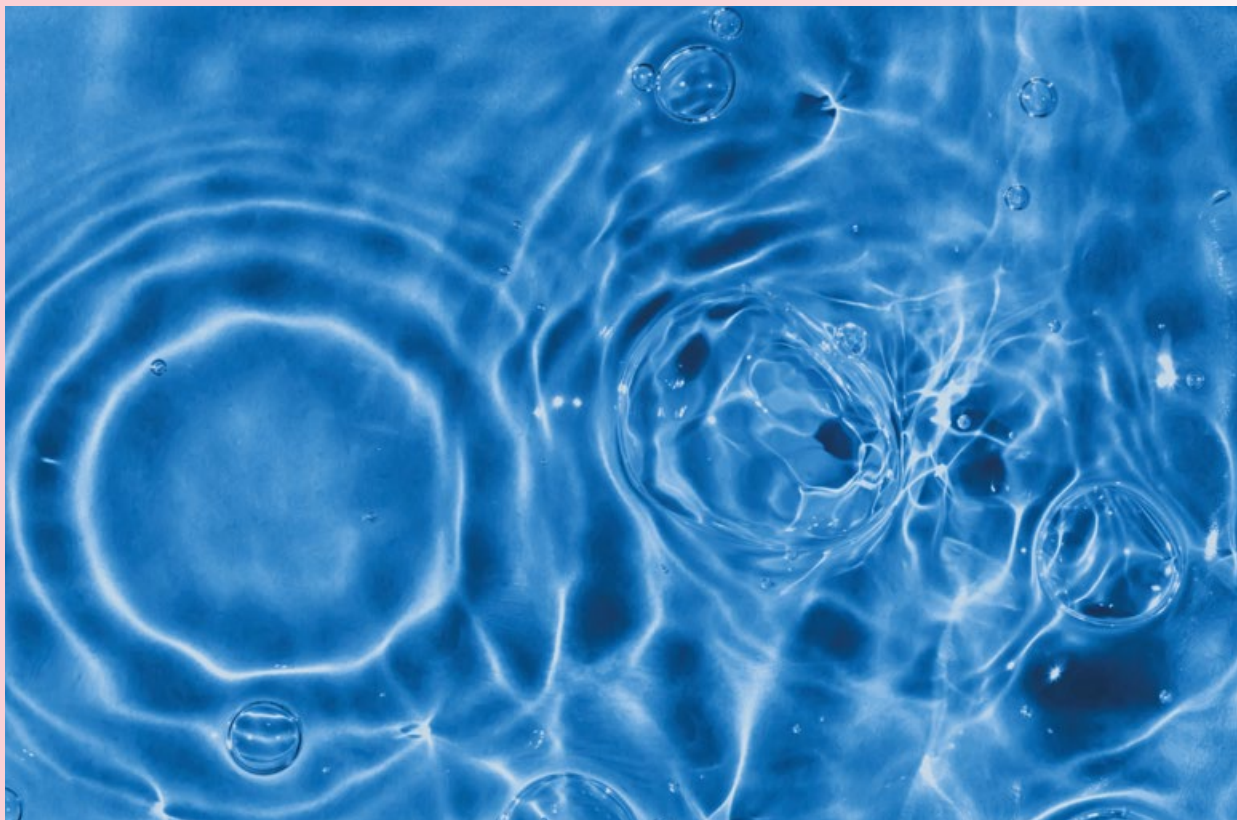


MAKING A SPLASH

The positive impact of swimming pools
on health and wellbeing



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on health and wellbeing

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President and Chief Executive
Officer
Gib-San Pools, Canada

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Kevin Holleran
President and Chief Executive
Officer
Hayward Holdings, Inc., USA

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Swimming pool industry leaders Ed Gibbs and Kevin Holleran emphasize the transformative role of swimming pools in fostering physical, mental and social wellbeing through innovation, accessibility and collaboration, shaping a future where pools are essential tools for healthier, more inclusive communities worldwide.

Pools and people: A vision of health and wellbeing

I have been designing and building swimming pools for 44 years and love every minute of my career making people happy.

I was asked to lead the Pool Horizons Health and Wellbeing working group and have had the privilege of collaborating closely with professionals from across the swimming pool industry and the wider ecosystem. I am excited to present Making a Splash, the Pool Horizons Health and Wellbeing report. This report is a culmination of the combined efforts, vision and expertise of our dedicated group, whose mission is to harness the transformative power of aquatic environments for improved health and wellbeing of everyone.

Our objectives are clear: to promote the physical, mental and social benefits of swimming and aquatic activity, enhance safety and accessibility, and position swimming pools as essential tools in fostering healthier communities. This work is not just about pools: it's about people; it's about ensuring everyone understands the life enhancing benefits of immersion in water.

The swimming pool industry is uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in the broader health and wellbeing space. By aligning our products, services and innovations with public health goals, we can meet the growing demand for wellbeing solutions while strengthening our industry's relevance and impact worldwide.

My vision for the swimming pool industry is one where every pool is recognized as a wellbeing sanctuary, a hub for physical fitness, a haven for mental relaxation and a space where individuals of all ages and abilities can thrive. By fostering collaboration and innovation, we can continue to lead the way in making health and wellbeing an integral part of our industry's identity.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the incredible participants of this initiative. Your dedication, passion and expertise have been the driving force behind this report.

Together we are shaping the future of our industry, ensuring swimming pools are the cornerstone of health and wellbeing everywhere.

Ed Gibbs

President and CEO, Gib-San Pools
Canada



Embracing the future: Swimming pools for health, happiness and inclusion

When I think about the past and future of our industry, I am reminded of why swimming pools have always been catalysts for health, happiness and connection; spaces where individuals and families create lifelong memories while also nurturing their physical and mental wellbeing.

As CEO of Hayward Holdings, Inc., I have had the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of innovation in our field. From advanced technologies that make pools more sustainable to designs that emphasize accessibility, our industry has never been better prepared to meet the challenges of today's world. But with this opportunity comes responsibility.

Pool Horizons represents a visionary approach to this responsibility. It challenges us to view pools not merely as products but as platforms for enhancing public health, fostering inclusivity and building resilient communities. At Hayward, we are proud to support the Pool Horizons initiative, which aligns with our belief that swimming pools are essential elements of better lives, that water is not just a source of enjoyment but also a cornerstone of holistic wellbeing.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the contributors to this report for their unwavering dedication. The report demonstrates how swimming pools can address some of the most pressing issues of our time - sedentary lifestyles, mental health struggles and social disconnection - through thoughtful design, innovative programming and strategic partnerships.

