

Pearl Beach School Holiday Beach Safety Program

15th - 18th April 2024

11.30am – 3.30pm each day

Australia's largest community engagement for drowning prevention campaign is coming to the Central Coast. Lifesavers will be on the beach teaching participants the rip current safety skills that are needed to stay safe at unpatrolled beaches

The number of drowning fatalities on Australian beaches is not decreasing. Last summer, 54 people drowned along the Australian coast, which is a 10% rise above the 10-year average. This 'drowning crisis' included 28 fatalities on the New South Wales coast – the highest number in the state's recorded history. This [past summer](#), 55 people drowned along the coast, with Victoria this time experiencing its highest number of coastal drownings in over two decades. What's unsettling is that all these drownings occurred at an unpatrolled location.

Leading beach safety researcher Prof Rob Brander and other beach [risk experts](#) argue that reliance on the prevailing message to 'swim between the flags' is not enough. In a recent [Conversation piece](#), Prof Brander states that new evidence-based approaches to beach safety that target drowning prevention on unpatrolled beaches are needed. Australia's largest community engagement for drowning prevention campaign targeting drowning prevention at unpatrolled beaches will take place this summer at Umina Beach and Pearl Beach, NSW from April 12th to 18th 2024.

A team of researchers from the University of Melbourne and the University of New South Wales in partnership with Surf Life Saving Australia are coming to Umina and Pearl Beach to measure the impact that safety lessons can have on drowning risk prevention. The team will be assessing whether the safety lessons run by volunteer lifesavers are enjoyable, whether participants learn anything and how likely they are to apply the safety skills they learned at an unpatrolled beach. Four months later, they follow-up with participants to ask if they had changed their behavior the next time they visited an (unpatrolled) as a result of the engagement. A published study using the same methods of community engagement was successfully tested in [Lorne, Victoria during January 2023](#) peak summer season.

"This new research that connects communities with lifeguards and lifesavers through safety lessons on the beach is a fantastic and much needed initiative that will help expand beach safety education and drowning prevention efforts beyond the flags" (Prof Rob Brander)

Quotes attributable to Adam Weir (pending approval)

The project leads are A/Prof Brian Cook and Dr Peter Kamstra from the School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Local life saver and beach safety educator Louise Lambeth from Ocean Beach Surf Lifesaving Club is the local contact.

This project was developed as part of the Community Engagement for Disaster Risk Reduction ([CEDRR](#)) research program run out of the University of Melbourne. The CEDRR methodology was developed by A/Prof Brian Cook, who believes that community engagement should be about more than just giving people information or telling them what to do. CEDRR puts relationship building at the centre of all their community engagement research, taking the time needed to have meaningful engagements that collect both data and stories. CEDRR projects similar to the safety lessons being held at Umina combines theories of learning, behaviour change, and diffusion of information to create a composite of impact called LAS (Learning + Action + Spillover).

Contact Dr Peter Kamstra (peter.kamstra@unimelb.edu.au)

end: Lynne Lillico
Publicity, Pearl Beach Progress Association
4344 2319

Photo: Lion Island & Pearl Beach on a stormy day