



Meeting on prevention of drowning in western European countries

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Leeuwenhorst, Kingdom of the Netherlands
18–20 November 2024

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Scope and purpose

Drowning is a leading cause of injury death in the WHO European Region, killing 20 000 people each year.

Two important milestones have been passed recently to ensure that drowning prevention receives greater prioritization and attention. The first was the passage of United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/75/273 on global drowning prevention in 2021, which proclaimed 25 July as World Drowning Day. The second was adoption of World Health Assembly resolution WHA76.18 in 2023, under which WHO accepted the role and mandate requested by the General Assembly to coordinate drowning prevention within the United Nations system.

Further, WHO is currently completing, with Member States, a first global status report on drowning prevention. This will document data and sources on the burden of drowning, as well as uptake of published WHO evidence-based recommendations for how drowning can be prevented. The report will be published by WHO headquarters before the end of 2024, and a regional report specific to the WHO European Region will be published in early 2025.

Research commissioned by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, along with evidence examined during production of the global status report, has highlighted several issues that are either unique or particularly relevant to prevention of drowning in WHO European Region. The first is that the epidemiology of drowning is different from that in other regions: the burden of drowning is particularly great (with the highest rate of any WHO region) among middle-aged males. This highlights the gaps in WHO recommendations for prevention, which are principally focused on prevention of childhood drowning. Second, national government coordination of drowning prevention – including strategies and action plans – is very limited. The majority of preventive action is implemented by civil society via lifesaving organizations or Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies – either independently or on behalf of governments. The third issue is the importance of regionally pertinent risk factors for drowning, such as alcohol and cold-water shock.

All these issues will be discussed in detail during the meeting, with the following objectives:

1. to highlight the burden and circumstances of preventable drowning in western Europe;
2. to highlight opportunities for scaling up governance and management approaches to national coordination of drowning;
3. to promote collaboration between national policy entities and nongovernmental lifesaving organizations for coordinated national prevention and response to drowning;
4. to explore opportunities for the European Union and its various entities, including the European Commission and the Parliament, to support the objectives of drowning prevention.

The meeting is expected to identify actions relevant to the burden of drowning in countries, as well as mechanisms for government entities and civil societies to coordinate implementation and monitoring.

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