

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

The social and economic benefits of swimming pools for communities



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pools for communities

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FOREWORDS

Swimming pool industry leaders Bonnie Chong and Bruce Brooks highlight the power of swimming pools to strengthen communities, foster connection and drive social and economic progress. Their inspiring visions offer a compelling picture of pools as vibrant, inclusive spaces at the heart of community life.

Creating spaces of belonging and wellbeing

For the first time, the swimming pool industry came together to discuss the power of our offering in communities globally. From industry to academia, with contributors from Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia and the USA, the Pool Horizons Community Development working group collaborated on this report, which underscores the remarkable potential of swimming pools to bridge generational, cultural and socioeconomic divides, fostering health, happiness and unity within our communities.

This is not a new phenomenon, but in today's world, where technology often leads to isolation and urban growth can overlook our need for real, shared experiences, we are constantly searching for opportunities to grow as humans and for sanctuaries for individuals and families alike. Swimming pools, whether public or private, offer a unique opportunity to create accessible, inclusive and sustainable spaces that nurture both individual and collective wellbeing.

Reflecting on our work over the last year, I am inspired and invigorated by the potential of swimming pools to transform lives and communities. We have observed how these spaces act as hubs of connection, belonging, and opportunity. The Pool Horizons Community Development report serves as our blueprint for harnessing this potential, aiming to make pools vibrant centres of social and economic growth for all.

Our recommendations in the report are a call to action for community leaders, policymakers, industry professionals and residents alike. Together, we can expand access, enhance inclusivity and create pools that reflect the diversity and resilience of our families and communities.

I am deeply grateful for the contributions of each member of the working group, whose insights, passion and commitment have been instrumental in shaping this report. The future of community life focuses on connection, health and togetherness. I am honored to champion this mission and invite you to join us in making our pools the heart of every community.



Bonnie Chong

Chief Executive Officer,
Anthony & Sylan Pools. USA

Fostering community through the joy of water

I learned to swim at our community YMCA, where the simple joy of being in and around water quickly became a lifelong passion. Growing up, the neighbourhood pool was not just a place to cool off during summer days; it was a cornerstone of community life. It stripped away titles and status, leaving us all equally exhilarated, splashing and laughing together. In those waters, I learned not only how to swim but also the invaluable lessons of connection, resilience and inclusivity.

The work of the Pool Horizons Community Development working group shows how swimming pools are profound community equalizers that serve as social hubs where people of diverse backgrounds can come together, breaking barriers and fostering relationships. They offer many benefits, be it a safer place for children to learn life-saving water competency skills, a therapeutic sanctuary for improved health and wellbeing or a competitive arena that nurtures athletic aspirations. Swimming pools can also be important motors of local economies. This report is intended to be a starting point, presenting valuable insights into how the community impact of swimming pools can be maximized and proposing actionable recommendations for the future.

At Fluidra, our mission is deeply tied to advancing the role of pools as agents of community transformation. The Pool Horizons initiative embodies this commitment, envisioning pools as accessible, inclusive and sustainable aquatic spaces. I would like to express my thanks to all those involved.

The world is better when more people are connected to water, and I firmly believe that everyone deserves to have that opportunity. Together, we can harness the power of swimming pools to enrich lives, uplift communities and build more harmonious relationships with each other and with our planet.

Bruce Brooks

Director
Fluidra. Spain



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ripple Effect report emphasizes the part swimming pools can play in the wellbeing, social cohesion and economic vitality of communities. It highlights how pools should be accessible and inclusive spaces for recreation, fitness and cultural connection. The report calls for strategic, sustainable pool development to enrich communities worldwide.

The Ripple Effect, the Pool Horizons Community Development report, underscores the significant role swimming pools play in enhancing community wellbeing, connection and economic vitality. It explores how these spaces contribute to social cohesion by providing communal areas for recreation, fitness and education. In diverse communities globally, swimming pools can be hubs for social bonding, leisure and sport, health improvement and community identity.

The report examines swimming pools' cultural significance, highlighting regional practices around the world, where pools are often central to community life. However, access to swimming pools sometimes remains unequal, with barriers including economic constraints, cultural norms and geographic availability hindering inclusivity. Solutions include subsidized access, culturally sensitive programming and investments in infrastructure to expand pool accessibility.

The report outlines a vision where pools foster inclusive, multigenerational, multicultural engagement and act as community pillars promoting physical and mental health. Economically, pools generate local employment, support businesses and stimulate tourism.

Pool Horizons calls on all the stakeholders in the swimming ecosystem - from policymakers to local communities - to collaborate, creating a future where swimming pools are universally accessible and continue to enrich lives across socioeconomic and cultural divides. The report's findings advocate for a strategic approach to pool development, embracing inclusivity, sustainability and economic empowerment to create resilient communities globally.

OPENING PERSPECTIVES

The Pool Horizons initiative provides a guiding compass for the swimming pool industry's response to modern social and environmental challenges. Swimming pools are places of leisure and enjoyment, of sport and competition, of health and wellbeing, and they can also play a fundamental role in communities of all kinds, contributing to a more vibrant and thriving society.

Pool Horizons

The Pool Horizons initiative serves as a guiding star for the swimming pool industry and its entire ecosystem, helping to navigate the complexities of the 21st century's second quarter. It offers a strategic vision to address the social and environmental challenges of our time. This effort is the result of a unique collaboration between global industry experts and key stakeholders, who together have crafted a forward-looking roadmap, one that charts a course across four horizons, showing how the swimming pool industry can shape a future that is both hopeful and sustainable.

Health and Wellbeing

Pool Horizons envisions a world where swimming pools are not only leisure spaces, but powerful tools for enhancing physical and mental health, aquatic sanctuaries that can uplift individuals, weaving them into a broader tapestry of wellbeing.

Community Development

Swimming pools can be hubs of social vitality and engines of community cohesion. Pool Horizons aims to ensure that access to water is not a privilege but a universal right.

Water and Safety

Swimming pools are the best place for individuals of all ages to develop water competency, an essential skill that reduces risks and unlocks a lifetime of enjoyment in and around water.

Sustainability and the Environment

The swimming pool industry has worked to evaluate the sustainability of swimming pools over the years, with significant progress in innovation and the implementation of best practices. Pool Horizons calls for a new relationship between swimming pools and the environment, promoting a vision of harmony between human-made spaces and the natural world.

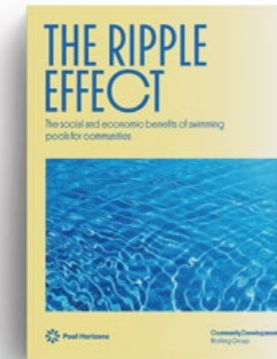
These four horizons weave together into an interconnected network, stretching from individual actions to community impact and further, shaping our global environment.

The Pool Horizons working groups, organized around these themes, have presented their conclusions in four reports, of which this is one.



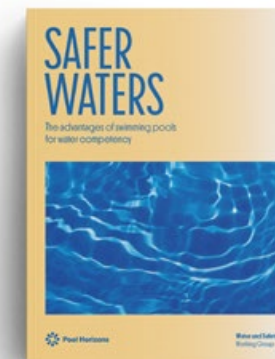
Making a Splash

The positive impact of swimming pools on health and wellbeing



The Ripple Effect

The social and economic benefits of swimming pools as community spaces



Safer Waters

The advantages of swimming pools for water competency



Keep Swimming

The present and future of swimming pools and sustainability

This report explores the transformative role of swimming pools as community hubs, emphasizing their power to shape and unify communities. Beyond offering recreation, pools can foster a sense of belonging and help build a more inclusive social fabric.

By presenting evidence-based insights, this report underscores the social and economic benefits of swimming pools, offering a strategic path for the swimming pool industry to expand access and enrich community life on a global scale.



The swimming pool industry's commitment to community development

Throughout history, water has drawn people together, forming spaces where life thrives and society takes shape. The swimming pool industry is the modern steward of this ancient relationship, shaping how communities interact with water today.

Swimming pools have always been places where health, relaxation and social bonds are nurtured. They echo the role of ancient public baths - spaces where Greek philosophers and Roman citizens once gathered, not just to cleanse, but also to connect, reflect and exchange ideas.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, as cities grew and industrialization reshaped daily life, swimming pools - both public and private, community and family - began to emerge as essential spaces for recreation and health. While access was often initially limited, pools gradually opened to broader segments of society, becoming vibrant hubs in urban neighbourhoods and in rural towns and villages. These spaces offered **a chance for people of diverse backgrounds to connect, share experiences and build community.** The growth of both public and private pools marked a pivotal expansion in the swimming pool industry, driven by a vision that the benefits of water and leisure should extend across all areas and communities.

Today, this mission endures, though the challenges have evolved. In a digital age frequently marked by social isolation, swimming pools remain physical spaces of connection, where people can experience the joy of water and the simple act of being together. The industry now embraces urgent imperatives such as the need to be more inclusive, accessible and sustainable. The core purpose of the swimming pool industry remains unchanged: to provide spaces where individuals find health, communities find unity, and society finds common ground.

The modern swimming pool is far more than just a recreational facility. It is a place where history, health and community come together; a space where the promise of water continues to refresh, to heal and to bring people closer in a shared experience. As long as the industry remains committed to this vision, the story of water and community will keep flowing, touching lives far beyond the pool's edge.