By embracing collaboration and innovation, we are not just building pools, we are building opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to thrive. The work we do today will ripple outward, creating a legacy that will impact generations to come.

Kevin Holleran

President and CEO, Hayward Holdings, Inc.
USA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report envisions a future where swimming pools are integral to public health strategies, fostering healthier, more connected people and communities through collaboration and innovation.

The Making a Splash report explores the evolving role of swimming pools as essential resources for community wellbeing. It argues that swimming pools, traditionally seen as leisure spaces, can be reimagined as pillars of physical, mental and social wellbeing.

The report emphasizes the diverse health benefits of swimming, including improvements in cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and mental resilience. Through activities such as aquatic therapy and water sports, swimming becomes a key strategy in managing chronic conditions and promoting overall wellbeing, offering accessible exercise opportunities for those with mobility limitations.

Swimming pools also play a significant role in strengthening community ties, providing spaces where social connections thrive. Group swimming activities foster community cohesion and reduce social isolation, underscoring the importance of inclusive and accessible aquatic environments. This report identifies barriers to accessing swimming facilities, such as economic challenges, social stigma, and geographic disparities. Solutions proposed include designing inclusive pools, offering subsidies, and promoting community-led initiatives to expand access.

The report envisions a future where swimming pools are integral to public health strategies, working alongside healthcare providers to deliver holistic support for physical and mental health. Real-world case studies from around the globe illustrate how tailored programmes can enhance individual and community health and support vulnerable populations.

By aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the swimming pool industry can contribute to global health objectives, driving progress toward a healthier, more equitable world. This vision calls for collaboration across sectors to unlock the potential of swimming pools as central hubs of health, wellbeing and sustainable community growth.

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 cohesion and connection, and they can also play a fundamental role in the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

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.

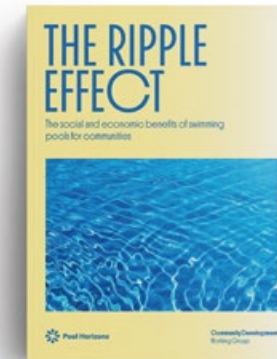
These four horizons weave together into an interconnected network, stretching from individual actions to community impact and further, shaping our global environment.

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



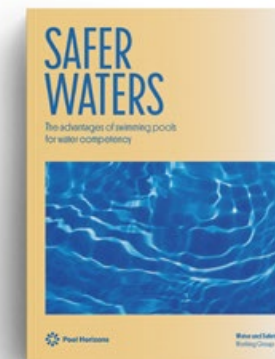
Making a Splash

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

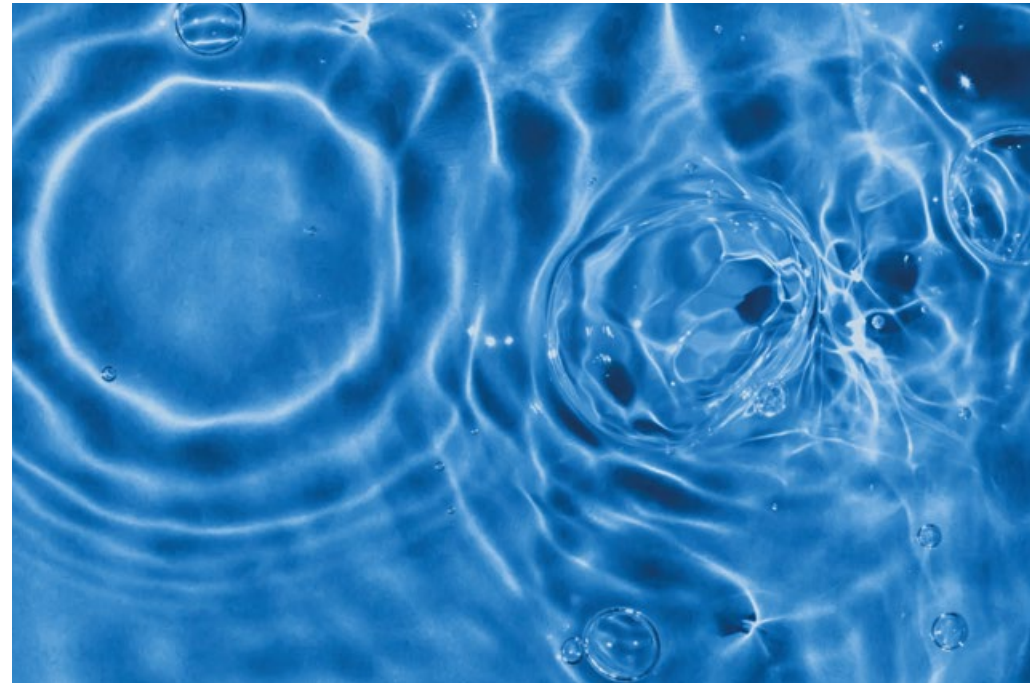


Keep Swimming

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 health and wellbeing

Swimming and other activities in and around water have long been recognized for their transformative effects on human beings, enhancing health, building resilience and fostering mental tranquillity. Ancient human instincts to engage with water harmonize with the vision of the World Health Organization (WHO) to promote physical activity as a shield against noncommunicable diseases.

The swimming pool industry is a key player in this quest for better health and wellbeing, providing spaces for the pursuit of physical fitness and emotional balance, helping to shape global progress in line with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing, whose mission is to “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.”

The commitment of the swimming pool industry to global development goes further, aiming to build healthier, more inclusive communities that transcend divisions of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background, while respecting the diverse needs of local populations, aligning with other UN SDGs, including Gender Equality (SDG 5), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11).

Through innovation, collaboration and a strong commitment to global health standards, the swimming pool industry creates spaces where both body and mind can thrive. This dedication extends to a larger vision of a world where the positive effects of being in and around water foster a brighter, healthier future.

THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

BENEFITS OF AQUATIC ACTIVITY

Swimming and being in and around water can play a vital role in boosting health and wellbeing at every stage of life, enhancing cardiovascular fitness, mobility and mental resilience. As global demographics change and lifestyles shift, aquatic activities offer powerful, low-impact exercise that fosters physical strength, social connection and holistic health within communities worldwide.



Context and approach

The importance of maintaining good health and wellbeing extends beyond a basic human right; it is a key element of personal development and a foundation for thriving communities. This includes fostering health across all life stages, from birth and childhood through to old age. To fully appreciate the role of swimming in promoting health and wellbeing, it is essential to explore global population dynamics, demographic trends and the evolving landscape of global health challenges.

