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Barriers to Accessing Swim Lessons and Water Safety Information

Research conducted by the
American Red Cross

Research Study Overview

- Beginning in December 2020 through July 2021, the American Red Cross conducted a two-phased research study to examine:
    - Phase 1: Barriers to accessing swim lessons and water safety information in communities with children at higher risk of drowning.
    - Phase 2: Estimating at what age young children may acquire unsupported swim skills through developmentally appropriate group swim lessons.
- Funding for this initiative was provided to the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) through a Cooperative Agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC – 6 NU38OT000303-03-01, CFDA 93.421). NNPHI and the American Red Cross collaborated with the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control on this initiative.
- This report contains the findings of phase 1 of this project. Phase 2 findings are provided in a separate report.

Research Purpose and Question

- The purpose of the Phase 1 research was to assess perceived barriers to swim lessons and water safety education, particularly among populations at higher risk for drowning.

- This was achieved through online surveys of parents/guardians/ caregivers, youth/young adults and swim lesson training providers and instructors* throughout the United States.

Research Question:
What are the perceived barriers to swim lessons and water safety education, as reported by Caregivers, Teens and Training Providers?

*Note: For simplicity, parents/guardians/caregivers will be referenced as "Caregivers," youth/young adults as "Teens," and training providers and instructors as "TPs."

Methodology

- Online surveys were developed, pilot tested and deployed during the winter/spring of 2021 for each of the following groups:

  - Caregivers of children between the ages of 1 and 19 years (n = 876).

  - Teen participants between the ages of 13 and 19 years (n = 979).

  - TPs (n = 930).

- Prior to deployment, focus groups among both (1) Caregivers and (2) Teens pilot tested and helped refine the surveys.

- Oversampling from Black or African American and American Indian or Alaska Native populations ensured that respondents from demographic groups at highest risk of drowning were well represented.

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Data Analysis

- Data cleaning and frequency analysis were performed.
- Results are presented by:
    - Racial/ethnicity identity.
    - Caregiver responses using age group of children.
    - Caregiver responses combined across all age groups of children.
    - Comparisons between TPs and combined Caregiver responses.
- "Other" responses were also reviewed for recurring patterns.

Study Limitations

- Quota sampling was utilized (rather than a random sampling strategy).

- Surveys were available in English-language only.

- Time constraints limited the extent of data analysis.

- Content validity was limited to an expert panel and focus groups.

- Data were collected in early 2021 while Covid-19 restrictions were in place in many locales.

Interpreting Results

- Where Caregiver responses were aggregated across age groups, an individual caregiver's responses may have been included up to 3 times in the combined total, to account for those with more than 1 child in different age groups.

- It was anticipated that TP responses would be more likely to report a barrier than individual caregivers, given that TPs responses reflect the many caregivers they interact with—while Caregiver responses reflect individual households.
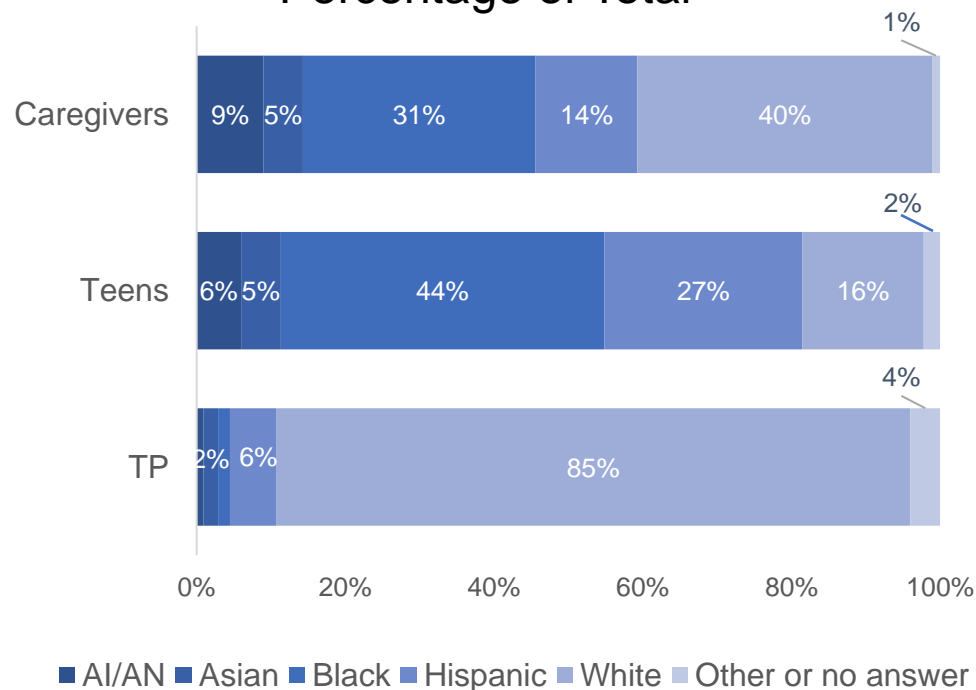
Data Summary – Race and Ethnicity

