

Research shows surfers play a critical safety role at unpatrolled beaches

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A first-of-its-kind study by La Trobe University researchers shows surfers play a critical role in keeping people safe on unpatrolled beaches, potentially saving hundreds of lives each year.

More than 550 surfers across Victoria were surveyed as part of a partnership study between Surfing Victoria and La Trobe's Center for Sport and Social Impact (CSSI).

In the first 24 months of the study, surfers helped prevent drownings by giving safety advice 2,500 times potentially preventing thousands of incidents, rescuing more than 250 people in the surf and administering first aid to more than 100 people.

Kiera Staley, research fellow at La Trobe's Center for Sport and Social Impact, said surfers are again playing a vital role in keeping the public safe this summer.

"Surfers often know the risks of particular beaches, and have highly developed water survival skills," said Kiera Staley.

"The risks on beaches this year is intensified by almost three years of missed swimming lessons due to recent COVID impacts."

"Coastal areas are also experiencing a greater influx of people as many inland Victorian holiday destinations are still recovering from recent floods," said Kiera Staley.

The research found that surfers are proving to be a vital year-round resource, reaching into many unpatrolled coastal locations.

Sport Australia estimates there are over 80,000 surfers in Victoria.

Liam Robertson at Surfing Victoria said quantifying surfers' impact will hopefully draw more support for their programs.

"Surfers perform hundreds of rescues year-round and compliment the incredible work that lifesavers do over the summer period," said Liam

Robertson.

"Surfboards are the perfect floatation device to assist in a [rescue](#) and surfers have a strong knowledge of the ocean allowing them to perform rescues safely.

"The research that La Trobe University is undertaking reiterates the importance of the Surfers Rescue 24/7 program and how surfers can keep our beaches safe."

"We have had over 3,500 surfers complete the program so far and further funding will allow us to continue to bring this important program to surfers across the state."

Surfing Victoria runs Surfers Rescue 24/7, a free board rescue and CPR course created by Surfing NSW.

So far more than 3,500 Victorian [surfers](#) have been trained in life saving skills since it began four years ago.

Full results of the research will be released after final data is collected in May 2023.

Provided by La Trobe University

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