THE BENEFITS OF SWIMMING POOLS FOR COMMUNITIES

Swimming pools serve as more than just places for recreation; they are dynamic spaces that can help shape the wellbeing and vitality of communities. They offer havens for exercise and relaxation, while also acting as gathering spots that strengthen social ties and elevate quality of life. In these waters, people find both respite and connection, fostering a sense of belonging that transcends age and background.



A global phenomon with cultural diferences

Being in and around water holds significant cultural value around the world, weaving into traditions and everyday life. From Japan's tranquil hot springs, where people gather to rejuvenate in mineral-rich waters, to Australia's vibrant beach culture, characterized by sun-drenched shores and a love for outdoor activities, swimming is much more than a mere pastime. It is an indispensable activity that supports physical fitness and mental relaxation, while also strengthening community ties as families and friends come together for pool parties, beach outings and swimming events, fostering a sense of belonging.

While swimming is universally cherished, the cultural expressions of this activity vary widely around the world.



Australia A nation of swimmers

Australia is renowned for its strong swimming culture, in part due to its extensive coastline and warm climate. Swimming is ingrained in the Australian way of life, extending beyond recreation to become a national identity. The country is home to numerous Olympic swimmers and its beaches are world-famous. Community and family swimming pools play an integral role in this aquatic culture, providing safe venues for people to learn to swim, train and enjoy water activities away from the potentially hazardous ocean surf.

Swimming lessons are a regular part of the school curriculum in Australia, ensuring that most children acquire this essential life skill. Community pools host swim meets, water polo games and various aquatic sports, making them key centres of local culture. These facilities are particularly important in inland areas where access to the coast is limited (Royal Life Saving Australia, 2021a).

A 2021 study by Royal Life Saving Australia highlighted the significance of the national aquatic industry in terms of social, economic and health contributions. Their findings underscored the pivotal role of swimming in Australian life (Royal Life Saving Australia, 2021b).

Japan The tradition of onsen and sento

In Japan, water is deeply tied to traditions of purification and relaxation, forming an essential part of the cultural landscape. This connection is most evident in the longstanding practice of communal bathing, with onsen (natural hot springs) and sento (public bathhouses) playing a central role for centuries. These bathhouses are more than just places for cleansing; they are crucial social spaces where people of all ages come together, promoting relaxation and social cohesion.

Though onsen remains a more traditional practice, swimming pools have become increasingly popular in urban areas of Japan. These pools provide modern venues for exercise, leisure and community activities, complementing the cultural emphasis on water's rejuvenating properties. Swimming has also become an integral part of Japan's education system. Since the 1960s, the Japanese government has actively supported swimming education by building pools in almost every elementary and junior school. Today, there are over 26,700 pools across the nation's 29,412 educational institutions, reaching nearly 80% of schools (Saskawa Sports Foundation, 2024).

This widespread availability has made swimming the most popular after-school activity for children aged 4 to 11, further embedding it into the fabric of Japanese life (Saskawa Sports Foundation, 2024).

North America

A melting pot of swimming cultures

In the United States and Canada, the significance of swimming pools reflects the country's diverse population and vast geography. Public pools are central to community life, especially in suburban neighbourhoods where they become hubs of social interaction during the hot summer months. These pools host a range of activities, including swimming lessons, community events and competitive swim meets.

Competitive swimming has a prominent place in American culture, producing world-renowned Olympians such as Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky. Their success highlights how swimming can evoke national pride and strengthen community bonds. Organizations such as the YMCA or U.S. Masters Swimming network have historically been instrumental in providing affordable swimming access, contributing to both physical wellbeing and social cohesion.

In states with extensive stretches of popular coastal beaches, such as Florida and California, swimming pools offer a safer environment for residents to develop essential swimming skills, enabling them to better enjoy their natural surroundings. In these regions, pools play an important role in teaching water safety, which is essential given the increased exposure to water (California Department of Public Health, 2024).

Europe

A legacy of public baths and modern pools

Europe's connection with swimming dates back to ancient public baths such as Roman *thermae* and Turkish *hamams*. These communal spaces were more than places for hygiene; they were gathering spots where people met to discuss politics, philosophy and social matters.

Today, European cities maintain this tradition with modern public swimming pools, which serve as important community resources. In countries such as Germany, France, Spain and Italy, swimming is a very popular activity, with people frequenting local pools for exercise and relaxation (Eurostat, 2022). In Scandinavia, outdoor swimming, even in icy waters, is a common practice, reflecting the region's deep connection to nature (Jones, 2025).

The UK, with its long history of public pools dating back to the Victorian era, has used these facilities to promote public health, teaching generations to swim and maintain fitness (Tiltman, 2013). In many European countries, swimming lessons are mandatory in schools, ensuring that children grow up with strong swimming skills.

Latin America

A blend of recreation and competition

In Latin America, swimming holds both recreational and competitive importance, shaped by the continent's diverse climates and landscapes. Public pools in urban centres provide crucial access to swimming lessons, especially in areas where natural bodies of water might pose risks.

Countries such as Brazil and Argentina have a strong affinity for water sports, with swimming playing a major role. In Brazil, the warm climate and extensive coastline foster a beach culture where swimming is integral, from leisure at Copacabana Beach to competitive events (Torres Ordonhes et al., 2021). In Argentina, community pools are a staple in local sports clubs, where children learn to swim alongside engaging in other activities such as soccer and gymnastics (Filadoro et al., 2019). South American swimmers have also made their mark internationally, with athletes such as César Cielo from Brazil achieving Olympic glory (Olympics, 2024).

Africa

Creating a new wave of swimming opportunities

Africa's relationship with swimming varies widely across regions, reflecting both traditional water practices and the development of modern swimming facilities. In some parts of Africa, swimming in rivers and lakes has been a traditional activity. Access to safer swimming facilities remains limited in many areas. As urbanization increases, community and family pools are becoming more common in cities, offering safer environments for swimming, although many urban planning efforts in Africa often overlook the creation of aquatic facilities.

Swimming pools in Africa are often rooted in complex historical and cultural factors. The legacy of colonialism and the traumatic history of slavery have played a significant role in shaping attitudes toward swimming and water-based activities. During the colonial era, access to pools and beaches was often restricted along racial lines and these spaces were not made accessible to all communities. As a result, many regions did not develop a strong tradition of recreational swimming or public pools.

Today, the lingering effects of these histories mean that swimming facilities are often deprioritized in urban planning, with infrastructure needs such as roads and housing taking priority. However, there is a pressing need to include swimming pools in urban development (UN Habitat, 2014). Access to these facilities can promote water safety education, reduce drowning risks and introduce communities to the many health benefits of swimming (National Sea Rescue Institute, 2022). Public pools also have the potential to serve as important social spaces, fostering community connections in rapidly growing cities.

Integrating swimming into urban planning can help reshape access to these activities, addressing historical inequities and building a healthier, more active population. By making swimming more accessible, cities can create a positive shift that enhances the quality of life for all residents.

South Africa, with its extensive coastline, has a rich tradition of open-water swimming, both for recreation and competition. The country also has a strong history of Olympic swimmers. Swimming lessons are a part of many schools' physical education programmes. In landlocked regions, swimming pools serve as vital venues for teaching water safety and life-saving skills, helping to prevent drownings and promoting physical activity.

Middle East Balancing tradition and modernity

Swimming has a unique place in the Middle East, balancing traditional uses of water with modern developments. Historically, water has been a precious resource in the arid climate, with cultural practices centred on communal baths like the hammam. Today, luxury resorts and modern swimming facilities have become common in cities such as Dubai, where indoor and outdoor pools offer respite from the heat and are central to recreation and tourism.

Swimming is also an important aspect of physical education in many Middle Eastern countries. In coastal areas, such as those along the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Gulf, swimming in the sea remains a popular activity (Razan Baker, 2019). Public pools are increasingly seen as safer spaces for families and communities to gather, especially during the scorching summer months.



South Asia Water as cultural identity and modern recreation

In South Asia, water is woven into the cultural and spiritual fabric of life, serving as both a symbol of purification and a practical necessity. In India, rivers like the Ganges are not only vital resources but also sacred sites where millions partake in ritual bathing, believed to cleanse and renew. This deep reverence for water blends with a growing trend of urban swimming pools, where families gather for leisure, blending ancient customs with modern recreation. Schools are also beginning to offer swimming lessons, responding to a need for water safety education, especially in rural areas with natural but risky water sources.

In Bangladesh, rivers shape daily life and community, with swimming often learned informally in local waters—a skill essential in a land of rivers and frequent monsoons. Recently, programmes such as SwimSafe have emerged to formalize this tradition in safer, supervised environments, balancing the cultural connection to rivers with enhanced water safety (Fariya, S.K., 2023).

Sri Lanka's coastal communities share a similar affinity for water, where the ocean is central to both livelihood and culture, with fishing and ritual offerings shaping local traditions (UNDP, 2023). The beaches also attract recreational swimming and are seen as places where families connect. As urbanization spreads, efforts to incorporate swimming lessons in schools reflect a commitment to safety alongside the enduring bond that communities share with their waters.