All Respondents by Race and Ethnicity, Counts

Selection	Caregivers	Teens	TPs
AI/AN[*]	79	59	8
Asian	46	52	19
Black	274	426	15
Hispanic[**]	120	260	58
White	347	160	793
Other or no answer	10	22	37
Total	876	979	930

[*]AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native
[**]Persons identified as Hispanic or Latino (Hispanic) might be of any race. Persons identified in the categories of White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN), or Asian or Pacific Islander are all non-Hispanic.

All Respondents by Race and Ethnicity, Percentage of Total

Caregivers: AI/AN 9%, Asian 5%, Black 31%, Hispanic 14%, White 40%, Other or no answer 1%
Teens: AI/AN 6%, Asian 5%, Black 44%, Hispanic 27%, White 16%, Other or no answer 2%
TP: AI/AN 2%, Asian 6%, White 85%, Other or no answer 4%

Legend: AI/AN, Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, Other or no answer

Data Summary – Age

Caregivers and TPs Respondents by Age, Counts and Percentage of Total

Selection	Caregivers		TPs	
	n	%	n	%
18 - 24 years old	160	18.3%	56	6.1%
25 - 34 years old	230	26.3%	132	14.3%
35 - 44 years old	365	41.7%	181	19.7%
45 - 54 years old	103	11.8%	194	21.1%
55 - 64 years old	15	1.7%	243	26.4%
65 + years old	3	0.3%	115	12.5%
Total	876	100%	921	100%

Teen Respondents by Age, Counts and Percentage of Total

Selection	Teens	
	n	%
13 - 14 years old	106	10.9%
15 - 17 years old	402	41.5%
18 years old	154	15.9%
19 years old	307	31.7%
Total	969	100%

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Data Summary – Gender Identity

All Respondents by Gender Identity, Counts

Selection	Caregivers	Teens	TPs
Female	412	644	668
Male	455	286	250
Non-binary	4	34	0
Transgender	3	10	0
Other	0	2	2
Prefer not to answer	1	3	8
Total	875	979	928

All Respondents by Gender Identity, Percentage of Total

Caregivers: Female 47%, Male 52%
Teens: Female 66%, Male 29%, Non-binary 4%
TP: Female 72%, Male 27%

Legend: Female, Male, Non-binary, Transgender, Other, Prefer not to answer
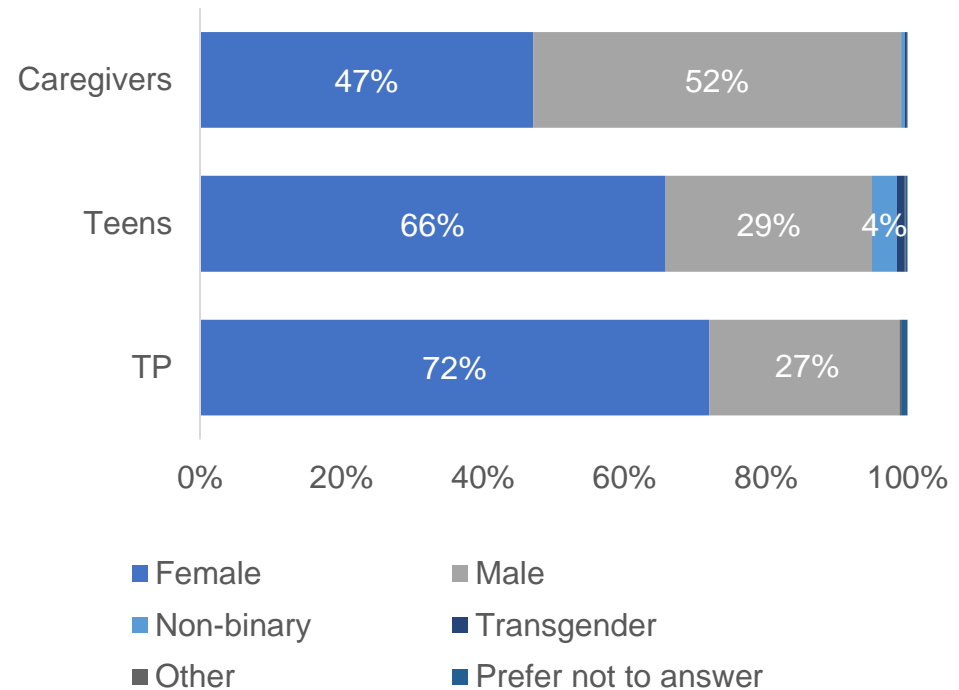
Data Summary – Income