As of 2024, the world's population stands at 8.16 billion, with an anticipated increase of 400 million by 2030. According to the United Nations, **the global population is expected to reach 10 billion by 2060.** However, the growth rate is slowing due to declining fertility rates, which means that a larger, ageing population will become more prominent. This shift leads to a rise in age-related diseases and conditions such as cardiovascular illnesses and dementia, especially in Europe, North America and parts of East Asia.

Urbanization and economic growth continue to reshape societies worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. As more people move to cities, physical activity levels often decrease while access to processed, calorie-dense foods increases. These changes, combined with the adverse effects of climate change, contribute to a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including cardiovascular conditions and respiratory ailments and mental health challenges.

The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study, conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), sheds light on the leading causes of death and disability worldwide. Cardiovascular diseases, particularly ischemic heart disease and stroke, continue to be the deadliest conditions globally (IHME, 2024a). Chronic respiratory diseases and neurological disorders also rank highly in terms of mortality and years of life lost. However, musculoskeletal and mental disorders, while less deadly, significantly impact quality of life over time, leading to increased disability and a reduced ability to participate in daily activities.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF THE GLOBAL BURDEN OF DISEASES (2021)

	PREVALENCE. NUMBER OF CASES (IN MILLIONS)	DEATHS (IN MILLIONS)	YEARS OR HEALTHY LIFE LOST DUE TO DISABILITY (IN MILLIONS)
Cardiovascular disease	612	19.4	32.5
Chronic respiratory diseases	468	4.41	26.2
Neurological disorders	2,870	2.61	71.1
Mental disorders	1,100	0.000232	155
Musculoskeletal disorders	1,690	0.119	159

Source
Own work based
on IHME (2024b)

Swimming and other aquatic activities offer a valuable solution for managing many of these health risks. Aquatic exercise can enhance physical fitness, improve cardiovascular health and promote mental wellbeing. For individuals with chronic physical or mental health conditions, swimming provides a low-impact form of exercise, allowing people of all ages to stay active. The buoyancy of water makes it especially suitable for those with mobility issues, as it minimizes joint stress. Additionally, the calming effect of water can alleviate stress and anxiety, contributing to improved emotional health.

A study by the Sport Industry and Physical Activity Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK, conducted for Swim England in 2023, underscores the positive impact of swimming on health and wellbeing. This literature review consolidated evidence from previous research, including the 2017 Swim England report on the health benefits of swimming. The findings highlighted that **swimming supports physical health, facilitates recovery from injuries and aids in the management of long-term health conditions (Swim England, 2023c).**

The review also noted the broader social benefits, such as improved self-confidence, social connections and community integration. In the United States, numerous local and state initiatives have leveraged swimming as a tool for public health. Programmes such as the American Red Cross's water safety courses and recreational swim classes in cities across the country aim to increase access to swimming pools and encourage active lifestyles. These efforts are especially important in promoting physical activity among young people, many of who spend long hours in front of a screen and face rising rates of obesity.

Physical health

The benefits of swimming extend beyond physical health, offering holistic improvements to personal wellbeing and contributing to stronger, healthier communities. **As populations grow and age, and urban lifestyles continue to change, the role of accessible swimming programmes becomes increasingly crucial.** By encouraging regular participation in swimming and aquatic activities, communities around the world can combat the rising burden of chronic diseases and build a foundation for healthier lives.

Swimming and other aquatic activities are excellent for overall physical health, benefiting the cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular, skeletal, nervous and digestive systems. Regular swimming improves cardiovascular fitness, aids in weight management and reduces the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers (Swim England 2023a). As a low-impact exercise that can be accessible and adaptable to many different needs, swimming is a valuable activity for promoting public health worldwide.

Physical health benefits and the role of hydrodynamics

The physical benefits of swimming are largely derived from **the unique properties of water**. Key hydrodynamic principles – such as buoyancy, hydrostatic pressure and viscosity – make swimming an effective form of exercise for improving physical fitness while minimizing strain on the body. For example, buoyancy reduces the weight placed on joints by up to 75%, making it easier for individuals with conditions such as arthritis or those recovering from injuries to exercise without pain. Hydrostatic pressure aids in improving circulation, which is beneficial for cardiovascular health. The viscosity of water provides natural resistance, allowing for strength training that can enhance muscle tone and endurance (Torres-Ronda & Schelling, 2014).

These properties make swimming an ideal exercise for individuals of all fitness levels. It is often recommended for those with limited mobility, as the water environment minimizes the risk of injury while still providing a challenging workout. The temperature of swimming pools, typically ranging between 27°C and 29°C, offers a comfortable environment for sustained physical activity.

Cardiovascular and metabolic benefits

Swimming has proven to be an excellent way to improve cardiovascular health. Engaging in regular swimming sessions **strengthens the heart, enhances lung capacity and helps to regulate blood pressure**. In the United Kingdom, data from Swim England (2023a) showed that swimming activities in 2022 helped prevent over 78,000 cases of conditions including coronary heart disease and stroke. Similarly, in the United States, swimming is widely promoted as a means of combatting the rising prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, which are among the leading causes of death. Public health campaigns often highlight the role of swimming in reducing blood cholesterol levels and maintaining healthy body weight (American Heart Association, 2024).

Swimming also plays a significant role in managing metabolic conditions such as type 2 diabetes. The combination of aerobic exercise and water resistance helps to regulate blood sugar levels, making it a preferred activity for those managing diabetes. Many community centres and wellness programmes in the USA and Australia offer tailored swimming classes to help individuals with metabolic conditions maintain an active lifestyle.

Musculoskeletal health and rehabilitation

Swimming is particularly beneficial for musculoskeletal health, providing an effective way to **build strength and maintain flexibility without the risk of overloading joints**. For people suffering from conditions including osteoarthritis or recovering from orthopaedic surgeries such as hip or knee replacements, swimming and other water-based exercises are often recommended. The buoyant properties of water allow these individuals to move more freely, reducing the stress on weight-bearing joints and facilitating a quicker return to mobility.

In countries with advanced rehabilitation programmes, such as the United States, swimming is integrated into many physical therapy regimens. Research has shown that aquatic therapy is effective in alleviating chronic back pain, enhancing range of motion and rebuilding muscle strength after injuries (Ma et al., 2022; Wilkins, 2017). This makes swimming an important part of comprehensive care plans for those with musculoskeletal issues, from Europe's ageing populations to athletes in the USA seeking to recover from sports injuries.

Support for age-related physical decline

As populations age globally, maintaining physical function becomes increasingly critical. Swimming offers **a safe and effective way for older adults to stay physically active**. It can help to maintain muscle mass, improve balance and prevent age-related declines in physical capacity. Studies indicate that regular swimming can improve gait and reduce the incidence of falls, which is particularly important for older adults living in countries with high ageing populations including Japan, Germany and the United States (Bherer et al., 2013).

