

HAWAI‘I IS IN THE MIDST OF A DROWNING CRISIS

IT IS THREATENING THE HEALTH OF OUR RESIDENTS
AND OUR VISITOR-DEPENDENT ECONOMY



DROWNING IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH for Hawai‘i’s keiki, ages 1-15.



Hawai‘i’s resident **DROWNING RATE IS THE SECOND HIGHEST** in the nation behind Alaska.



Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are about 27% of Hawai‘i’s population yet make up **36% OF RESIDENT DROWNING DEATHS**.



LESS THAN 2% OF HAWAI‘I SECOND GRADERS have the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning.

DROWNING is the leading cause of injury-related death for our visitors.

What makes these statistics even more tragic is that drowning is 100% preventable, but water safety and drowning are not prioritized at the policy level. Everyone assumes that Hawai‘i’s strong ocean-going culture means that we all are able to swim. In reality, those most closely connected to this culture, Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, are drowning in higher numbers, especially the young.

Investing in drowning prevention and water safety in Hawai‘i also protects the integrity of the state’s visitor industry, which in 2024 alone is expected to generate more than \$20.7 billion in total visitor spending, \$2.4 billion in taxes, and support more than 210,000 jobs.



Hawai‘i’s visitor industry supplies roughly a quarter of the state’s GDP, but we put it at risk when we don’t recognize the damage that even one visitor drowning causes. Our reputation as a “safe destination,” is a leading reason that visitors come here.

Yet it’s not one visitor drowning, it’s many – the most of any state. Visitors make up less than 15% of the state’s average daily population, according to the State of Hawai‘i Data Book. Yet, visitors comprise most drowning victims in Hawai‘i across all age groups.

**WE CAN DO BETTER,
AND WITH YOUR SUPPORT - WE WILL.**

Join the movement now to increase water safety and protect the lives of our visitors and our Hawai‘i residents, especially our keiki.

WHAT WE NEED

We met with stakeholders across the state to create the first Hawai'i Water Safety Plan. Please join us in advocating for new funding, new laws, and new policies for some of the most urgent recommendations in our plan.

- 1 A centralized authority for water safety and drowning prevention.
- 2 Expand funding for the Department of Health to meet their mandate to prioritize drowning prevention, including filling vacant staff roles, increasing data collection and executing a Hawai'i Injury Prevention Plan.
- 3 Fund a pilot program to provide water safety and swimming education to first or second grade students through the Department of Education with the goal of phasing in a statewide program. With the increased threat of drowning from climate change, Hawai'i's children have a right to a basic water safety and swim education.
- 4 Require warning signage, four-sided fencing, and onsite safety tools such as ring buoys for flood control structures such as retention and detention ponds, reservoirs, and dams, and the development of maintenance schedules and periodic inspections.
- 5 Hawai'i should have a statewide water safety outreach campaign, including utilizing digital platforms, and signage should be updated with expert review. One way we could do this is by increasing the percentage of mandated safety spending for tourism, and making the promotion of water safety messaging for both locals and visitors a destination stewardship mandate.
- 6 Drowning is an equity issue so lawmakers should address pool maintenance and building pools in their CIPs, especially in places like the O'ahu's west side, where there are not any public pools.
- 7 Bring Hawai'i into compliance with the federal Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act through the adoption of the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code ("ISPSA"), or through the Hawai'i Legislature passing a state law that meets one of these alternative requirements (as listed below):
 - a) The enclosure of all outdoor residential pools and spas in the state or locality by barriers to entry that will effectively prevent small children from gaining unsupervised and unfettered access to the pool or spa.
 - b) That pools and spas built in the state or locality more than 1 year after the date of the enactment of such state or local law have:
 - More than 1 drain
 - 1 or more unblockable drains
 - or no main drain
 - c) The applicant must provide for enforcement of the law(s).
- 8 Reconvene the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Task Force on Beach & Water Safety that is required by Act 190.

We understand that some of these steps will require significant funding; however, drowning and injury prevention has a notably high return on investment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that fatal unintentional drownings in 2022 in the (United States) cost a combined \$5.68 billion dollars (or \$11.24 million per life lost).

"Each dollar invested into drowning prevention can return up to 9 times the original value – protecting societal health and well-being, while benefiting the economy."

- World Health Organization (WHO)

ABOUT US

THE HAWAII WATER SAFETY COALITION

was formed in 2023 to create the state's first Hawai'i Water Safety Plan—a roadmap to ensure that everyone in Hawai'i is safe in, on, and around the water. The plan, which is slated for a December 2024 release, follows closely behind the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan. The creators of the national plan challenged all states to join them. California also answered the call to action, but we are not far behind.

 @HAWAIIWATERSAFETYCOALITION
 HAWAIIWATERSAFETYCOALITION@GMAIL.COM