Caregiver Respondents by
Reported Household Annual Income,
Counts and Percentage of Total

| Selection	Count	% of Total
No income in 2019	22	2.5%
Less than $15,000	72	8.2%
$15,000 - $24,999	81	9.3%
$25,000 - $34,999	71	8.1%
$35,000 - $44,999	61	7.0%
$45,999 - $54,999	64	7.3%
$55,000 - $74,999	100	11.5%
$75,999 - $99,000	105	12.0%
$100,000 or more	278	31.8%
Prefer not to answer	19	2.2%
Total	873	100.0%

Data Summary – Income (con't)

Caregiver Respondents by Reported Household Income and Race and Ethnicity, Percentage of Total
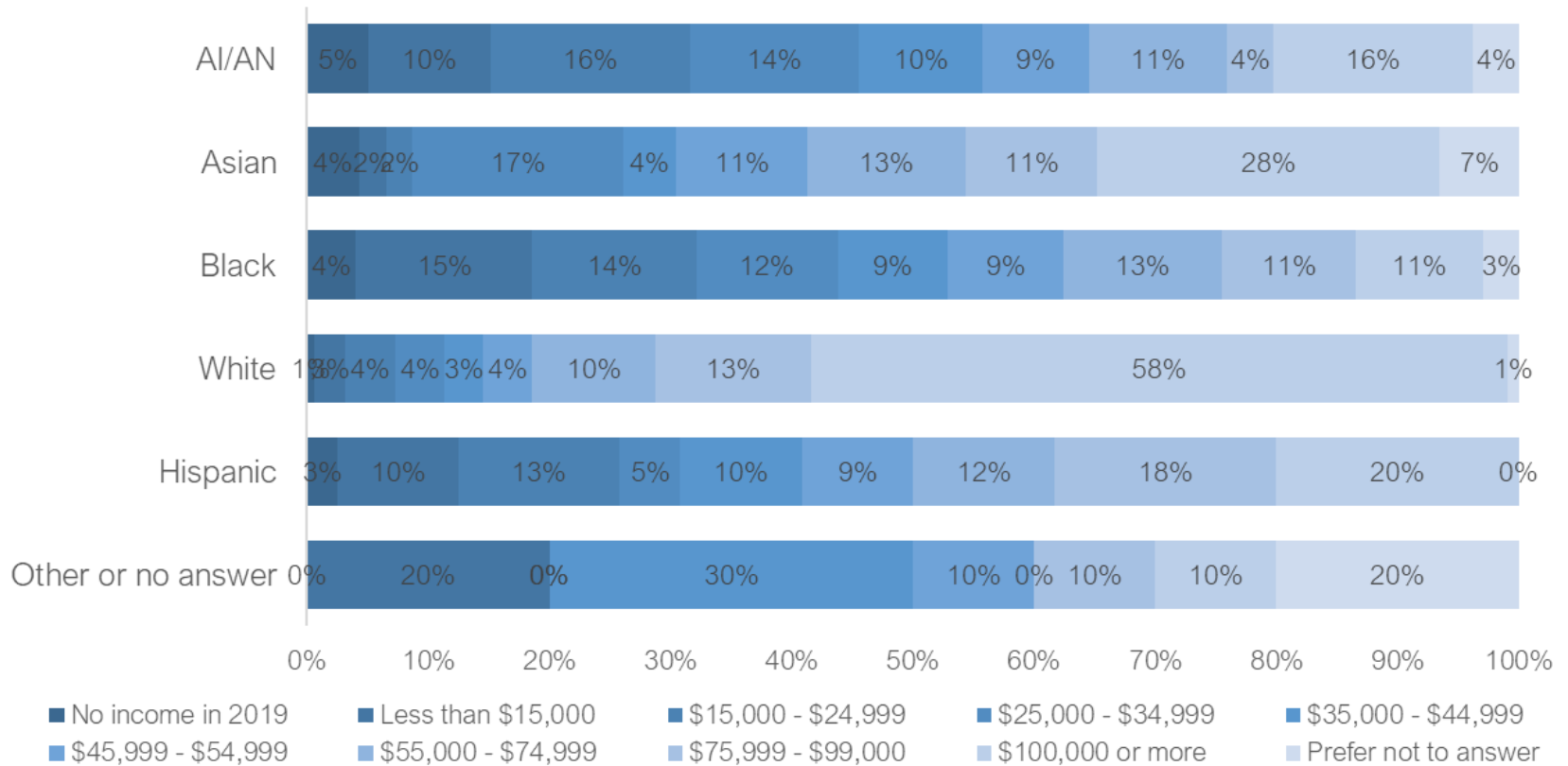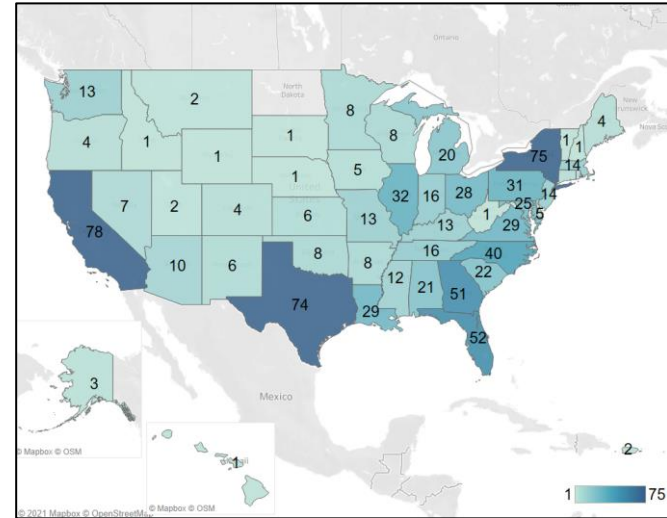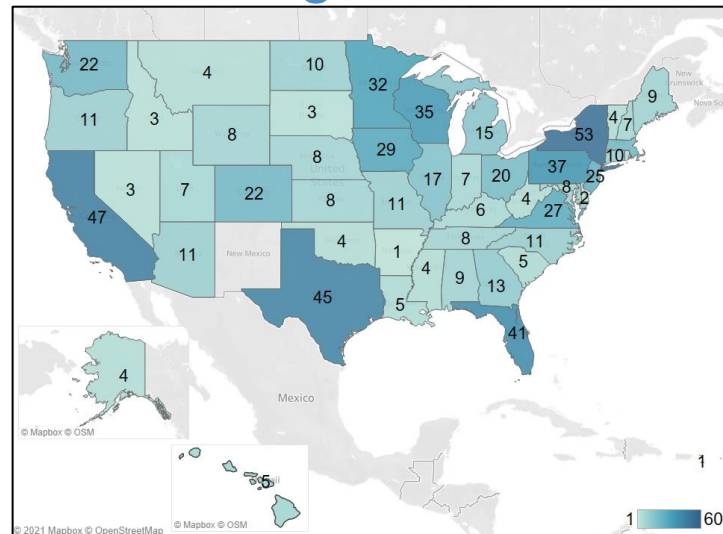
Data Summary – by ZIP Code