The low-impact nature of swimming also helps older adults to maintain their physical conditioning without the risk of injury that may come from high-impact activities such as running. This is especially relevant in the USA, where community pools offer seniors a place to exercise safely, often as part of structured programmes designed for those with conditions like osteoporosis. These programmes emphasize swimming as a way of maintaining physical independence and improving quality of life.

Aquatic therapy for chronic conditions

Swimming and aquatic therapy are also highly effective for managing chronic physical conditions. Water-based exercises are used in the rehabilitation of conditions such as strokes, with studies showing improved mobility, balance and muscle strength among stroke survivors participating in aquatic therapy programmes (Illiescu et al., 2019). In the United States, where stroke is a leading cause of long-term disability, incorporating swimming into recovery plans has proven to **enhance physical outcomes, helping individuals regain their functional independence**.

For those with neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis, the resistance and support provided by water help maintain muscle tone and physical function. Similar programmes exist in Europe and Australia, providing access to aquatic therapy for people dealing with degenerative conditions. These initiatives demonstrate how swimming can be adapted to serve a wide range of physical needs, offering benefits that extend across different healthcare systems.

Cold water immersion and muscle recovery

Cold-water immersion (CWI) has emerged as a complementary practice to swimming, particularly among athletes. It is known to **speed up muscle recovery, reduce inflammation and enhance overall physical performance**. Studies have shown that CWI can significantly decrease muscle soreness after intense physical activity (Leeder et al., 2012). This practice is popular in countries such as Finland, where it has long been a part of sports recovery, and in the United States, where many professional sports teams use CWI as part of their training routines.

Cold-water immersion also helps improve circulation and cardiovascular function by causing blood vessels to constrict and then dilate, promoting better blood flow. This can aid in recovery from physical exertion and enhance athletic performance. These physical benefits have led to increased adoption of CWI in wellness centres and athletic training facilities around the world, reflecting its growing role in promoting physical health and recovery.

A global approach to physical health through swimming

Swimming is a globally accessible form of exercise that supports physical health across all stages of life. The scalability and adaptability of swimming make it an essential tool in addressing global health challenges, particularly those related to chronic diseases and ageing. As communities worldwide continue to promote swimming as a fundamental part of physical wellbeing, it holds great potential to enhance public health on a global scale, contributing to stronger, healthier populations across diverse regions.

Mental health and personal wellbeing

Swimming is widely recognized for its positive impact on mental health and emotional wellbeing, with research highlighting its benefits across diverse populations and settings. Studies show that **swimming can be a therapeutic activity for those experiencing mental health challenges**. For example, a study found that military veterans who included swimming in their therapeutic routines saw significant reductions in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, with improvements in relaxation and emotional control (Carless & Douglas, 2010).

Animal research has shed light on swimming's cognitive benefits, indicating that it can stimulate the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein vital for cognitive function (Radak & Goto, 2016). These findings suggest that swimming contributes to cognitive health by promoting neuronal regeneration and enhancing cognitive abilities across different age groups. This potential for maintaining mental sharpness through swimming has implications for diverse populations worldwide, offering a holistic approach to wellbeing.

Swimming is also known to boost mood through the release of endorphins, which act as natural mood enhancers. This effect, paired with improved sleep quality, makes swimming particularly beneficial for those dealing with depression and anxiety. Research has found that regular swimming can significantly alleviate symptoms of these conditions, leading to better overall emotional health (Stubbs et al., 2018).

The benefits of swimming extend beyond the pool, especially in natural settings known as blue spaces, areas near bodies of water such as oceans, lakes and rivers. Studies across multiple countries have highlighted the positive effects of these environments on mental health. For example, research in Canada suggests that living near water can reduce the risk of mortality from certain causes, such as stroke and respiratory diseases, particularly among older adults and women (Crouse et al., 2018). In Europe, a systematic review found that structured activities in blue spaces, such as outdoor swimming, contribute to improved psychosocial wellbeing (Britton et al., 2020). These findings align with the insights from Wallace J. Nichols' book, *Blue Mind*, which explores how proximity to water can foster relaxation, happiness and a sense of connection.



In the UK, the relationship between swimming and wellbeing has been extensively studied. A report by Swim England found that **swimmers reported higher life satisfaction, greater happiness and a stronger sense of self-worth compared to non-swimmers** (Swim England, 2019). Regular swimmers also reported lower levels of anxiety, illustrating the potential of swimming to support emotional health. The study highlighted that these positive effects were more pronounced among women and individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. It also emphasized the importance of regular engagement, with those who swam frequently experiencing the greatest improvements in their wellbeing (Swim England, 2023a).

Similar findings have emerged from other European countries, where outdoor swimming in natural bodies of water has been increasingly recognized for its mental health benefits. For example, in Scotland, research on wild swimmers has shown that regular swimming in natural settings including the country's iconic lochs fosters mindfulness, resilience and a sense of social connection (McDougall et al., 2022). These benefits contribute to a greater sense of wellbeing, as the act of swimming outdoors combines physical activity with a deep connection to nature.



Research from Australia and New Zealand has also emphasized the mental health advantages of being in or near water. Coastal communities in these regions often benefit from improved mental wellbeing due to easy access to blue spaces (White et al., 2020; Coleman & Kearns, 2015). For example, ocean swimming is popular in Australia, and studies suggest that it **helps reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress while fostering a sense of connection to the environment (Costello et al, 2019).**

In other countries, the concept of blue spaces is also increasingly recognized for its impact on community wellbeing. In Japan, for example, the practice of blue bathing complements traditional forest bathing, focusing on the calming effects of water to reduce stress and enhance mindfulness (Uchiyama, 2024). In Nordic countries, cold-water swimming is a cultural tradition that is associated with improved mental clarity and emotional balance. Participants report feeling invigorated and refreshed, highlighting the psychological benefits of immersing oneself in cold, natural waters (Jones, 2025).

The therapeutic potential of swimming extends to specific interventions. A controlled study demonstrated that swimming helps lower cortisol levels - a hormone associated with stress - thereby promoting relaxation and aiding in stress management (Larson et al., 2019). Such findings have broad applicability, offering insights into how structured swimming programmes can be used in diverse settings, from urban centres to rural communities.

In addition to formal programmes, the **family swimming pool serves as a personal space for emotional connection and relaxation.** Across many cultures, the pool is more than just a recreational feature; it is a place where family ties are strengthened, contributing to a sense of emotional security. From childhood memories of learning to swim to shared moments of joy with friends and family, these experiences foster a sense of continuity and emotional resilience. The family pool thus becomes a symbol of connection, where the simple act of being in water brings people closer together and helps create lasting bonds.

