

Free VacSwim for regional families

The Nationals WA believe removing financial and geographical barriers to VacSwim programs will encourage participation and reduce drownings in regional areas.

If The Nationals WA form government in 2021 we will work with Royal Life Saving WA and invest \$5 million from Royalties for Regions to make VacSwim free for regional families, provide more instructors and offer programs at more locations.

Background:

The *National Drowning Report 2019* concluded that people in regional and remote areas are 2.3 times more likely to drown than those in metropolitan areas.

According to Royal Life Saving, swimming lessons are one of the most important aspects in reducing the risk of drowning and giving young people the ability to positively and actively enjoy our waterways for fun, fitness and good health.

Research also shows that children from rural, indigenous, economically disadvantaged and migrant communities are less likely to learn swimming and water safety skills, but they generally catch up quickly if given the opportunity.

More can be done to ensure children in regional WA have a chance to participate in basic swimming and water safety education.

Discussion:

Under the McGowan Labor Government, costs for VacSwim have increased by more than 120 per cent, and Labor also threatened to remove VacSwim programs from dozens of regional communities without consultation.

The Nationals WA propose to remove the financial barrier for entry to VacSwim. This will deliver increased demand for VacSwim and help create opportunities for more locations in regional WA to participate in this important program.

Working with Royal Life Saving and the Department of Education, The Nationals WA believe we can double the enrolments in VacSwim participation from 17,000 to 34,000 per year. In addition, we will provide financial support to Royal Life Saving to develop a regional network of swimming instructors.

This will help cater to increased demand for VacSwim programs and has potential to expand VacSwim programs to additional locations. This will also create a positive first job opportunity for young people in regional WA and give them opportunities for additional training and skills development.

Recommendations:

- The Nationals WA will invest \$5 million from Royalties for Regions over five years to boost VacSwim participation and expand locations where VacSwim is offered.
- Enrolment fees for children and families in regional areas will be removed with the aim of doubling participation rates to 34,000 annually.
- A regional network of VacSwim instructors will be developed, creating job opportunities and allowing more locations to offer VacSwim programs. The Nationals WA invite feedback on this discussion paper.
- The program will be evaluated to determine if funding should be ongoing. The Nationals WA invite feedback on this discussion paper.