Caregivers
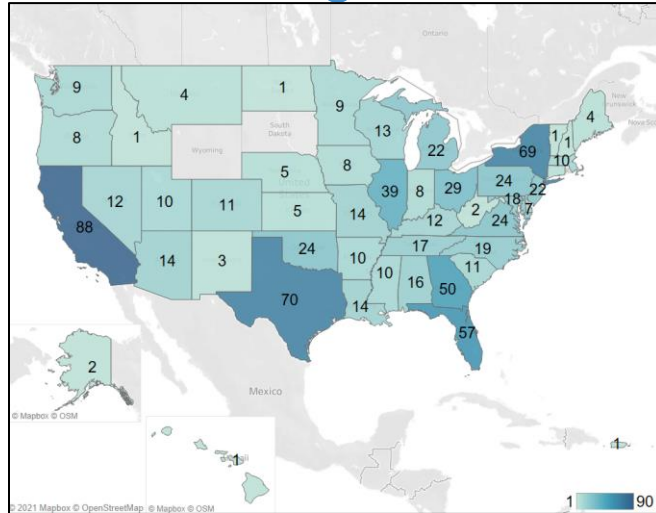
Teens

Training Providers

Note: Values represent count of respondents by state.

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Data Summary – Swim Lessons

Surveys by Child Swim Lesson Response and Respondent Group, Percentage of Total

Response	Youth ages 1-4	Youth ages 5-12	Youth ages 13-19	All Youth	Caregivers	Teens
n	**432**	**560**	**378**	**1370**	**876**	**972**
I/they have taken swim lessons from a friend or relative	22%	20%	22%	21%	32%	31%
I/they have taken private swim lessons from a certified instructor	27%	32%	30%	30%	26%	22%
I/they have taken group swim lessons or a swim class from a professional or certified instructor	23%	32%	36%	30%	27%	25%
I taught myself to swim (caregivers)/ They taught themselves to swim (children)	9%	13%	22%	15%	27%	33%
I taught them to swim myself (caregivers)	17%	23%	22%	21%	n/a	n/a
I/they have never taken a swim lesson	24%	12%	6%	14%	12%	11%

Data Summary – Swim Lessons (con't)

Caregiver Survey by Child Swim Lesson Response
and Parent Race and Ethnicity, Percentage of Total

Response	Total	AI/AN	Asian/ Pac. Islander	Black	White	Hispanic
n	1370	92	61	418	558	227
They have taken swim lessons from a friend or relative	21%	20%	16%	18%	26%	18%
They have taken private swim lessons from a certified instructor	30%	15%	21%	25%	38%	28%
They have taken group swim lessons or a swim class from a professional or certified instructor	30%	27%	28%	24%	34%	33%
They taught themselves to swim	15%	15%	16%	12%	15%	18%
I taught them to swim myself	21%	30%	10%	16%	23%	23%
They have never taken a swim lesson	14%	15%	15%	24%	9%	7%
Other / please describe	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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Results
Barriers Related to Access or Convenience

- **Limited and conflicting schedules** within the household and **inconvenient lesson schedules** were recurring themes.
  - Caregivers' work schedule was identified by all groups (14% Caregivers, 16% Teens, 54% TPs).
  - Teens identified school (16%), work (12%) and extracurriculars (14%) as barriers.
  - Similarly, inconvenient lesson schedules (13% Caregivers, 45% TPs) and conflicts with other household members' activities (13% Caregivers, 12% Teens, 60% TPs) were frequently selected.
- **Affordability* of lessons** also among the top barriers (12% Caregivers, 35% TPs).
- Caregivers reported **difficulty with registration** (10%-11%) and **finding lesson information** (10%).
- TPs often identified lack of transportation (22%) and class space (21%), but these were less frequently identified by Caregivers (6% and 7% respectively).
- Caveat: "None" = most selected barrier of Caregivers (24%) and Teens (19%)

*See footnote, slide 16

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Results

Barriers Related to Interest, Motivation and Physical Challenges

- Being too busy was a recurring theme among Caregivers (10%) and TPs (41%); Teens also reported being too busy (20%).

- Perceptions regarding lack of need for formal swim lessons because of other available resources were consistent (10% Caregivers, 10% Teens, 33% TPs).

- Child's fear of water was commonly cited (8% Caregivers, 9% Teens, 30% TPs).
  - Perceived fear among Caregivers varied (6% Caregivers, 32% TPs).
  - Teens (16%) as compared to Caregivers (7%) were more likely to believe they were not at risk for drowning.