While the existing research highlights the many benefits of swimming and being near water for mental health, more studies are needed to fully understand the scope of these effects. Much of the current evidence is derived from smaller-scale studies or research focused on specific populations, which makes it challenging to generalize findings across diverse cultural contexts and age groups. Future research could explore how different types of water environments, such as urban rivers or man-made lakes, compare in their impact on mental wellbeing. Additionally, more longitudinal studies could help clarify how sustained exposure to water environments influences long-term mental health outcomes.

These examples from around the world underscore that the mental health benefits of swimming and being near water are not limited to any single region. Instead, they represent **a global phenomenon where different cultures and communities harness the therapeutic properties of water for emotional wellbeing.** Whether through community initiatives, therapeutic programmes or moments in a family pool, swimming offers a universal pathway to better mental health, providing relief from stress and creating spaces for emotional healing. By appreciating these diverse perspectives and continuing to study the effects of water environments, we can deepen our understanding of how best to integrate swimming and blue spaces into strategies for promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Individual and community development

Our holistic sense of wellbeing, fulfilment and self-realisation is deeply connected to our personal development and our relationships within a community.

One crucial aspect of swimming related to individual development is that it is a life skill, unlocking a world of possibilities. While much emphasis is placed on the importance of water safety and swimming skills to prevent drowning (as extensively discussed in the Pool Horizons Water and Safety report), research in this area remains limited (Swim England, 2023b).

A promising area of research is the exploration of **the relationship between swimming and various aspects of personal development, such as self-discipline, goal orientation, social skills, self-esteem and even the impact on personal identity**. These factors are closely tied to how individuals, particularly swimmers, thrive within a community, contributing to outcomes including academic success, employability and the development of pro-social behaviours. This underscores the strong social and communal dimension of swimming. While swimming is often seen as an individual activity, it inherently involves a collective experience - whether in indoor pools or outdoor settings - where space is shared, connections are made and social interactions occur with family, friends, peers and members of the broader community.

The social dimension of health has been increasingly explored, revealing that the quantity and quality of our relationships have a direct impact on our health throughout our lives. Swimming spaces are inherently social environments where people meet, interact, and experience diversity across various dimensions, including gender, age, race and health condition. These spaces foster horizontal connections and active participation, reflecting the cultural significance of swimming. Given its universal appeal and potential, it is essential that everyone has equal access and opportunities to enjoy the benefits of swimming, enabling individuals and communities to reach their full potential.

Group swimming has been shown to foster social connections and strengthen community bonds. Research has shown that group swimming promotes team spirit, cooperation and mutual support (Heuser, 2005). Participants in community or recreational swimming sessions often build strong social ties through shared experiences, which in turn contributes to a greater sense of community. Regular involvement in group swimming has been linked to increased social engagement, reduced isolation and the development of supportive social networks, providing emotional and psychological benefits by creating a welcoming space for interaction (Mutz & Muller, 2019).

Public health and socioeconomic impact

Swimming has a broad impact on public health and socioeconomic conditions worldwide. Beyond promoting individual physical fitness and wellbeing, **swimming significantly enhances community health, delivering measurable benefits to healthcare systems**. This impact has been extensively studied in countries including Australia and the United Kingdom, where the direct health advantages of swimming and its contribution to economic savings have been highlighted.

In Australia, research by the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSSA) has demonstrated the role of swimming facilities in reducing physical inactivity, which is a major contributor to chronic diseases. Swimming helps lower the incidence of conditions such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, resulting in significant savings for the Australian healthcare system, estimated at approximately US\$1.05 billion annually. Swimming also alleviates some of the costs associated with mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. This reduction in mental health issues translates to about US\$100 million in savings each year in Australia. Swimming also helps reduce workplace absenteeism, leading to an estimated economic benefit of US\$170 million annually and plays a vital role in drowning prevention, saving an additional US\$75 million each year.

TABLE 2

CONTRIBUTION OF THE AQUATIC INDUSTRY TO THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF AUSTRALIANS

AREA	BENEFITS IN MILLION US\$
Physical health	1,050
Mental health	100
Reduced absenteeism	170
Reduced drowning	75
Total	1,395

Source
PwC for Royal Life Saving Society, Australia (2021)

Similarly, the United Kingdom has gathered insights into the socioeconomic impact of swimming. Swim England's social value analysis estimates that swimming generates around US\$3 billion in economic benefits each year, primarily through its positive effects on physical and mental health.

TABLE 3 SOCIAL VALUE OF SWIMMING IN ENGLAND

SOCIAL VALUE	BENEFITS IN MILLION US\$
Physical and mental health	352
Wellbeing	1,776
Individual development	9
Community development	863
Total	3,000

Source
Swim England
(2023c)

Swimming and aquatic activities also offer significant public health benefits in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that swimming improves physical fitness and reduces the risk of chronic conditions including heart disease and obesity, which are leading contributors to the country's healthcare costs. For example, heart disease alone accounts for approximately one in every four deaths in the USA and costs the healthcare system over \$200 billion annually in treatment and productivity losses (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, 2024). The American Heart Association notes that water-based exercise, including swimming, can help reduce these numbers by strengthening cardiovascular health, aiding in weight management and improving overall physical fitness (American Heart Association, 2024). By reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety - conditions that affect nearly one in five Americans and cost billions in healthcare expenses and lost productivity - swimming provides a low-cost, accessible intervention that supports mental wellbeing, helping to reduce healthcare demands and promote healthier communities (Overbury, et al., 2023).

In Japan and Germany, swimming and aquatic activities are an integral part of public health strategies. In Japan, swimming is a key component of physical education in schools, helping to establish lifelong habits of physical activity (Saskawa Sports Foundation, 2024). This early exposure contributes to Japan's high rates of active lifestyles and longevity. In Germany, public swimming pools are often subsidized by local governments, making them more accessible and supporting community health. These pools offer programmes designed for various age groups, from children to seniors, ensuring that swimming remains an inclusive activity that benefits everyone (Portal München, 2025).

Overall, **swimming's contribution to public health extends beyond individual physical fitness. It helps reduce healthcare costs by preventing chronic diseases, supports mental wellbeing and fosters community development through social inclusion and improved safety.** Countries around the world can leverage swimming as a valuable resource for enhancing the health and wellbeing of their populations. By investing in swimming infrastructure and programmes, governments can achieve significant health benefits while addressing social challenges such as drowning and physical inactivity, building healthier, more resilient communities.