Southeast Asia Tradition meets tropical waters

Southeast Asia, with its tropical climate and extensive coastlines, has a deep connection to water activities, from traditional fishing practices to modern recreation. In countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, swimming is a common pastime at beaches, rivers and public pools. However, open-water swimming in rivers, lakes and seas can be dangerous due to strong currents, seasonal flooding and unpredictable conditions, making drowning a significant risk in the region.

The growth of urban centres such as Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila has led to an increased demand for public swimming pools, providing safer environments for swimming. These facilities offer a controlled space where children and adults can learn essential swimming skills and water safety practices, reducing the risk of drownings. For example, initiatives to build more community pools in Jakarta aim to make swimming lessons accessible to urban residents, promoting water competency (Marthiara, 2022).

Beyond safety, these pools serve as social and recreational hubs, encouraging physical fitness and bringing communities together. As the popularity of swimming grows, expanding access to public pools across the region represents a key opportunity to improve both water safety and overall community wellbeing.

Fostering inclusiveness, cohesion and a sense of belonging

Swimming and other activities in and around water serve as more than a recreational activity in many parts of the world; they often play a fundamental role in fostering community cohesion, promoting health and supporting the development of identity.

However, historical and social inequalities, especially those based on class, gender and ethnicity, have often restricted equal access to swimming pools. These disparities stem from systemic issues such as colonial histories and economic inequities, resulting in limited water competency across many communities. This lack of access not only heightens drowning risks but also fosters a reluctance to engage with water, depriving these communities of the numerous physical, mental and social benefits that come from being in and around water.

This is particularly evident in countries like the United States, where data from the CDC in 2023 revealed that African American children aged 10 to 14 are more than seven times more likely to drown in swimming pools than their white peers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024a). Organizations such as Diversity in Aquatics and the USA Swimming Foundation are working to address this gap, striving to reduce drowning rates among historically underrepresented populations (Diversity in Aquatics, 2025).

Similarly, Australia's Closing the Gap strategy aims to improve access to services for Aboriginal communities, including water safety initiatives. Such efforts are crucial, as drowning remains a leading cause of accidental death in disadvantaged communities. The strategy focuses on providing services that are on par with those available to other Australians, addressing public health disparities in water safety (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

Community-driven initiatives have also emerged as powerful responses to these challenges. For instance, the Nile Swim Club in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, founded in 1959, became the first African American-owned and operated swim club in the United States. It arose in response to racial discrimination that denied African American families access to other swimming clubs.

The Nile Swim Club quickly became a vibrant social hub, offering swimming lessons, community events and a space where members could foster a sense of belonging (Colquitt, K., 2022).

In the UK, the Black Swimming Association (BSA) has been particularly active in promoting inclusivity within aquatic spaces, advocating for policies and practices that address the barriers faced by ethnic minorities. Their recommendations include offering culturally appropriate swimming



orientations, developing community resources and recruiting a diverse workforce in aquatic facilities. Such measures aim to create a welcoming environment for all, ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has the opportunity to participate in water-based activities safely (Black Swimming Association BSA, 2023).

The emphasis on community-based approaches to aquatic facilities is mirrored in other parts of the world, such as Australia, where strategic planning ensures that 89% of the population lives within a 20-minute drive of one of the country's 2,113 aquatic facilities (Royal Life Saving Australia & PwC, 2023).

Swim England's place-based approach emphasizes that swimming pools can serve as crucial community assets, offering spaces where people can gather, engage in physical activity and access services that support overall wellbeing. These pools contribute significantly to social value, particularly in deprived communities, where they provide a space for school swimming lessons, grassroots sports and family activities. They are often integrated with health and leisure services, serving as vital hubs for physical and social engagement (Swim England, 2023a).

Aquatic facilities thus play a key role in promoting inclusivity and social cohesion globally. They provide safe environments for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with water, improve their physical and mental wellbeing, and build a sense of community. By addressing historical inequalities and ensuring that these spaces are accessible to all, communities can foster a more inclusive and healthier future, where the benefits of swimming are available to everyone.

Enhancing social bonds and promoting better health

Swimming and aquatic activities are well known for their physical and mental health benefits, but they also play a critical role in building social bonds and fostering a sense of community.

In Europe, swimming facilities are often an integral part of urban life, offering spaces where people from all walks of life can connect. Cities such as Copenhagen, Paris and Barcelona have made significant investments in community pools, viewing them as being essential to public wellbeing (Vile de Paris, 2019). Swimming is often introduced at an early age through school programmes, ensuring that children learn water safety and develop a lifelong relationship with swimming. In Nordic countries such as Finland, these initiatives have significantly lowered drowning rates while also encouraging social interaction among children and their families (SHU, 2025). By providing accessible and inclusive environments, public pools in Europe contribute to reducing social isolation and fostering a sense of belonging within diverse populations.

Similarly, in the United States, aquatic programmes play a pivotal role in connecting communities, particularly through initiatives that prioritize access for underserved groups. The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance's Step Into Swim programme is a key example, focusing on increasing water safety education and offering swimming lessons to children who might otherwise not have access to them (PHTA, 2025). This programme reaches thousands of young people, helping to break down barriers related to race and socioeconomic status, while also promoting physical activity and community engagement.

In many urban areas in the USA, public pools double as community centres, hosting classes, events and recreational activities that bring people together. For example, during the summer, public pools in cities such as Los Angeles and New York become vital social spaces where families can gather, children can play more safely and residents can form bonds that strengthen neighbourhood cohesion (NY City Council, 2025).

The power of swimming to create social bonds is also evident in Latin America, where aquatic activities often reflect a deep connection to natural bodies of water. In coastal cities such Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, swimming is not only a sport but also a cultural practice that unites communities. Local swimming clubs serve as important social structures, offering a sense of belonging and pride, especially among young people. However, access to formal aquatic facilities can vary significantly, particularly in rural areas (Torres Ordonhes et al. 2021). Non-profit organizations and local governments have stepped in to provide swimming lessons in communities with limited access, teaching essential water safety skills and reducing the risks of drowning. These programmes not only save lives but also build social

networks and support structures, offering children and families opportunities for growth and connection (Filadoro et al., 2019).

In Africa, where access to swimming facilities can be scarce, the emphasis has been on teaching water safety skills in communities near rivers, lakes and coastal regions. Programmes such as Learn to Swim in South Africa have become crucial in reducing drowning incidents among children and adults, while simultaneously providing opportunities for social interaction (Vile de Paris, 2019). In Ghana, community-driven efforts have seen swimming lessons incorporated into school programmes in regions where seasonal flooding makes water safety a necessity (Vile de Paris, 2019). These initiatives build a culture of cooperation and mutual support, demonstrating that even in regions with fewer resources, swimming can play a vital role in strengthening community bonds.

Australia offers another compelling example of how aquatic facilities can enhance social cohesion and health outcomes, particularly in remote and indigenous communities. The Remote Aboriginal Swimming Pools Project has shown that pools can be more than just places to swim; they are community assets that improve hygiene, reduce infection rates and provide a safer space for physical activity. These facilities have become centres of community life, offering training and employment opportunities while fostering relationships among residents (Royal Life Saving Australia, 2014). The No School, No Pool policy has been shown to boost school attendance, highlighting the broader social benefits that come with having access to community pools. The Australian government's Closing the Gap initiative has further recognized the role of such facilities in achieving social and health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

Even in regions with established access to swimming facilities, such as Japan, the emphasis on swimming extends beyond individual skill-building to include societal wellbeing. Swimming is a key part of the Japanese school curriculum, reflecting a cultural understanding that swimming is not just a sport but also a life skill that promotes safety and social connection (Saskawa Sports Foundation, 2024). Community pools in Japanese towns and cities are gathering places for people of all ages, from young children learning to swim to older adults participating in water aerobics, fostering a sense of intergenerational community. This approach emphasizes the role of aquatic activities in maintaining social cohesion and promoting a healthy lifestyle across all age groups.

While the specific approaches and challenges vary from country to country, the evidence from Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, Australia and Asia points to a universal truth: the social benefits of swimming are profound.

Aquatic programmes help to break down barriers, offer pathways to inclusion and support the physical and mental health of individuals. As more communities recognize these benefits, there is growing potential to leverage swimming not just as a recreational activity, but also as a vital component of social infrastructure that strengthens the fabric of society. By investing in accessible aquatic facilities and programmes, communities worldwide can continue to build stronger bonds and promote better health for all.

Generating educational, training and volunteering opportunities

Swimming pools are invaluable resources for generating educational, training and volunteering opportunities within communities, serving as crucial centres for water safety education and professional development.

One of the primary educational roles of swimming pools is in water safety education. In many countries, such as England, swimming is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, ensuring that nearly all children have access to this essential training. Approximately 72% of children in England learn to swim through programmes facilitated by local swimming pools (Swim England, 2023). This model ensures that swimming education reaches a broad audience, teaching skills that can save lives.

In the United States, swimming pools play a similar role in promoting water safety. Organizations such as the YMCA and programmes supported by the USA Swimming Foundation make swimming lessons accessible to diverse communities. These efforts are crucial, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning by up to 88% for young children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024b).

