

Toddler drowning in home swimming pools: An injury prevention success story



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The Royal Life Saving Society WA

Our Vision

A water loving nation free from drowning

Our Purpose

Empowering our community to be safe in and around water and leading efforts to reduce the impact of drowning



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Toddler drowning in Australia & WA



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Toddler drowning statistics

Toddlers 0-4 years are more at risk of drowning than anyone else in Australia

25

Fatal drownings each
year in **Australia**

4

Fatal drownings each
year in **WA**

40

Drowning-related
hospital admissions
each year in **WA**

60

ED presentations each
year in **WA**

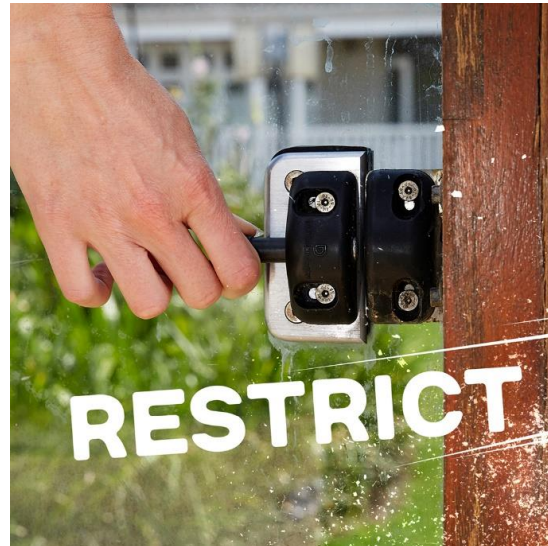


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Toddler drowning key facts

- Children aged 1-2 years are at greatest risk (~50% of toddler drowning deaths)
- Most common drowning locations
 - Home pool
 - Bath
 - Pond/water feature
- Boys are twice as likely to drown as girls
- In 100% of cases, a lack of adequate adult supervision was a major contributing factor

Preventing toddler drowning



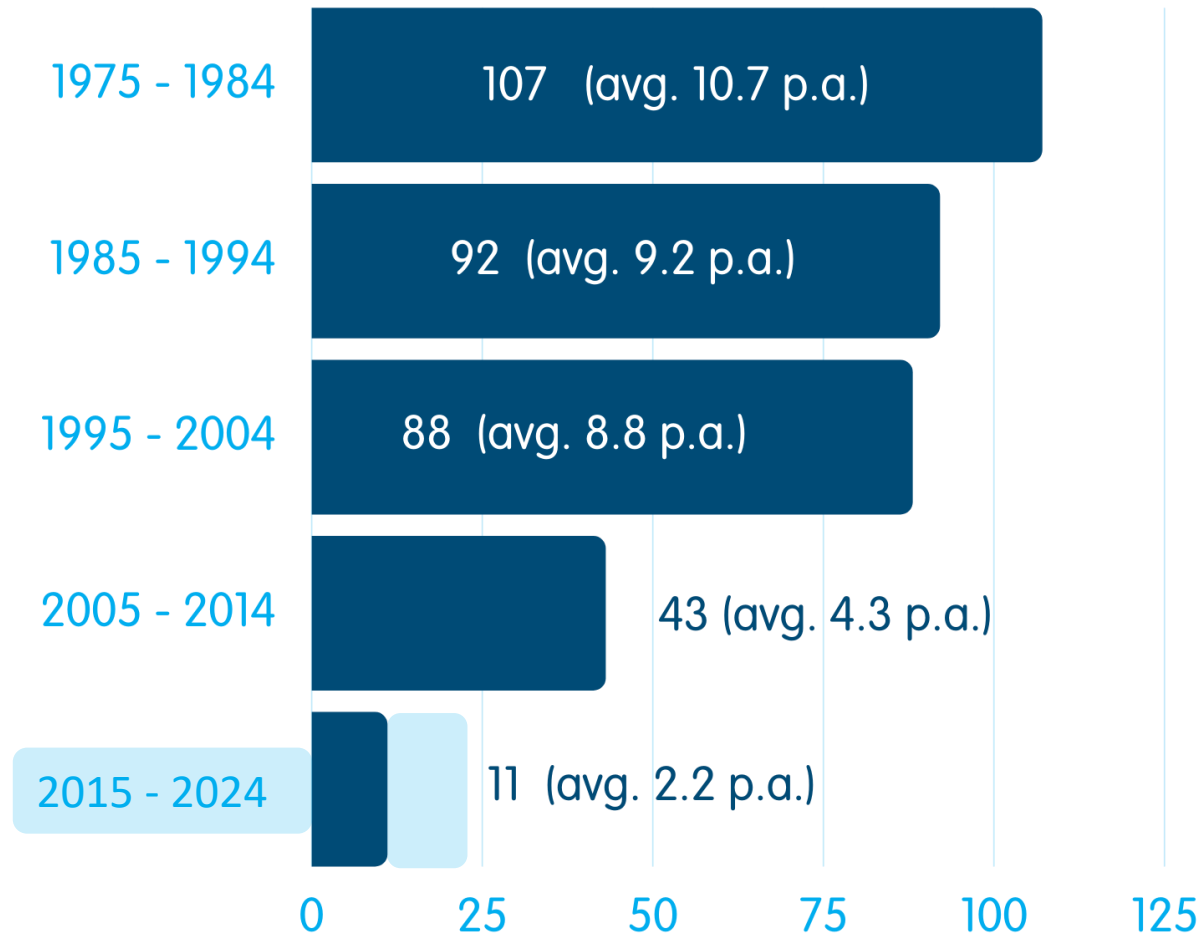
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Preventing toddler drowning in home swimming pools