- Teen participants also frequently selected body image (12%) and changing/locker room-related concerns (12%).

- TPs often indicated Caregivers do not believe their child needs to learn to swim (20%), but Caregivers infrequently selected this (4%).

- Open-response among TPs indicated cold water temperatures as a deterrent.

- Caveat: "None" = most selected by Caregivers (28%) and 3rd of Teens (15%)

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Results
Factors That Would Aid Enrollment

- **Increased affordability**[*] (21% Caregivers, 22% Teens, 48% TPs)
  - And discounts for enrolling multiple members (13% Caregivers, 36% TPs)
- **Differing aquatic program offerings and schedules**
  - Offerings that better suit household schedules (17% Caregivers, 18% Teens, 49% TPs)
  - Concurrent programs for multiple children (12% Caregivers, 44% TPs)
- **A more welcoming environment** (16% Caregivers, 18% Teens, 28% TPs)
  - Accommodations to changing/locker room spaces (17% Caregivers, 20% Teens, 11% TPs)
- Caveat: "None" = Most selected barrier of caregivers (24%)

[*]9% of TP survey respondents indicated their classes are free; 32% indicated price per session as $1-$6; 38% indicated price per session as $7-$12; 22% indicated price per session as $13 or more.

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Results
Water Safety Education

- Most Caregivers and Teens reported already having learned about water safety (80% Caregivers, 75% Teens).
  - Among these Caretakers, a smaller proportion report learning about water safety during/with swim lessons (11-15%) or in-person sessions at aquatic facilities (29%).
  - However, 95% of TPs report integrating water safety education into their swim lesson curriculum.
- At least half of Caregivers and Teens reported that children received water safety education at school (50% Caregivers, 57% Teens) .
  - 27% of TPs were aware of children were receiving water safety education in their schools.
- Primary barriers to water safety education among TPs were having not considered it previously (26%), uncertain about how to start water safety outreach (20%) and failed attempts (18%).
  - Open-response among TPs also frequently indicated lack of time (6%).

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Results
Water Safety Education (con't)

- Among both caregivers and teens, respondents frequently selected online sources as desired ways to learn about water safety:
  - Online searches (43% Caregivers, 34% Teens)
  - Online courses (35% Caregivers, 22% Teens)
  - Mobile apps (22% Caregivers, 24% Teens)
  - Social media (18% Caregivers, 29% Teens)
- Of in-person options (e.g., aquatics facilities, non-aquatics locations, child's school), caregivers (28%) and teens (24%) frequently selected in-person sessions *at an aquatic facility.*
- However, while social media (55%) and advocating for online courses (36%) were also among the top ways TPs reported conducting water safety outreach, others differed:
  - Outreach at schools (59% TPs)
  - Guest speaker at service organizations/camps/clubs for children (56% TPs)
  - In-person classes at locations *other than aquatic facilities* (37% TPs)

Results
Aquatics-Based Job Opportunities Among Teens

- More than half of teens (54%) have considered aquatic job opportunities. Of those, the top selected were lifeguard (54%), swim instructor (33%) and swim coach (27%).

- The top reason for not considering these jobs was teens' perception of not having the swimming skills necessary to complete training (33%). Other reasons included:
  - Too much responsibility (18%)
  - Already having a job (17%)
  - Perceptions that an aquatics-based job would not help in their chosen career field (17%)
  - Lack of access to this type of training (16%)
  - Unaffordable training (15%)

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Results

Barriers Among American Indian or Alaska Native Respondents

- The primary barriers related to <u>access and convenience</u> included:
  - Affordability (21%* Caregivers, 16%* Teens)
  - Transportation (16%* Caregivers, 16%* Teens) and nearby pool access (16%* Caregivers, 11% Teens)
  - Conflicts with other activities (14% Caregivers, 15%* Teens) or Caregiver(s) work schedule (16%* Caregivers, 13% Teens)
- The primary barriers related to <u>interest and motivation</u> included:
  - Being too busy (14%* Caregivers, 28% Teens)
  - Having other resources (e.g., family, neighbors) who can teach the child/self to swim (18%* Caregivers, 21%* Teens)
  - Not perceiving that the child/self is at risk of drowning (10% Caregivers, 17% Teens) or not perceiving lessons as a priority (11%* Caregivers, 14%* Teens)
- In addition, AI/AN respondents indicated that a more welcoming environment and changing/locker room accommodations would aid enrollment.

