee Surf Life Saving Club

Our partnership with Coogee SLSC is essential for the running of beach programs. We particularly thank and acknowledge all of the volunteer surf life savers and in particular Doug Hawkins who delivers the BOS Program.



### Fitness and Aquatic Centre

UNSW FAC is a key partner in the delivery of our Learn to Swim Program.



### Royal Life Saving Society

Our new partnership with RLSS NSW is instrumental in the delivery of workshops and resources to international students.



### UNSW Beach Safety Research Group

The UNSW BSRG has been instrumental in evaluating our programs and providing continual advice and guidance in the running of our programs.



Study NSW

### Study NSW

Support from Study NSW has been essential to share our knowledge with other educational providers and increase awareness of water safety.



## **Oliver Jackson**

Water Safety Program Officer

## **Madhav Raman**

Engagement Officer, Health Promotion Unit



[healthy@unsw.edu.au](mailto:healthy@unsw.edu.au)



[@unswhealth](https://www.instagram.com/unswhealth)

**GOT A  
QUESTION?**



UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia |  
UNSW CRICOS Provider Code: 00098G | TEQSA  
Provider ID: PRV12055 (Australian University) |  
ABN: 57 195 873 179

Report Created on: 13th November 2024

## Website Links

[UNSW Water Safety Hub](#)

[Beach Safety Walk Website](#)

[Learn to Swim Website](#)

[Beach Ocean Safe Website](#)

[Swimming Safe Grant Website](#)