AI PERSONALIZING AQUATIC ACTIVITY



Overview

Over the last couple of years, artificial intelligence (AI) has made a huge impact on society and now seems to be everywhere. Swimming pools are no different, with AI now offering innovative ways to make aquatic therapy more accessible and effective. Good Boost, developed in the UK, uses clinically certified AI software to deliver personalized aquatic therapy programmes that people can access at their local pool. Designed for conditions such as chronic pain, arthritis, diabetes and neurological challenges, these programmes are tailored to each individual's needs and are easy to follow on waterproof tablets or smartphones at the poolside. In group settings, the technology allows participants to work at their own pace, creating an inclusive environment where everyone can benefit from customized routines without requiring one-on-one therapists. For many, this approach means improved mobility, reduced pain and the possibility of avoiding surgery or cutting back on medication. It's a practical way for public pools to support health and recovery in their communities, helping people return to the activities they enjoy and live with less discomfort.

Points of interest

- Good Boost has helped create therapeutic, wellbeing and rehabilitation services in over 200 swimming pools in local communities in the UK.
- Over 15,000 people have signed up.
- Good Boost is available in 9 languages.
- Over 60% of participants report clinically meaningful improvements in health outcomes.
- An average of US\$540 of social impact is created per participant in avoided health and social care costs.

“Good Boost gives participants something tailored for their health condition, which we’ve never had here before. We started with two Good Boost classes a week and are now at 13 classes a week. We’re really having an impact on local people’s health.”

Carolyn Brookes, Aquatic Manager, Jubilee2 Leisure Centre, UK

“I joined Good Boost classes to prepare ahead of a large surgical operation on my back. But when I went into the surgery, they said I didn’t need to have the operation, as the pain was almost gone.”

Linda, Good Boost participant

Conclusions

The integration of innovation and technology in swimming pools highlights the profound impact these advances can have on health and wellbeing. Tools such as AI-driven programmes and personalized therapies can make health services more accessible, reducing barriers to participation and tailoring support to individual needs. Swimming pools are evolving to offer ever more meaningful contributions to physical and mental health. Embracing such innovations ensures that pools can continue to play a vital role in improving quality of life for diverse populations.

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 most significant 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 (Burbach Aquatics). 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, 2023d).

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.

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 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. Additionally, individuals from the LGBTQ+ community may feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in environments that are not explicitly inclusive or where they fear discrimination.

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 legal requirements for gender-neutral changing facilities, 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 (Burbach Aquatics).

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.

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 crucial for building and maintaining swimming pools. Public-private partnerships can also be explored to share the costs and responsibilities of developing these facilities.

- **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 safer 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, traditional pool designs can be particularly challenging. Many 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.

WATER AND MENTAL WELLBEING

BARCELONA, SPAIN



Overview

Physical activity in water substantially improves the physical and mental health of people with serious mental disorders. Over a two-year period, Sant Joan de Déu Hospital in Barcelona evaluated participants in their aquatic mental health programme and found significant benefits. Activities such as swimming and water aerobics were shown to boost self-esteem, reduce feelings of social stigma and alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Participants also reported improved perceptions of their overall health, along with enhancements in personal care and the ability to manage daily tasks. Furthermore, engaging in water-based exercise within a community sports setting amplifies these benefits by fostering social connections and encouraging active participation in society.

Points of interest

- 435 people participate in the programme.
- The benefits are different for men and women.
- The study forms part of the global Thalassa project.
- The project receives the support of Fluidra and the Fluidra Foundation.

“Aquatic activities generate improvements in many areas in people with mental health problems, depending on their gender and diagnosis.”

Dr Susana Ochoa, Unitat de Recerca del Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Déu

“The project acts as a facilitator to address the limitations associated with mental health conditions and allows participants to gain autonomy, self-esteem and improve social interactions.”

Berta Garcia, Sant Joan de Déu Project Coordinator

Conclusions

The Hospital Sant Joan de Déu's aquatic programme demonstrates the powerful role that swimming pools can play in mental healthcare. By offering a space for structured water-based activities, the initiative helps participants gain confidence, build social connections and find a sense of belonging. This case study highlights the potential of integrating aquatic therapy into mental health support, providing a valuable model for other facilities seeking to combine physical activity with community-based care.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SWIMMING POOLS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

For swimming and other aquatic activities to be important motors for improving individual and collective health and wellbeing in the future, swimming pools need to be accessible and inclusive, attractive and welcoming. The benefits are clear: an enjoyable and cost-effective way to healthier, happier lives.



Personal health and wellbeing opportunities horizon

Society is grappling with a health crisis on multiple fronts, with rising rates of obesity, cardiovascular disease, mental health struggles and ageing populations that face increasing mobility issues. But where there is challenge, there is also potential for renewal. Swimming pools offer us an unparalleled opportunity to transform how individuals engage with their own wellbeing.

In water, we are freed from the constraints of gravity, enabling even those with severe physical limitations to engage in movement that would otherwise be impossible. The buoyancy of water reduces joint strain, making swimming a perfect solution for rehabilitation, prevention of injury, and the maintenance of physical fitness. But beyond the physical, there is something deeply soothing about the aquatic environment, something that helps people reclaim their mental equilibrium in a world that feels increasingly overwhelming.

Our vision is clear: swimming pools must become accessible sanctuaries for all. They should be places where individuals come not only to exercise but to heal, to find peace, clarity and resilience. In an era when stress and anxiety are defining features of the human condition, swimming offers a pathway to a healthier mind, a calmer spirit and a stronger body.

Public health and wellbeing opportunities horizon

Personal health is only the beginning. Swimming pools have the potential to play a much larger role in the public health landscape, serving as community anchors that promote wellbeing on a societal scale. As the global burden of disease continues to rise, exacerbated by sedentary lifestyles and widening health inequalities, swimming pools present a tangible, scalable solution.

Imagine a future where swimming pools are integrated into public health strategies, where every community has access to safe, clean and affordable aquatic environments. These pools could serve as hubs for health education, offering swimming lessons, water safety courses and exercise programmes tailored to different demographics. Partnerships with healthcare providers could see swimming prescribed not just for physical rehabilitation, but as part of mental health treatment plans, helping to alleviate conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety.

In this future, the swimming pool is not a luxury but a public health necessity, a space where preventive care meets community engagement, and where the line between leisure and health blurs in the most positive ways.



A call to action to all stakeholders

The vision laid out in this report is ambitious, but it is not a dream. It is a tangible, achievable reality that will require the collective effort of a wide array of stakeholders: policymakers, the swimming pool industry, pool owners, healthcare professionals, environmental advocates, communities and individuals themselves.