Swimming pools are also important for offering training and professional development opportunities in the aquatic sector. In Australia, nearly all swimming facilities (98%) provide training for staff and community members, which includes lifeguard certification and swim instructor courses (Royal Life Saving Australia, 2021). This focus on training ensures that pools are staffed by knowledgeable professionals and provides pathways for community members to enter careers in aquatics.

In the United States, similar opportunities are available through local pools and community programmes. For example, the USA Swimming Foundation supports programmes that offer lifeguard and swimming instructor training, helping to fill vital roles in community pools. Many of these programmes prioritize recruiting young people from local communities, offering a pathway to employment for those interested in working in the aquatic industry (US Swimming Foundation, 2017).



In addition to formal education and training, swimming pools are a key source of volunteering opportunities. Volunteering at pools helps build a sense of community and personal development, allowing individuals to give back while learning new skills. Many pools rely on volunteers to support swim classes, mentor young swimmers and assist in organizing local events and competitions.

Research has shown that these roles are especially meaningful: 90% of volunteers in swimming programmes report a sense of accomplishment, while 84% find the experience enjoyable (Swim England, 2019).

In England, more than 35,000 volunteers support Swim England-affiliated clubs (Swim England, 2019). The United States also has a strong tradition of volunteerism. The YMCA, for instance, relies heavily on volunteers for many of its swim programmes, providing opportunities for parents, former competitive swimmers and community members to contribute.

Swimming pools also serve as important training centres, offering courses and certifications for lifeguards, swimming instructors and aquatic fitness coaches. These training programmes help build a skilled workforce, creating job opportunities and fostering professional growth within the aquatic sector.

Creating job opportunities and boosting the local economy

Swimming pools have the potential to create job opportunities and stimulate local economies through their contributions to the leisure, tourism and sports sectors. The economic impact of the aquatic industry can be observed through job creation, income generation and support for ancillary businesses, benefitting entire communities.

In Australia, the swim and aquatic industry is a significant economic driver, with over 65,000 workers employed across different roles, such as lifeguards, swim instructors and facility managers. According to the 2023 National Aquatic Industry Workforce Report by Royal Life Saving Australia, the sector generates AU\$2.8 billion (US\$1.8 billion) in gross value added to the national GDP. This figure includes AU\$1.4 billion (US\$1 billion) from direct operations of aquatic facilities and another AU\$1.4 billion from indirect impacts, such as the purchase of goods and services from related industries such as equipment manufacturers and utility services. The workforce is diverse, with 58% of employees being women and 4% coming from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. The industry relies on a mix of full-time, part-time and casual workers, with around 42% of the workforce employed full-time (Royal Life Saving Australia & PwC, 2021).

This impact extends beyond employment, as the presence of aquatic centres can stimulate economic activities in surrounding businesses, from local restaurants and retail stores to hospitality services. For instance, competitive swimming events contribute directly to local tourism by attracting visitors who require accommodation, dining and entertainment. The economic value of such events was estimated at AU\$4.9 billion (US\$1.8 billion) for Australia, showcasing the far-reaching benefits of investment in aquatic facilities (Royal Life Saving Australia & PwC, 2021).

In the United States, similar trends can be observed, with new aquatic facilities generating significant economic impact at both the local and regional levels. A study titled *How a World-Class Aquatics and Wellness Facility in Bellevue Benefits the Local Economy* analysed the economic contributions of a proposed aquatic centre in Bellevue, Washington. It projected the creation of 70 to 90 full-time jobs during a two-year construction period, alongside US\$19.5 million in wages and benefits over the first five years of operations. Additionally, the centre was expected to attract competitive swimming events, resulting in 12,400 room nights at local hotels, further supporting the city's tourism sector (Wang, 2020).

Another compelling example is the regional swimming centre planned for Niceville, Okaloosa County, Florida. This project, which involves an investment of US\$15 to 20 million for an Olympic-sized swimming pool, is expected to yield an economic impact of US\$235 million by 2035, creating more than 450 jobs during the construction and operational phases. As the first facility of its kind in the southeastern United States, the centre aims to become a hub for major swimming events and a training destination for athletes, drawing visitors from Florida, Alabama and Tennessee. The influx of visitors is anticipated to boost local businesses, from hotels and restaurants to recreational services, significantly contributing to the regional economy (Bestor, 2023).

The potential of swimming pools to stimulate economic growth is not limited to urban areas; rural communities can also benefit. Studies have highlighted the role of aquatic leisure centres in revitalizing economically challenged regions. For example, the Paradise Cove Aquatic Centre in Madison County, Kentucky, serves as a model for how such facilities can drive economic development in rural America. Since its opening, Paradise Cove has generated an economic impact of over US\$1 million, creating more than 16 jobs and bolstering tourism. The centre has positively influenced various economic categories, including lodging, retail, dining and local services. As more visitors are drawn to the area, their spending contributes to local businesses, further embedding the aquatic centre's role in the region's economic ecosystem (Kilburn et al., 2021).

Similar investments in aquatic facilities have shown potential in other regions of the world. In parts of Europe, community swimming pools often serve as venues for events that attract visitors from neighbouring areas, thus contributing to local hospitality industries. In the United Kingdom, local councils have recognized the value of investing in community swimming pools as a way to stimulate local economies through job creation and increased visitor spending (UK Government, 2024).

By offering employment opportunities and serving as attractions for tourists and sports enthusiasts, aquatic centres can play a vital role in supporting local businesses and fostering economic growth. Whether in urban centres or rural communities, the construction and operation of swimming facilities create opportunities for job creation, community engagement and economic revitalization. With thoughtful investment, swimming pools can serve as valuable assets that contribute to the economic health of regions around the world.

Offering active recreational opportunities away from technology

In today's world, where digital screens and technology shape much of everyday life, people are often drawn to more sedentary lifestyles, leading to concerns about physical inactivity and social isolation. Moreno-Llamas et al. (2020) demonstrated that global physical inactivity has increased alongside technological advancements. Swimming pools play a unique role in offering active recreational opportunities away from digital technology; they are spaces where communities can gather, socialize and engage in physical activity. The presence of these type of spaces has become increasingly important.

Many city planners and local governments around the world recognize the value of swimming pools in promoting active leisure. In the United States, for example, the development, management and maintenance of community swimming pools often fall under the responsibility of Parks and Recreation departments. The Conejo Recreation and Park District (CRPD) in California categorizes parks to meet diverse community needs, from neighbourhood parks to regional centres. These parks often include swimming pools (CRDP, 2011).

Swimming ranks as a leading recreational activity in California, with more than half of the population engaging in it across the United States swimming pools are considered essential community assets (California State Parks, 2025).

One example of a strategic approach to developing swimming facilities is VanSplash plan in Vancouver, Canada, which illustrates how a city can use pools to enrich community life. The 25-year strategy aims to expand and modernize the city's aquatic facilities, based on input from local residents about their needs and preferences (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2017). This plan is rooted in the understanding that swimming pools offer significant benefits, including promoting water safety, providing injury-free exercise and creating opportunities for social interaction. By focusing on swimming as a form of active recreation, Vancouver is positioning itself to meet the evolving needs of its residents while emphasizing the importance of maintaining physical activity in a digitally saturated world.

Globally, the trend of investing in swimming pools is gaining momentum as cities seek to provide active alternatives to screen-based entertainment. In Europe, many urban centres have embraced the concept of outdoor swimming facilities, integrating them into city life. Examples such as the Badeschiff in Berlin, the Allas Sea Pool in Helsinki and the Skylagoon in Reykjavik show how cities are creating vibrant spaces where people can swim, interact and enjoy the outdoors (Canning, 2023).

As cities around the world seek to become more sustainable and resilient, investing in active recreational spaces including swimming pools is becoming a priority. These investments are not just about building infrastructure; they are about fostering a culture of health, interaction and wellbeing. By providing alternatives to technology-driven leisure, swimming pools play a crucial role in creating balanced communities where people can thrive both physically and socially. Swimming pools help strengthen the social fabric in a way that virtual interactions often cannot.

REVIVAL AND RENEWAL EATONVILLE, USA



Overview

Eatonville, Florida, the oldest Black-incorporated municipality in the United States, has a rich history dating back to its incorporation in 1887 by freedmen after the Emancipation Proclamation. As a historical community with deep cultural roots, Eatonville has faced significant challenges over the years, including economic hardship and limited access to recreational spaces. After nearly a decade of closure, the town's community pool was revitalized and reopened on May 25th, 2024. This project represents a critical investment in the social fabric of the town, providing a renewed space for fun, recreation and connection in a working-class neighbourhood.

Points of interest

- The population of Eatonville is approximately 2,500 residents.
- 79% of Eatonville's population identifies as Black or African-American.
- The revitalization was made possible through contributions from the swimming pool industry, local businesses and community members.

“The Eatonville pool is one of the social staples in this community. It is a magnet for the community members to come together, have fun and enjoy their life.”

“When you think about a dying pool, you're almost making that synonymous with a dying community. For me, reviving the pool would also be reviving the community.”

Angie Gardner, Mayor of Eatonville

Conclusions

The reopening of the Eatonville Pool illustrates the profound impact that community-focused projects can have on social cohesion and revitalization. By restoring a cherished local space, Eatonville has not only enhanced recreational opportunities but also reaffirmed a sense of pride and unity among its residents. This case study highlights how investing in community infrastructure can breathe new life into neighbourhoods, creating lasting benefits for both individuals and the collective spirit of the community.



BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SWIMMING POOLS

A closer look at the obstacles that hinder access to swimming pools and the solutions that can break down these barriers, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable aquatic experience for all.



Economic barriers: Cost of access and equipment

Swimming pools are valuable community assets that offer numerous physical, mental and social benefits. However, economic barriers, including the cost of access and the necessary equipment, can limit the ability of many individuals and families to enjoy these benefits. **Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing effective strategies to make swimming more accessible to all.**

The cost of access: Entry fees and memberships

One of the economic barriers to accessing swimming pools is the cost of entry. Public community pools often charge admission fees, which, while generally lower than private facilities, can still be prohibitive for low-income families. According to a 2019 report by the US National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the average daily admission fee for a community pool in the United States was around US\$5 to US\$10 per person, while monthly memberships ranged from US\$20 to US\$60 per person (Crompton, 2019). These costs can add up quickly, especially for larger families, making regular visits to the pool unaffordable.

In countries such as the United Kingdom, the cost of swimming at public pools has also risen. The BBC reported that, in some areas, the cost of an adult swim has increased by over 50% in the past decade, making it difficult for those on a tight budget to afford regular swims (Palmer, 2023). These rising costs are partly due to increasing operational expenses, such as staffing, maintenance and energy costs (Swim England, 2023c).

Equipment costs: Swimsuits, goggles and swimming caps

The cost of swimming equipment can also present an economic barrier. While swimming is generally less expensive than some other sports, essential items including swimsuits, goggles and caps can still strain household budgets, especially for families with multiple children who require replacements as they grow. For low-income families, these recurring expenses can be particularly challenging. Competitive swimming adds another layer of financial strain, with specialized suits, training gear and competition fees further increasing the cost.

Socioeconomic disparities in access to pools

Socioeconomic disparities play a significant role in access to swimming pools. Communities in low-income areas often have fewer public pools, and those that do exist may be in poor condition due to underfunding. A 2017 study by the USA Swimming Foundation found that 64% of African American children and 45% of Hispanic/Latino children in the USA have low or no swimming ability, compared to 40% of Caucasian children. This disparity is largely attributed to a lack of access to pools and swimming lessons in minority communities (USA Swimming, 2017).

In some cases, transportation costs can also be a barrier. Low-income families may not have access to a vehicle or may live far from public pools, making it difficult and expensive to reach a facility. Public transportation may not always be a viable option, especially in suburban or rural areas where public transit is limited.

Proposed solutions to mitigate economic barriers

Addressing these economic barriers requires a multifaceted approach involving policy changes, community initiatives and partnerships with the private sector.

- **Investment in community pools.** Governments and local authorities should prioritize the construction and maintenance of public swimming pools, especially in low-income and minority communities. Ensuring that pools are well-maintained and safe can encourage more frequent use and enhance community engagement.
- **Subsidised access programmes.** Local governments and community organisations could offer subsidized or free access to public pools for low-income families. Programmes like the USA YMCA's 'Open Doors' initiative provide discounted memberships based on income, making it more affordable for families to use swimming facilities.
- **Sliding scale admission fees.** Implementing sliding scale fees based on household income can help ensure that everyone has access to public swimming pools, regardless of their financial situation.
- **Free or low-cost swimming lessons.** Providing free or low-cost swimming lessons, especially in underserved communities, can help address disparities in swimming ability and reduce the risk of drowning. Partnerships with non-profits and government grants can help fund these programmes.
- **Equipment donation programmes.** Establishing equipment donation programmes where little used swimsuits, goggles and swimming caps are collected and redistributed to families in need can reduce the financial burden of purchasing swimming gear.
- **Transportation assistance.** Offering transportation vouchers or organizing shuttle services to and from public pools can help mitigate the barrier of access for those who live far from facilities or do not have reliable transportation.
- **Public awareness campaigns.** Educating communities about the importance of swimming for health and safety, and informing them of available resources and assistance programmes, can increase participation and support for public pools.
- **Corporate and philanthropic sponsorships.** Encouraging local businesses and philanthropists to sponsor community pools or swimming programmes can help offset costs and keep fees low for users. Corporate sponsorships can also fund special events, swimming lessons and facility upgrades.

Economic barriers can restrict access to swimming pools for many individuals and families. However, by tackling these obstacles through targeted programmes, policy reforms and community support, access to swimming can be enhanced for everyone, ensuring that all community members can enjoy the numerous benefits that swimming pools offer.

Social barriers: Cultural perceptions and inclusivity

Social barriers, including cultural perceptions and inclusivity challenges, can also limit access for specific groups. **These obstacles are often deeply entrenched in historical contexts, cultural norms and social inequalities.** Understanding and addressing these issues is crucial to ensure that all individuals can enjoy the benefits of swimming.

Cultural perceptions and historical context

Cultural perceptions surrounding swimming can act as significant barriers to access. In some cultures, swimming is not traditionally valued or practised, leading to a lack of familiarity and comfort with the activity. For example, in many African American communities in the United States, historical segregation and exclusion from public swimming pools have contributed to a generational fear or mistrust of water-based activities. Jeff Wiltse, in his book *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, explains how racial segregation in public pools during the 20th century led to a deep-rooted disconnect between African Americans and swimming, a legacy that persists today.

In some Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures, gender norms and modesty concerns can also pose barriers. Women, in particular, may feel uncomfortable swimming in public pools due to cultural expectations around modest dress or the potential for mixed-gender environments. This can lead to reluctance to participate in swimming, even when facilities are available.

Inclusivity challenges

Inclusivity remains a significant issue in many swimming facilities. Public pools are often not designed with the needs of all community members in mind, particularly those with disabilities, different body types or those from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, people with disabilities may find that pools lack appropriate access features such as ramps, lifts or specialized changing rooms (ASA, et al., nd). Additionally, individuals from the LGBTQ+ community may feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in environments that are not explicitly inclusive or where they fear discrimination (Swim England, 2018).

Moreover, there are often few culturally sensitive accommodations, such as women-only swimming times or swimwear that aligns with religious practices, which can discourage participation from various groups. This lack of inclusivity can make swimming pools unwelcoming spaces for many, further reinforcing social barriers.

Solutions for mitigating social barriers

To address these social barriers, a comprehensive approach that includes policy changes, community outreach and facility design is necessary.

- **Cultural sensitivity training.** Community pool staff should undergo cultural sensitivity training to better understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of the communities they serve. This includes being aware of cultural norms related to modesty, gender and body image, and ensuring that all patrons feel welcome.
- **Inclusive programming.** Offering programmes such as women-only swimming times, family swimming sessions and designated hours for LGBTQ+ individuals can create a more inclusive environment. Additionally, providing options for modest swimwear can encourage participation from those with religious or cultural dress codes.
- **Accessibility improvements.** Pools should be equipped with ramps, lifts and accessible changing facilities to accommodate people with disabilities. Additionally, offering adaptive swimming programmes and ensuring that pool environments are safe and welcoming for individuals with varying needs can enhance inclusivity.
- **Community outreach and education.** Partnering with local organisations to promote swimming in underserved communities can help break down cultural barriers. Outreach programmes that offer free or low-cost swimming lessons, particularly in minority communities, can help build confidence and skills among groups that have historically been excluded.

- **Policy and advocacy.** Advocating for policies that require public swimming facilities to meet inclusivity and accessibility standards can ensure that these spaces are designed with all community members in mind. This might include accessible pool designs and anti-discrimination policies.
- **Inclusive marketing and communication.** Marketing materials for swimming facilities should reflect the diversity of the community, showcasing people of different ages, races, genders and abilities. This helps to create a welcoming atmosphere and signals that everyone is encouraged to participate.
- **Partnerships with cultural and religious groups.** Collaborating with cultural and religious organisations is essential for pools aiming to better serve diverse communities. By engaging with local worship centres, community centres and cultural associations, community pools can create tailored programmes that resonate with specific populations. Such initiatives can foster a sense of belonging, encouraging greater participation and engagement from diverse groups within the community.

Addressing social barriers to accessing swimming pools requires a thoughtful and inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse needs of the community.

By implementing cultural sensitivity training, inclusive programming and accessibility improvements, public swimming facilities can become welcoming spaces for all. Everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the physical, mental and social benefits that swimming pools provide.



Geographical barriers: Availability of facilities in urban and rural areas

Swimming pools are essential facilities that provide a space for recreation, exercise and socializing. However, geographical barriers, such as the availability of swimming facilities, can significantly limit access to these benefits. The disparity in the distribution of swimming pools between urban and rural areas creates challenges that need to be addressed to ensure equitable access for all communities.

In the USA, rural areas are often underserved when it comes to public swimming facilities. A report by the CDC highlights that rural residents are less likely to have access to community pools, which contributes to lower rates of swimming ability and higher rates of drowning in these communities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

In Australia, the situation is similar. While coastal cities like Sydney and Melbourne have abundant swimming pools, rural and remote communities, particularly in the vast interior regions, often lack such facilities. The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia reports that people in rural areas are at a higher risk of drowning due to limited access to swimming education and facilities (Royal Life Saving Australia, 2024).