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Fatal toddler drowning deaths in WA 1975 - 2019



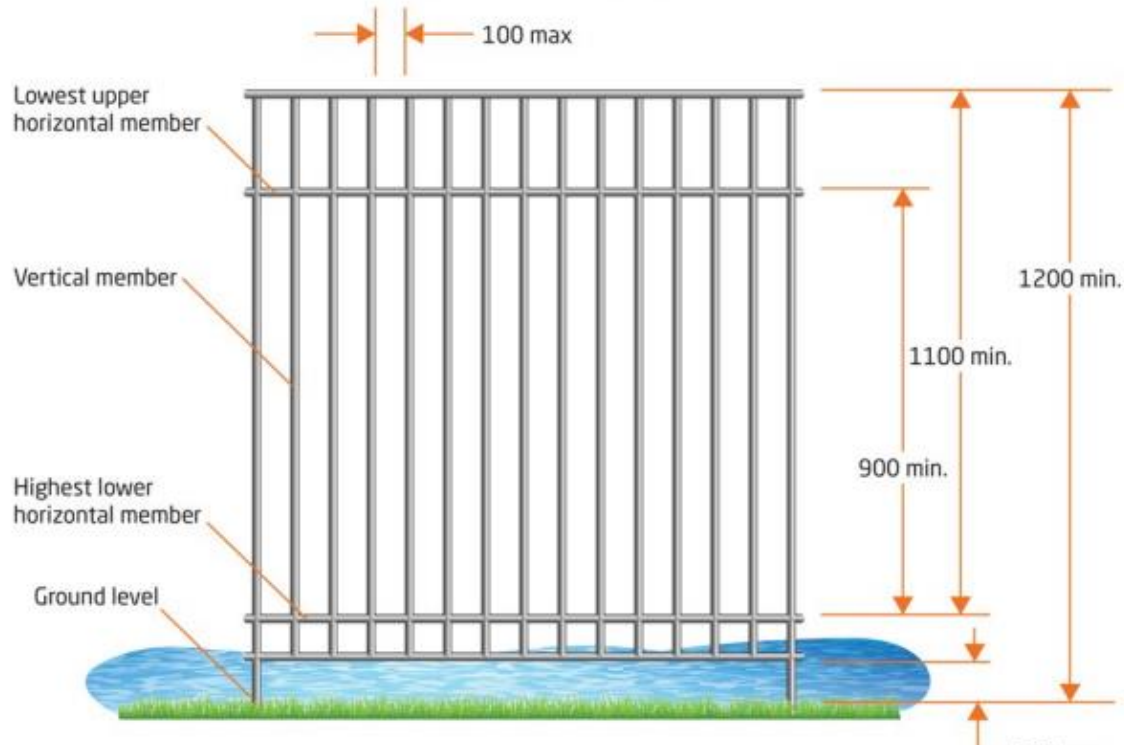
Injury prevention strategies

| | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Engineering | Technology and engineering solutions to reduce environmental hazards and provide automatic protection | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swimming pool barriers• Self-closing/self-latching gates |
| Enforcement | Legislation and enforcement to ensure compliance, including penalties for non-compliance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home swimming pool barrier inspections |
| Education | Awareness-raising and skill development among the community | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educating parents on drowning risks and prevention strategies• Informing home pool owners of how to comply with regulations |