- **Policymakers** must recognize that swimming pools are not merely recreational facilities but essential public health resources. Governments must invest in their development and maintenance, ensuring that these spaces remain accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status. By integrating swimming pools into broader health and wellbeing initiatives, policymakers can help address the growing healthcare burden, offering a proactive approach to disease prevention and mental health support.
- **The swimming pool industry** plays a crucial 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 public health assets, fostering activity, fitness and wellbeing.
- **Public pool owners and manager** have a unique duty to create a welcoming environment for all age groups, backgrounds and abilities. Partnering with local healthcare entities can help engage more residents and increase pool usage. Maintaining high standards of cleanliness and safety is fundamental.

- **Healthcare professionals** must embrace swimming as a powerful tool in the treatment and prevention of chronic disease. Swimming should be seen as more than just exercise; it is an adaptable, low-impact solution that can be integrated into treatment plans for everything from musculoskeletal disorders to mental health issues. With the rise of social prescribing, swimming has the potential to become a mainstream recommendation, improving outcomes and reducing healthcare costs.
- **Communities** should also play their part, demanding better access to swimming pools and advocate for their inclusion in urban planning and public health initiatives. Swimming pools should not be seen as a privilege but as a right, an essential resource that fosters health, wellbeing and social connection.
- **And finally, you, the individual.** In an age of digital distractions and sedentary habits, the simple act of swimming offers something profound: the chance to reconnect with your body, to calm your mind and to find balance in an increasingly unbalanced world. We urge you to dive into this opportunity, to see swimming not just as a pastime but as a path to wellbeing, resilience and community.

CASE STUDY 3

INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE BY DESIGN

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA



Overview

Gunyama Park Aquatic and Recreation Centre in Sydney's Green Square was designed with accessibility at its core. With features including ramped pool entries, aqua wheelchairs and accessible changing rooms, the centre makes it easy for people of all abilities, ages and backgrounds to dive in, relax and connect. Whether swimming lengths in the 50 m pool, enjoying the hydrotherapy facilities or engaging in gentle water exercises for rehabilitation, the space ensures everyone has access to the joy of movement and leisure. Gunyama Park sets a new standard for what an inclusive community space can be – beautiful, functional and open to all.

“Not just for fitness fanatics, this is a place for all people to enjoy the centre in different ways – even if it's simply reading the paper in the sun and enjoying the occasional dip.”

Andrew Burges, Andrew Burges Architects

Points of interest

- All pools, including the 50 m outdoor pool, 25 m indoor pool, hydrotherapy pool and leisure pool, feature ramped access.
- Mobility parking spaces, pool hoists and aqua wheelchairs make the centre accessible for people with reduced mobility.
- Communal changing rooms, family changing rooms and private cabanas accommodate various needs, including individuals with disabilities and families.
- The upper-level fitness centre is accessible via lift, ensuring no area is out of reach.

“Gunyama Park reinvigorates the public pool typology, drawing from the civic and landscape tradition of Sydney's coastal pools, to celebrate the pleasures of swimming for all. Not simply an aquatic centre but a place where the community congregates and connects.”

2021 New South Wales Australian Institute of Architects Awards Jury

Conclusions

Gunyama Park reinvigorates the public pool typology, drawing from the civic and landscape tradition of Sydney's coastal pools, to celebrate the pleasures of swimming for all. Not simply an aquatic centre but a place where the community congregates and connects.



CONCLUSIONS AND BEYOND

Pool Horizons envisions a future where swimming pools are at the heart of health and wellbeing policies, strategies and programmes, whether public or personal. Swimming pools have so much to offer individuals and communities, providing an enjoyable, cost-effective way of staying active and being healthier.

In the grand narrative of human history, every civilization has faced the enduring challenge of maintaining the health and wellbeing of its people. From the first homo sapiens who roamed the African savannah to the bustling metropolises of today, the question has always been the same: how do we preserve vitality of body and peace of mind? The answer, at least in part, lies in something as simple and elemental as water.

Swimming, an activity that defies the rigid pull of gravity, symbolizes humanity's eternal desire to rise above its limitations. Swimming is a metaphor for the human spirit: buoyant, resilient and adaptive. In today's world, marked by increasing health challenges and social stresses, the swimming pool serves as a sanctuary, offering a welcome break from the pressures of modern life.

The journey through these pages has revealed a profound truth: swimming is not just a leisure activity or a form of physical exercise. It is a conduit for transformation of individuals, communities and even societies. The evidence is clear and the impact is undeniable. From enhancing cardiovascular fitness to soothing the troubled mind, from preventing disease to fostering a sense of belonging, swimming touches every aspect of human life.

But this report is more than a collection of statistics and case studies. It is a call to action. It is an urgent reminder that the health of our planet and its people rests in the decisions we make today. The swimming pool industry, with its unique capacity to influence public health and wellbeing, must now rise to meet this moment.

The commitment of the swimming pool industry is unwavering, forming part of a global movement that seeks to redefine good health, not as a distant goal or an elusive ideal, but as a tangible, everyday reality for people across all walks of life. The industry does not just build pools; it plays a part in constructing the very foundations of healthier, happier societies.

In the coming years, Pool Horizons' mission is clear: to make swimming inclusive and accessible to all, to innovate and improve the design and sustainability of aquatic facilities and to work together with policymakers, healthcare professionals and communities.

The future of health does not lie in isolated technologies or medical breakthroughs alone. It also lies in the simple, timeless act of immersing ourselves in water, of floating, moving and finding peace. The swimming pool industry stands ready to champion this vision, not just as a business but also as a guardian of public health and wellbeing.

Together, we are not just making a splash. We are shaping the very currents of human progress, ensuring that the ripple effects of what we do today will echo for generations to come.

The water is waiting. Let us dive in.

CONTRIBUTORS



Ed Gibbs

President and CEO
Gib-San Pools Ltd. Canada

Ed Gibbs is the President and CEO of Gib-San Pools Ltd, Canada, with over 44 years of experience in company management. For the past 32 years, he has led the award-winning Gib-San Group. Ed has held leadership positions in organisations including the Pool and Hot Tub Association of Canada and the Master Pools Guild. His international experience spans the Middle East, Caribbean, and Europe. When not managing his business, Ed enjoys reading, academic pursuits and outdoor activities. He lives between Toronto, Sarasota (Florida) and Muskoka (Ontario) with his family.



Tanya McNabb

Vice President Communications
Cardinal Financial. USA

Tanya McNabb has nearly 20 years of experience in strategic communications and change management. Until recently she was Senior Director of Communications at Hayward Holdings Inc, which she joined in 2021 and where she built the global communications function. Prior roles include Head of Communications for the Americas at Continental AG, where she led media relations, internal communications and initiatives in diversity, equity, inclusion and corporate social responsibility. Tanya holds a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communication and a Master of Arts in International Public Relations.