*Indicates that this racial or ethnic group had the highest percentage of respondents indicating this barrier

Results
Barriers Among Black or African American Respondents

- The primary barriers related to <u>access and convenience</u> included:
  - Conflicts with Caregiver(s) work schedule (13% Caregivers, 17% Teens) or other extracurriculars/household activities (11% Caregivers, 13% Teens). Teens also reported issues with work (14%) and school schedules (15%)
  - Lack of nearby pool access (12% Caregivers, 17%* Teens)
  - Unsure where to find information (11% Caregivers, 13% Teens)
- The primary barriers related to <u>interest and motivation</u> included:
  - Being too busy (10% Caregivers, 17% Teens)
  - Not perceiving child/self at risk of drowning (10% Caregivers, 17% Teens)
  - However, caregivers indicated concerns regarding their child's safety during swim lessons (10%) and some teens did indicate fear of water or drowning (12%)
  - Embarrassment in swimsuit (11% Teens)
- In addition, Black respondents sought a more welcoming environment and changing/locker room accommodations.

*Indicates that this racial or ethnic group had the highest percentage of respondents indicating this barrier

Results
Barriers Among White Respondents

- The primary barriers related to <u>access and convenience</u> included:
  - Conflicts with Caregiver(s) work schedule (15% Caregivers, 17*% Teens) or convenience (14% caregivers). Teens also reported issues with school (21*%) and extracurricular schedules (18%)
  - Caregivers also identified issues with registration (12%-13%)
  - Teens indicated lack of nearby pool access (16%) and affordability (15%)
- The primary barriers related to <u>interest and motivation</u> included:
  - Being too busy (9% Caregivers, 21% Teens)
  - Caregivers also indicated fear for the child's safety during lessons (11%*) as well as having access to other resources (e.g., family members) who can teach the child how to swim (10%)
  - Teens expressed discomfort with changing/locker room areas (16%*) and embarrassment about how they look in a swimsuit (15%). Many did not think they were at risk for drowning (16%)
- In addition, White respondents sought a welcoming environment and more affordable lessons (and among Teens, single-gender lessons*).

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*Indicates that this racial or ethnic group had the highest percentage of respondents indicating this barrier

Results
Barriers Among Hispanic Respondents

- The primary barriers related to <u>access and convenience</u> included:
  - Conflicts with other household activities (17%* Caregivers), Caregiver work schedule (14% Caregiver, 15% Teens), youth work/school schedule (15-16% Teens) or other convenience-related issues (14%* Caregivers)
  - Issues with registration (14-15%* Caregivers, 7-13% Teens) and affordability (15% Caregivers, 12% Teens)
  - Caregivers indicated facility inaccessibility (16%*) and inability to enroll multiple children (14%*)
- The primary barriers related to <u>interest and motivation</u> included:
  - Being too busy (11% Caregivers, 20% Teens)
  - Caregivers also indicated their child's lack of interest (11%*), child's fear (10%*), concern about hair (10%*), staff that doesn't speak their language (10%*), and having other resources to teach their child (13%)
  - Teens expressed lesson/swimsuit embarrassment (9-11%). Many did not perceive a risk of drowning (14%), although 12% had safety concerns.
- In addition, Hispanic respondents generally sought several elements of a welcoming environment (e.g., language and changing/locker room considerations and same-gender lessons).

Results
Barriers Among Asian or Pacific Islander Respondents

- The primary barriers related to <u>access and convenience</u> included:
  - Conflicts with other household activities (13% Caregivers, 14% Teens) as well as other other scheduling issues including school schedule, Caregiver schedule, inconvenience, and teen-reported extracurricular* activities
  - Affordability was the top barrier identified by Caregivers (18%) and lack of nearby pool access was also identified (12%)
- The primary barriers related to <u>interest and motivation</u> varied by group:
  - Among Caregivers, 15% reported having other resources for the child to learn to swim. 10% also reported (a) concern about the child's safety and (b) the child having no interest
  - Among Teens, 31%* reported being busy, 12-17%* reported embarrassment associated with swim lessons. However, while 15%* reported being afraid of the water, 19%* perceived they were not at risk
- In addition, Asian teen respondents sought a more welcoming environment and changing/locker room accommodations.