In the UK, rural communities face challenges similar to those in the USA and Australia. A 2020 report by Swim England noted that many rural areas have seen their public pools close due to funding cuts, leaving residents with few options for swimming.

Proposed solutions to mitigate geographical barriers

Addressing the geographical barriers to accessing swimming pools requires targeted interventions, including taking into account the unique challenges of rural areas.

- **Government and community investment.** Increased government funding and community investment are important for building and maintaining swimming pools. Public-private partnerships can also be explored to share the costs and responsibilities of developing these facilities (Royal Life Saving Australia, 2024).

- **Grant programmes for rural communities.** Establishing grant programmes specifically aimed at rural communities can help fund the construction and maintenance of swimming pools. These grants could also support initiatives that promote swimming education and water safety.

- **Promotion of community-led initiatives.** Encouraging and supporting community-led initiatives to build and maintain swimming pools can foster local ownership and sustainability. Crowdfunding campaigns, volunteer efforts and local fundraising can be effective ways to bring these projects to fruition.

- **School and community collaboration.** Schools in rural areas can collaborate with local governments and organisations to build swimming pools that serve both educational purposes and the broader community. This approach not only provides a venue for physical education but also creates a community resource.

- **Transportation solutions.** Providing transportation options, such as shuttle services to nearby towns with swimming facilities, can help rural residents access pools. Partnerships with local bus services or community organisations could facilitate this.

- **Mobile swimming pools.** Introducing mobile swimming pools that can be set up temporarily in rural areas could provide a practical solution. These pools can be transported and assembled in different locations, allowing communities to access swimming facilities on a rotating basis.

- **Utilising natural water bodies.** In rural areas with lakes, rivers or ponds, creating safe swimming zones with lifeguards and swimming lessons can offer an alternative to traditional swimming pools. These natural sites can be enhanced with proper safety measures, such as floating barriers and regular water quality monitoring.

Geographical barriers significantly impact access to swimming pools, particularly in rural areas where facilities are scarce. **Addressing these barriers requires a combination of innovative solutions, increased funding and community involvement.** All communities, regardless of location, should have access to the vital benefits that swimming pools provide.

Swimming pools as barriers:

Features that discourage swimming

Swimming pools themselves can inadvertently create barriers to access due to a variety of factors related to design, maintenance and management. These barriers can prevent individuals from fully enjoying the benefits that swimming pools offer, particularly those from marginalised communities, people with disabilities or individuals facing financial challenges. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that considers the needs of all potential users.

Physical barriers: Design and accessibility

Swimming pools are sometimes designed without considering the diverse needs of all community members. For individuals with physical disabilities, some pool designs can be particularly challenging. A number of pools lack the necessary features to accommodate those with mobility impairments, such as ramps, pool lifts or zero-entry points (sloped entries that allow gradual access). The absence of these features makes it difficult or impossible for individuals who use wheelchairs, walkers or other mobility aids to access the water.

Maintenance and operational barriers

Poorly maintained swimming pools can become barriers themselves, deterring use due to safety concerns or general unappealing conditions. Issues such as broken tiles, slippery surfaces, inadequate water quality and malfunctioning equipment can pose risks to all users but particularly to those who are already vulnerable, such as children and the elderly.

Operational practices, such as limited hours of operation, overcrowding or inconsistent enforcement of pool rules can also create barriers. For example, if a pool is only open during hours when working adults or school-aged children cannot attend, it effectively excludes a significant portion of the population. Similarly, overcrowded pools may discourage attendance due to safety concerns or a lack of space for individual activities like lap swimming.

Proposed solutions to mitigate barriers created by swimming pools

- **Implement universal design principles.** Swimming pools should be designed or retrofitted according to universal design principles, which ensure accessibility for everyone, regardless of age, ability or mobility. This includes installing ramps, pool lifts and zero-entry points, as well as providing handrails, non-slip surfaces and accessible changing rooms.
- **Regular maintenance and upkeep.** Ensuring regular and thorough maintenance of swimming pools is crucial. This includes routine inspections for safety hazards, maintaining water quality and promptly addressing any physical damage to the facility. Local governments and pool management should allocate sufficient budgets for maintenance to keep facilities safe and welcoming.
- **Extend and diversify operating hours.** Pools should offer extended and varied operating hours to accommodate different schedules. For example, offering early morning, late evening and weekend hours can make it easier for working adults and schoolchildren to use the facility. Additionally, special times should be set aside for specific groups, such as seniors, people with disabilities or women-only sessions, to ensure that everyone feels welcome.
- **Enhance training for staff.** Pool staff should be trained not only in safety and maintenance but also in cultural competency, conflict resolution and inclusivity practices. This can help prevent and address behavioural issues such as bullying or harassment and create a more welcoming environment for all users.
- **Community engagement and feedback.** Regularly engaging with the community to gather feedback on community swimming pools' operations, accessibility and inclusivity can help identify barriers and areas for improvement. This can be done through surveys, community meetings or suggestion boxes. Actively responding to this feedback can help build trust and ensure that the facility meets the needs of all users.

While swimming pools are valuable community resources, they can also create barriers to access due to design, maintenance, operational practices and social dynamics. **Implementing inclusive design principles, ensuring regular maintenance, extending operating hours, enhancing staff training, promoting cultural inclusion and engaging with the community can mitigate these barriers.** These actions will help ensure that swimming pools are accessible, welcoming and beneficial to all members of the community.

SWIMMING AHEAD

BRAZIL



Overview

For 18 years, the Swimming Ahead project, initiated by the non-governmental organization Instituto de Esportes (Sports Institute) has worked to transform the lives of underprivileged children in Brazil by providing access to swimming lessons. Focused on promoting sport, fostering healthy lifestyles and creating brighter futures, the project addresses Brazil's deep-seated social inequality by creating opportunities for children who would otherwise lack access to organized sports activities. Participants receive swimming essentials such as goggles, caps, swimsuits, t-shirts, towels and backpacks, all free of charge. These resources, combined with dedicated training, ensure that children gain valuable swimming skills and grow in confidence and self-esteem. The project mandates that children remain in school and adhere to programme regulations, emphasizing the importance of education alongside physical activity.

Points of interest

- The project has benefited over 8,400 children aged 7 to 12 living in socially vulnerable conditions.
- Currently, 570 children from three cities - Ribeirão Preto and Limeira (São Paulo) and Fortaleza (Ceará) - are enrolled in the programme
- Notable influencers such as Rafael Madormo, Executive Director of the Instituto de Natação Infantil (INATI) and International Swim Schools Association (ISSA) Ambassador, emphasize the critical role of such initiatives in bridging gaps in access and opportunity.

“We are permanently looking for people who share our spirit of support and desire to generate opportunities for these children. Our mission is to create new opportunities for children through sports.”

Edmilson Dezordo, National Coordinator

“Projects like this are extremely important in a country like Brazil, which has latent social inequality. They offer opportunities for integration to children who do not have the financial means to attend programmes offered by swimming schools. The impact on children’s self-esteem and their quality of life and safety is visible.”

Rafaele Madormo, ISSA Ambassador and Executive Director of INATI

Conclusions

The Swimming Ahead project stands as a beacon of hope, offering underprivileged children not only the ability to swim but also the tools to envision a better future. By merging the principles of education, sport and social equity, the programme exemplifies the transformative power of community-driven initiatives. Looking forward, Instituto de Esportes is eager to expand its reach, seeking like-minded partners to sustain and grow this life-changing programme. With continued support, the project aims to uplift thousands more children, nurturing healthier, more confident and resilient young individuals.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SWIMMING POOLS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The swimming pool industry holds significant untapped potential for fostering community development. Swimming pools are dynamic social hubs that can play an even greater role as spaces where people gather, connect and socialize. They create a sense of identity and belonging, promote better individual and collective health and wellbeing, and significantly boost local economies.



Social opportunities horizon

A new kind of social hub

Imagine a place where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities gather, connect and share experiences – a place that welcomes everyone, transcending generational divides, ethnic backgrounds, physical abilities, body shapes and more. Swimming pools can be vibrant social hubs, inclusive spaces where events and activities foster a sense of belonging. Picture families of diverse backgrounds coming together for lively pool parties, quiet evening swims and children learning to swim with confidence, no matter their physical needs. Envision seniors of all abilities embracing active lifestyles through gentle water-based exercises alongside people of all body types feeling free to enjoy the water. These inclusive spaces, filled with the rhythms of community life, help build stronger, more resilient communities where everyone feels they truly belong.



Inclusive spaces for all

A community thrives when everyone feels welcome, and swimming pools can play a pivotal role in fostering true inclusivity. Designing facilities that respect and accommodate diverse needs and backgrounds transforms pools into spaces where everyone feels they belong. Ramps, handrails and lift systems ensure that people with mobility challenges can experience the joy and freedom of the water. Designated times for adaptive swimming or therapy sessions make pools accessible for individuals with physical or developmental needs. Inclusive scheduling and facilities that consider religious practices, gender identities, and sexual orientations – such as private changing areas, gender-neutral restrooms and designated swim times for specific groups – allow everyone to participate fully. By embracing this broad spectrum of diversity, pools become welcoming havens that embody the true spirit of community, where no one is left behind.