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 health and wellbeing of individuals and communities with swimming pools at their heart.



Pedro Arrebola

General Manager, Pool
Renolit. Spain

Pedro Arrebola, General Manager of Pool, Renolit, has 30 years of experience in the swimming pool industry. He has been with the Renolit Group for 14 years, leading its swimming pool division. Previously, Pedro held senior roles at the Fluidra Group for over 14 years. He is the President of both ASOFAP, the Spanish Swimming Pool Association, and the European Union of Swimming Pool and Spa Associations (EUSA). Pedro holds a law degree, an Executive MBA from ESIC and a PDG from IESE.



Angela Beale-Tawfeeq

Associate Professor
Rowan University. USA

Dr Angela Beale-Tawfeeq is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator at Rowan University, specialising in Health and Physical Education Teacher Education. With over 25 years of experience, her research focuses on health disparities in marginalised communities, youth development and water safety. She holds a Doctorate in Physical Education from Florida State University and a Master of Public Health from Arcadia University. Angela is a board member of Diversity in Aquatics and has earned national recognition for her contributions to water safety and social equity.



Jason Brownlee

Founder, President and Creative Lead
J. Brownlee Design Group. USA

Jason Brownlee, founder and President of J. Brownlee Design Group, is a Registered Landscape Architect with a passion for creating award-winning outdoor living spaces. He holds Master-level certifications in Watershape Design and has led his firm in collaborating with clients and industry professionals internationally. Jason is also the co-founder of Elevate Events, where he teaches design, construction, and business skills to aspiring leaders. Based in Nashville, he enjoys travel, photography and water sports with his family.



John Caldwell

President
J. Caldwell Custom Pools. USA

John Caldwell is the President of J. Caldwell Custom Pools, a leading company specializing in custom pools, based in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. With over 30 years of experience in swimming pool building, service and remodelling, John has established a reputation for excellence in the industry. Under his leadership, J. Caldwell Custom Pools constructs approximately 150 custom pools each year, services over 1,000 pools weekly and completes hundreds of pool remodels annually.



Mike Durand

Owner
J&M Pool Company. USA

Mike Durand is the owner of J&M Pool Company, a successful pool design and construction business in the U.S. J&M Pool Company has built a reputation for delivering high-quality pool installations and exceptional customer service.



Luke Daly

CEO
Australian Swim Schools Association.
Australia

Luke Daly is the CEO of the Australian Swim Schools Association, leading a dynamic organisation dedicated to promoting water safety, swimming education and community engagement across Australia. With nearly 20 years' experience in the pool and spa industry, he previously served as Chief Operating Officer at Swimming Pool and Spa Association (SPASA), where he led several strategic initiatives. Luke holds a bachelor's degree in business and completed the Oxford Executive Leadership Programme. Known for his focus on operational excellence, he fosters growth and collaboration to support members and advance industry standards.



Agustí Ferrer

Managing Director

Asociación Española de Profesionales del Sector de la Piscina (ASOFAP). Spain

Agustí Ferrer is the Managing Director of the Spanish Swimming Pool and Spa Association (ASOFAP) and serves as General Secretary of the European Union of Swimming Pool and Spa Associations (EUSA). With over 15 years of experience in leadership roles, Agustí specialises in business association management, public affairs and corporate communication. He has an international background in business administration and holds an MBA from Esade Business School.



Kevin Holleran

President and CEO

Hayward Holdings, Inc. USA

Kevin Holleran is the President and CEO of Hayward Holdings, Inc. a global leader in pool and outdoor living technologies. Since joining in 2019, Kevin has driven significant growth through strategic innovation and acquisitions. Previously, he served as CEO of Textron's Industrial Segment, where he led divisions focused on commercial vehicles and automotive solutions. Kevin's diverse background in sales, marketing and product management spans top roles at Ingersoll Rand and Terex Corporation. He holds an MBA from Wake Forest University and a bachelor's degree from Cornell University.



Brian Murphy

Segment Strategy Leader

Pool Pentair. USA

Brian Murphy is the Segment Strategy Leader for Pentair's Pool business, overseeing the strategic direction of the \$1.6 billion division. With over 20 years of experience in corporate development, strategic marketing and general management, Brian has worked across industries, including apparel and consumer goods. Prior to joining Pentair, he held senior roles at Fruit of the Loom and The Hershey Company, leading innovation and business strategy. Brian holds an MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and a BA in Economics from Johns Hopkins University.



Mille Örnmark

CEO

WeGroup. Sweden

Mille Örnmark is the CEO of WeGroup in Sweden and a specialist in public pool design, water treatment, and safety. With over 40 years of experience, Mille has led numerous initiatives to improve public pool standards across Europe. He has served as president of the Swedish Swimming Pool and Spa Association and held leadership roles within the European Union of Swimming Pool and Spa Associations (EUSA). Mille is passionate about environmental sustainability and innovation in the pool industry.



Brad Parker

Vice President, Marketing

Fluidra. USA

Brad Parker serves as Vice President of Marketing at Fluidra North America, bringing over 15 years of diverse marketing experience. Before Fluidra, he held senior roles at Sony Electronics, leading strategic, product and digital marketing efforts for the computing and audio divisions, having begun his career in academic publishing. He is a member of the USA Pool and Hot Tub Association's Government Relations Advisory Committee. Brad holds an MA in Literature from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and a BA in Philosophy from the University of Colorado at Boulder.



Ben Wilkins

CEO

Good Boost. UK

Ben Wilkins is the CEO of Good Boost, a UK-based social enterprise focused on digital musculoskeletal (MSK) rehabilitation. As a registered osteopath, Ben has extensive experience in MSK therapy and aqua rehabilitation, working in partnership with leisure centres, community venues and charities. He holds a Master's in Osteopathy from Oxford Brookes University and an MSc in Musculoskeletal Science from the University of Oxford. Ben is a recognised leader in active ageing and sits on multiple advisory boards, including the WHO's World Rehabilitation Alliance.

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The Making a Splash report by the Pool Horizons Health and Wellbeing working group highlights the transformative health benefits of swimming pools, positioning them as essential resources for physical, mental and social wellbeing. Swimming and other activities in and around water boost cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and mental resilience, and help manage chronic conditions, reduce stress and improve mobility. By providing accessible exercise options, swimming pools can help address health disparities and promote holistic wellbeing. The report envisions pools as integral to public health strategies, partnering with a wide range of stakeholders to enhance community-wide health outcomes.