*Indicates that this racial or ethnic group had the highest percentage of respondents indicating this barrier

Recommendations
Data-driven Information

- Use data-driven approaches to learn about your community—rather than assumptions—which can help illuminate:
  - Barriers (or the lack thereof) among and between groups.
  - Factors that aid enrollment.
- Examples of findings revealed during this study that were <u>contrary</u> to expectations illustrate this point:
  - Contrasting with general discourse among swim instruction and water safety professionals, transportation was not a frequently reported barrier (10% or fewer across all racial ethnicity groups).
  - Affordability of lessons was more frequently an issue among AI/AN (21%) and Asian (18%) Caregiver respondents.
  - Black and White Caregiver responses often did not differ dramatically.
  - Across Caregiver groups, Hispanic respondents indicated the most concern about hair and chemicals in the water (10%).

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Recommendations
Data-driven Information (con't)

- Examples of mechanisms to achieve data-driven information include:
  - Conduct one or more community needs assessments—especially for multiple facility organizations that serve diverse populations (this study's Caregiver survey could be used as a template from which to start).
  - Conduct routine customer satisfaction surveys to assess facilities, programs, schedules, fee structure, processes, instructors and staff.
  - Utilize data from relevant and recent academic or industry reports to inform decision-making, such as this report.
- Create action plans to execute findings.

Recommendations
Schedule and Affordability

- Understand scheduling challenges of your population to adjust for:
  - Caregiver work schedules.
  - Teen school, activity and work schedules.
- Provide programming options that allow for multiple children of different skill levels to attend at the same time.
- Assess fee structure for possible areas of improvement, including:
  - Better affordability for Caregivers of multiple family members (e.g., discounts, scholarship opportunities).
  - Better affordability of aquatics job training, such as lifeguard or swim instructor training.

Recommendations
Welcoming Environment

- Take steps to (1) better understand interpersonal and structural barriers among teens and caregivers related to fostering a welcoming environment and, (2) consider facility configurations and devise strategies to address concerns such as:
  - Changing/locker rooms.
  - Facility accessibility.
  - Differences in language spoken by instructors and caregivers.
  - Teens' embarrassment regarding swimsuits and swim trunks.
  - Some teens' preference for single-gender group swim lessons.

Recommendations
Communications/Messaging

- Communication Strategies

  - Use your online or digital resources to educate your community about water safety, including the use of:
    - Social media
    - Blogs
    - Online courses

  - Work with your information technology team to optimize searches when people are seeking knowledge and information regarding your programs.

- Communications/Messaging

  - To Caregivers:
    - Better communicate the advantages of learning to swim as a life skill and water safety from trained professionals
    - Communicate a stronger message that it is recommended that children as young as 1-year old begin some level of introduction to swimming.

  - To Teens:
    - Provide and market appealing lesson/training opportunities.

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Recommendations
Water Safety Education

- Integrate water safety into swim lessons in a clear and informative way so caregivers and course participants "know" they are getting essential water safety information.

- Incorporate water safety education programs that take place at aquatic facilities.

- Utilize and share pre-existing online water safety education programs with teens and caregivers, such as the Red Cross Swim app and online courses.

- Develop or share water safety education on online platforms, including (low-cost) outlets like social media pages.

- To successfully initiate water safety education outreach efforts, seek out and participate in water safety/drowning prevention coalitions made up of a wide range of stakeholders in the community in order to combine efforts with respect to knowledge, resources and networks.

Next Steps: Dissemination of Findings

Articles and abstracts are intended to be submitted to the following:

- Publications
  - *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*
  - *American Journal of Public Health*
  - *Pediatrics*
  - *Injury Prevention*
- Presentations
  - *American Public Health Association* Conference
  - *Association of Aquatics Professionals* Conference
  - *Diversity in Aquatics* Convention
  - *World Aquatic Health* Conference
  - *National Recreation and Parks Association* Conference
  - *National Drowning Prevention Alliance Water Safety* Conference

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