Health and wellbeing

Swimming and being in and around water can be a powerful boost to both individual and community health and wellbeing. In a world where sedentary lifestyles pose health risks, pools provide a refreshing counterbalance. A whole suite of fitness options – water aerobics, swimming lengths and team sports, such as water polo – to name just a few, invigorate the body, strengthen muscles and improve cardiovascular health. Beyond physical benefits, pools can be sanctuaries for mental and emotional healing. Aqua therapy sessions, perhaps offered in partnership with mental health organizations, provide a peaceful escape for those seeking relaxation and resilience amid life's stresses. Through this vision, swimming pools evolve into vital community assets, promoting physical vitality, mental clarity and a sense of belonging that nourishes both body and mind. For further insights into the role of swimming pools and health and wellbeing, see the Pool Horizons Health and Wellbeing report: Making a Splash.

Economic opportunities horizon

Partnerships that elevate the local economy

Community pools can serve as dynamic drivers of economic growth, benefiting a wide range of local businesses. Beyond attracting residents and visitors, these pools generate steady foot traffic for nearby restaurants, cafes and shops. Events hosted at the pool create even more economic opportunity - local businesses gain visibility through sponsorships and the pool becomes a vibrant community hub.

Pathways to employment and skills

Swimming pools, both public and private, serve as powerful engines for employment across various sectors. Local community pools generate jobs for lifeguards, swimming instructors, maintenance teams and administrative staff, providing steady roles within the community. In the private sector, demand for pool construction, servicing and maintenance creates a wealth of opportunities for skilled tradespeople, technicians and contractors. Training programmes can further enhance these opportunities by equipping local residents with the specialized skills needed to build, manage and service pools, transforming jobs into viable, long-term careers. Seasonal and entry-level roles, particularly for young people, offer valuable experience and skill-building, paving pathways toward future success.



A future of connection and growth

The swimming pool industry holds a unique position in the nexus between community wellbeing and economic vitality. By becoming centres of social life, beacons of inclusivity and engines of local prosperity, pools can transform the communities that invest in them. These waters reflect not just a vision of fun and leisure, but a deeper commitment to building a world where people come together, support one another and thrive. Communities that embrace this vision are likely to see a future of stronger bonds and flourishing local economies - proof that the most profound change often begins in the simplest places.

A call to action for all stakeholders

Unlocking the full potential of swimming pools requires a collaborative approach that engages all stakeholders: policymakers, urban planners, real estate developers, researchers, pool owners and managers, community associations, NGOs, schools and local residents. Each of these groups can play a vital role in amplifying the benefits that swimming pools bring. By working together, stakeholders can enhance access, foster safety, promote economic growth and create vibrant community spaces that maximize the positive impact of swimming pools for everyone.

- **Policymakers and authorities** should integrate swimming pools into neighbourhood planning, viewing them as essential infrastructure for community health and engagement. Implementing policies that promote the construction and upkeep of public pools, allocating funds for swimming programmes and facilities and regularly updating safety regulations are essential.
- **Urban planners and real estate developers** are encouraged to consider pools as standard amenities in residential projects, designing them to be accessible, eco-friendly, and inclusive. By collaborating with community associations, they can help ensure pools are available to diverse populations, fostering inclusivity and community wellbeing.
- **The swimming pool industry** plays an important role in making pools accessible, designing features such as ramps, gradual entry points and handrails to ensure everyone can enjoy the water. By incorporating inclusive designs and sustainability-focused innovations, the industry can help transform pools into valuable community assets, fostering connection, recreation and wellbeing.
- **Public pool owners and managers** have a unique role in creating a welcoming environment for all age groups, backgrounds and abilities. Partnering with local schools and organizations to host community-focused events can help engage more residents and increase pool usage. Maintaining high standards of cleanliness and safety is fundamental.

- **Local community associations and NGOs** are instrumental in advocating for the benefits of swimming to local governments and businesses. By organizing events at pools, they foster a strong sense of community and provide essential gathering spaces. Offering scholarships or free swimming lessons to underprivileged individuals ensures equitable access to pool resources.
- **Schools** have an opportunity to integrate swimming lessons into their physical education curriculum, instilling valuable life skills in students. Utilizing pools for extracurricular activities and sports teams can make fitness accessible and enjoyable for all. Collaboration with pool managers for events and competitions strengthens community bonds through shared activities.
- **Researchers** play a pivotal role in studying the social, health and economic impacts of swimming pools. Sharing research findings enables stakeholders to make informed, evidence-based decisions that enhance pool facilities and their positive effects on communities. Innovations in safety and sustainability practices further advance public health and pool management.
- **Individuals** are encouraged to engage with local pools by participating in community events and programmes. Advocating for improved facilities and supporting pool initiatives can help build thriving community spaces. Volunteering to assist with swimming lessons or pool maintenance fosters a shared sense of responsibility and community spirit.

Each group's involvement is essential to harness the multifaceted benefits swimming pools provide to society, from promoting health and wellbeing to enhancing community cohesion.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

AUSTRALIA



Overview

In Australia, refugees and asylum seekers face unique challenges, including the need to learn water competency in a country where swimming and aquatic activities are part of everyday life. Life Saving Victoria (LSV), based in Melbourne, has created a programme that teaches members of these communities water competency and how to swim, giving them essential life skills and helping them to integrate into society. From there, a platform has been established to train them to become lifeguards, swimming pool managers and other posts relating to swimming pools and water safety, further enhancing their integration and active participation in their new local communities.

“When I arrived in Australia, I didn’t have any sense of belonging. I didn’t know what I was doing. The water has given me a pathway. If it hadn’t been for the water, if I hadn’t learned to swim, I don’t know where I’d be now.”

Ramzi Hussaini, D&I Project Coordinator, LSV

Points of interest

- On average, 288 people drown in Australia annually, with approximately 25% being individuals born overseas.
- Over 250,000 people have participated in LSV’s water safety activities since 2007.
- The programme has trained 370 pool lifeguards, 95 swimming teachers and 166 surf lifesavers.
- A study carried out by LSV with La Trobe University found that for every \$1 invested the programme, there was a \$14.85 return in social value.
- Similar programmes operate in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland.

“The statistic that I don’t know about, but which I am very proud of, is how many people didn’t drown or didn’t get injured over the last 17 years thanks to the LSV initiative.”

David Holland, D&I Community Outreach, LSV

Conclusions

Australia’s swimming and water safety programmes reflect a broad commitment to supporting diverse communities. By providing essential safety skills in a country where much of life is based in and around water, these programmes not only save lives but also build bridges between cultures, promoting a sense of belonging and community. This case study illustrates how targeted initiatives can transform challenges into opportunities for connection and growth, creating safer and more inclusive environments for all.



CONCLUSIONS AND BEYOND

In the vast tapestry of human history, every community has sought spaces that nourish connection, resilience and growth. From ancient gathering places to modern towns and cities, the quest has remained consistent: how to build environments where people not only survive but thrive together? The role of water in this – from lakes, rivers and wells to today's swimming pools – has always been fundamental.

Swimming pools are places of leisure and enjoyment, of sport and competition, of health and wellbeing. And they are spaces where communities come to life. They embody our innate desire to gather, connect and share experiences. A swimming pool is a mirror of society, reflecting both its tensions and its aspirations. In some places, the history of exclusion lingers, yet within those same waters lies the potential for reconciliation and healing.

This report has shown how swimming pools can foster social cohesion, offering a platform where relationships are built and a sense of belonging is nurtured. By creating spaces that are accessible and inclusive, swimming pools can help communities overcome past divisions and embrace a more connected future.

But this report is not just a reflection; it is a call to action. It reminds us that the essence of community is in shared experiences, in the simple act of being together, of splashing in the same water, of laughter and conversation echoing across a pool. As we look to the future, the swimming pool industry has an important role to play, not only in designing, building and maintaining sustainable and accessible swimming pools but also in shaping the very spirit of communities.

The future of community lies in spaces that bring people together. The swimming pool industry is nurturing the bonds that hold society together. In the ripples we create today, we shape the waves of a more connected, vibrant world.

The water is waiting. It's time to dive in together!

Pool Horizons envisions a future where swimming pools are at the heart of communities, playing a key role in fostering social bonds, providing friendship and support, fun and enjoyment, health, wellbeing and an active lifestyle.

CONTRIBUTORS

The knowledge and dedication of a diverse group of experts and collaborators have been instrumental in shaping this report, reflecting the strength of collective effort in advancing the future of communities with swimming pools at their heart.



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Bonnie Chong is the CEO and President of Anthony & Sylvan Pools, the leading builder of residential in-ground swimming pools in the USA. With over 400,000 pools designed and constructed in more than 15 states, the company is renowned for its commitment to quality and innovation. Bonnie joined Anthony & Sylvan in 2018 as General Counsel and later served as CFO and Chief Strategy Officer during the pandemic before becoming CEO in 2022. Prior to this, she was Assistant General Counsel at Draeger, Inc. and Senior Attorney at Sunoco, Inc. Bonnie holds a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, a J.D. from The George Washington University Law School and is an alumna of The Wharton School. She serves as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors for the National Alopecia Areata Foundation.