Engineering

Australian Standard AS1926.1 - Safety Barriers for Swimming Pools

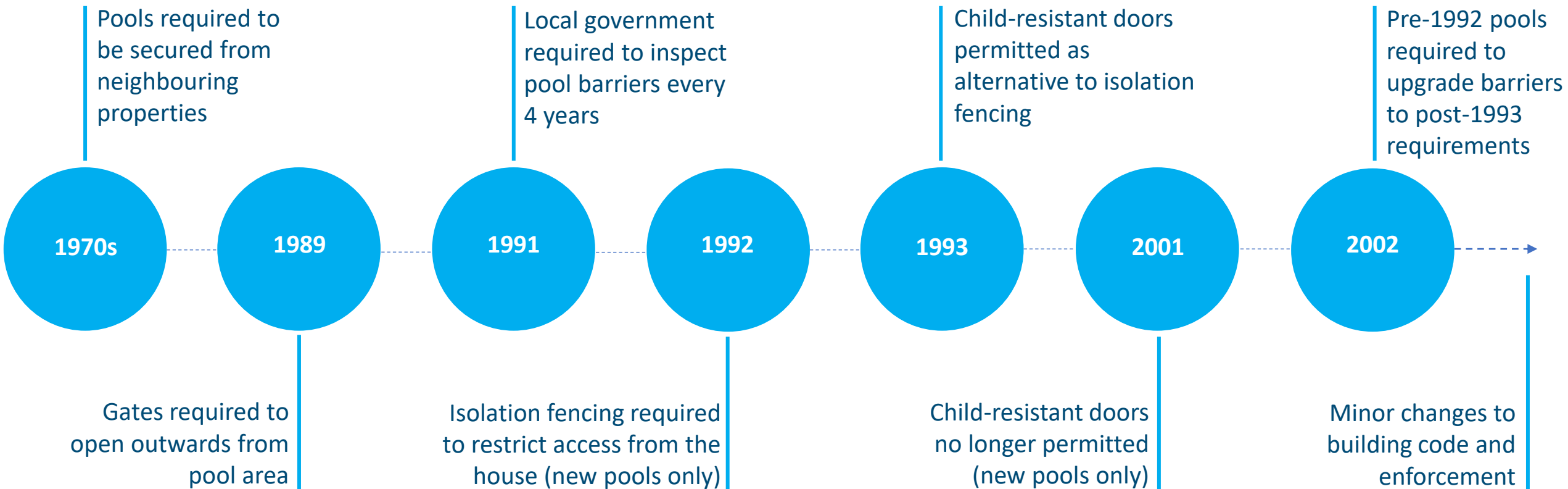
Effective barrier height DIMENSIONS IN MILLIMETRES



Location of latch DIMENSIONS IN MILLIMETRES



Enforcement



Education

- Direct parent education
- Public events/expos
- Child health clinics
- Childcare/playgroups
- Parent ambassadors
- Educational resources
- CPR training
- Social media
- Media