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Jill Rooks, a leader in enhancing Fluidra's customer experience across North America, is dedicated to quality and service. She founded Providing Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (P.A.T.H.), supporting causes such as women's health and swimming lessons. Collaborating with the Fluidra Foundation, Jill focuses on promoting water safety and swim education, particularly for children in underserved communities. Her efforts empower young lives, aligning with her commitment to give back and make a lasting impact.



Ed Accura

Head of Community Partnerships
Black Swimming Association (BSA), UK

Ed Accura is a multifaceted British artist known for his contributions to using various media to highlight the issue of diversity in the aquatics sector. As a songwriter, producer and filmmaker he has made significant strides in addressing important issues while inspiring change through his creative endeavours. Through his pioneering initiatives, particularly in creating the impactful Blacks Can't Swim film documentaries and co-founding the Black Swimming Association (BSA), Ed has been a driving force in promoting water safety and inclusivity within aquatic activities, shaping a narrative of transformation and empowerment.



Bruce Brooks

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Fluidra, Spain

Bruce Brooks serves on the Board of Directors at Fluidra, a global leader in pool and wellness solutions. With over six years as Fluidra's CEO, he led its integration with Zodiac Pool Solutions in 2018. Previously, he held leadership roles at Black & Decker Corporation, including Group Vice-President. As CEO of Zodiac Pool Solutions, Bruce focused on the residential pool market, revitalized its financial performance and guided its ownership transition from the Carlyle Group to the Rhône Group. Renowned for strategic vision and goal execution, he holds a Marketing degree from the University of Virginia.



Annalisa Colletto

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Annalisa Colletto is an Executive and Member of the Board of Directors at A&T Europe Spa, whose brands include Myrtha Pools and Piscine Castiglione. She has worked in the swimming pool industry since 1992, in both sales and marketing, where she has contributed to business development through building relationships with customers, guided changes and adjustments to product lines and implemented key marketing strategies. Annalisa has a degree in Chemical Engineering from the Politecnico di Milano.



Alison Cope

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National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI), South Africa

Alison Cope, born in San Diego, California, discovered her passion for swimming at a young age and began teaching stroke development to younger swimmers by age 15. After moving to Cape Town, South Africa, she ran her own swimming school for many years. Upon retiring, Alison volunteered with the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI), where she was trained to deliver water safety lessons in classrooms - a role she found deeply rewarding. In 2019, the NSRI began offering free survival swimming skills to the public at municipal pools. The programme has since expanded nationwide, with both volunteers and paid instructors, and includes establishing swimming schools in rural areas without facilities.



Elisa Fulp

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Elisa Fulp is Senior Corporate Counsel at Hayward Holdings, Inc., where she oversees employment issues, commercial contracts, SEC filings and corporate governance. She implemented Hayward's first contract management system, advises C-suite executives and drafts corporate policies. Previously, as Director of Legal Affairs at Joerns Healthcare, Elisa managed legal and compliance matters, advised the board and mitigated company risks. Her expertise spans government affairs, contract negotiations, litigation management and compliance programmes. Known for strategic counsel and risk management, Elisa plays a pivotal role in navigating complex legal challenges.



Craig Goodson

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Craig Goodson, President and CEO of UAG, has 25 years of experience in the USA swimming pool industry. After graduating from Jacksonville State University in 1997, he managed a small pool construction, retail and service company before transitioning to manufacturing and distribution. He spent 15 years with a leading pool manufacturer before joining UAG in 2018. As Vice President and later CEO, he has successfully doubled UAG's membership and sales since 2020. Craig's extensive industry experience and leadership have been instrumental in driving growth and innovation within the organization.



Dan Lawler

Chief Operating Officer
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Dan Lawler, Chief Operating Officer of The Amenity Collective in the USA, drives operational excellence and financial performance across the company's core platforms. With nearly 30 years in the industry he has expanded its aquatics division, American Pool Enterprises, into a leading provider of pool maintenance, renovation, repair, construction and management for residential, commercial and hospitality clients. With over 50 locations serving 8,000 residential and 3,800 commercial facilities, Dan has positioned the company as leaders in safety, employee retention and customer-focused solutions in the aquatics industry.



Miriam Lynch

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Dr Miriam Lynch is an instructional technology specialist and Executive Director of Diversity in Aquatics in the USA, championing access to aquatic sports in marginalized communities. Under her leadership, the organization has partnered with the American Red Cross and USA Swimming and contributed to the US National Water Safety Action Plan. Passionate about diversity, equity and inclusion, she focuses on increasing aquatic opportunities at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Miriam serves on several boards including the ZAC Foundation and International Water Safety Foundation. Beyond her work in aquatics, Miriam integrates technology to create inclusive learning environments in Fairfax County Public Schools.



Emily McNeill

Global Partnerships Executive
International Swim Schools Association (ISSA). Singapore

Emily McNeil is an association professional with strong leadership, operational and financial skills, adept at ensuring strategic goals are met efficiently by both staff and the board of directors. She has a lifelong passion for swimming and water safety, having competed at the national level in pool and open-water swimming. Transitioning from competition, Emily moved into swimming teaching and swimming school management. She now works with the International Swim Schools Association, where she supports the industry through professional development, advocacy and networking opportunities for swim school professionals. Her dedication to the field is evident in her commitment to fostering growth and collaboration within the swimming community.



Kara Meyer

Managing Director
+POOL. USA

Kara Meyer is the Managing Director at + POOL, leading the creation of the world's first water-filtering, floating swimming pool in New York City (NYC), USA. Since founding Friends of + POOL in 2015, she has overseen design and construction, built a network of over 100 educators, swimming instructors and scientists and advocated for safe public water access in NYC. Kara spearheaded NYC's first real-time water quality monitor and influenced policy reforms for water safety. Previously, she managed the U.S. representation at the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale and worked with Storefront for Art and Architecture in NYC, focusing on funding and participatory design. Her career emphasizes community engagement and innovative collaborations.



Kevin Post

Chief Executive Officer
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Kevin Post is the Chairman and CEO of USA-based Councilman-Hunsaker, leading the company with over 20 years of experience in the aquatic industry. His clients include municipalities, universities, YMCAs and waterparks. Kevin advances the industry by speaking at national conferences on sustainability, technology and risk management. Recognized in Aquatics International's Power Issue (2019, 2021) for contributions to pool safety and sustainability, he is also a contributing author to key industry guides. Kevin serves on the Boards of the USA Pool and Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) and the Council for the Model Aquatic Health Code (CMAHC) and holds leadership roles in PHTA standards committees.



Victoria Prizzia

Founder and Principal
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Victoria Prizzia is the Founder and Principal of Habithèque Inc. in the USA, a Womens Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certified cultural production and design studio creating immersive, impactful experiences that unite art and science to promote equality and sustainability. Since 2008, she has led projects for museums, environmental centres and public agencies, reaching millions across the USA and earning international recognition. In 2019, Victoria founded the Blue and Green FUND 501c3 to support water conservation, ecosystem restoration and renewable energy. With advanced degrees in critical and creative thinking, pedagogy and interpretive design, she lectures at universities and is dedicated to environmental conservation and public education.



Nicky Sloan

Chief People Officer
City Venue Management. Australia

Nicky Sloan has over 12 years of experience in the aquatics industry and currently serves as the Chief People Officer for City Venue Management in Queensland in Australia. She is dedicated to promoting water safety, particularly through teaching children to swim, and is passionate about the social value and community impact of the aquatic industry. Nicky holds leadership roles on several industry boards, including President of Royal Life Saving Queensland and board member positions with Aquatics Recreation Queensland and the Australian Swim Schools Association (ASSA).



Jillian Swift

CMO, Pool
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Jillian Swift is the Chief Marketing Officer for Pentair Pool, a company dedicated to promoting the safe and sustainable enjoyment of water. With 20 years of marketing experience, Jillian excels in driving customer-centric initiatives, brand strategy, digital transformation and employee engagement. Before joining Pentair, she held leadership roles at Electrolux, where she contributed to significant growth and brand storytelling for major brands. Jillian also led marketing for PreGel in North and South America, establishing the company as a leader in the frozen yogurt ingredient industry. She holds a journalism degree from Ohio University and has a diverse background in both B2C and B2B marketing across corporate and agency environments. Jillian is passionate about marketing, family, travel and culinary adventures.



Jeff Wiltse

Professor of History
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Jeff Wiltse is a Professor of History at the University of Montana in the USA and the author of the critically acclaimed book *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. An expert on social justice and racial inequality in sports and recreation, his research focuses on the social, cultural and political dimensions of public life in American cities during the 19th and 20th centuries. Jeff has published extensively on the history of swimming pools in the USA and the historical roots of contemporary race-based disparities in swimming and drowning rates.

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The Ripple Effect report, created by the Pool Horizons Community Development working group, highlights the role swimming pools play in promoting community wellbeing, social cohesion and economic vitality, contributing to improved health, offering spaces for recreation and reinforcing cultural identity. However, challenges such as financial barriers, cultural norms and limited access can restrict inclusivity. To overcome these obstacles, the report recommends strategies that include subsidized access, culturally sensitive programming and targeted infrastructure investments to broaden availability. It emphasizes the need for efforts from stakeholders to build resilient, inclusive communities where pools serve as central hubs for health, connection and economic development.