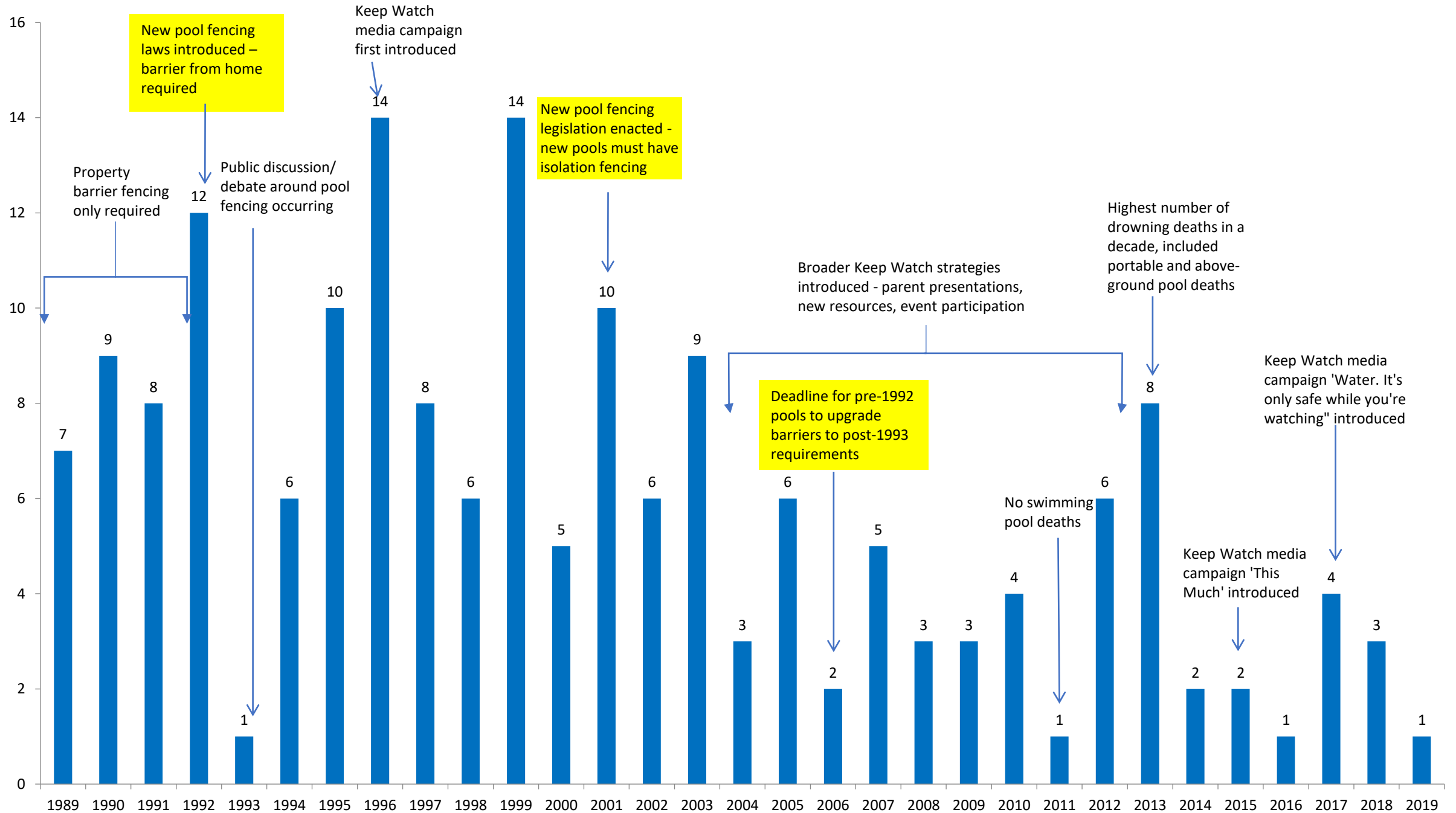


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Media



Toddler drowning deaths in WA, 1989 - 2019



What worked for WA

- Progressive, prospective changes
- Inspection regime implemented from the beginning
- Cooperation between industry, various levels of government (local and state) and non-government organisations
- Ongoing investment from government towards education
- The drowning toll



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Challenges and future directions



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The opposing arguments...

- “Why don’t we just put a fence around the Swan River?”
- “It’s all down to parental responsibility – they need to supervise their kids in the pool”
- “There’s no children at my house – why should I have to fence my pool?”
- “It’s the nanny state at work”



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Ensuring compliance

Why it's important

- Pool barriers only work when they're correctly used and maintained
- Children most commonly drown in fenced pools when they are non-compliant

Most common issues

- Gate not self-closing/self-latching
- Climbable objects (pot plants, barbecues, furniture)
- General maintenance/wear and tear

| % compliant | |
|--------------|-----|
| First visit | 60% |
| Second visit | 80% |
| Third visit | 90% |



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Education and awareness

- Encourage ongoing maintenance and safe behaviours (e.g. not propping gates open)
- Promote supervision and other safety strategies
- Introduce further education for builders/fencing installers
- How to keep the message fresh?



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Policy considerations

- Concessions (pre/post 2001)
- Inspection at time of sale/rental
- Rights and responsibilities of landlords v. tenants
- Accreditation or training for pool inspectors
- Consistency Australia-wide



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Lives saved

567

The Royal Life Saving Society – Australia estimates that the reduction in drowning rates between 1998/99 and 2017/18 saved an estimated 567 children's lives nationally



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Rachel Murray
Keep Watch Program Coordinator
rmurray@royallifesavingwa.com.au
(08) 9383 8224

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