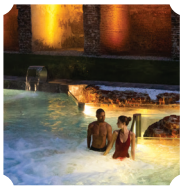
GLOBAL WELLNESS INSTITUTE®

Initiative Trends 2026

Collective Intelligence and Foresight from Global Wellness Leaders

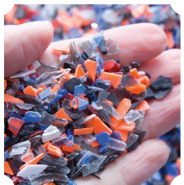












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About the Global Wellness Institute Initiatives

The nonprofit Global Wellness Institute (GWI) supports a wide range of collaborative Initiatives that bring together wellness leaders to drive meaningful change across key sectors of the global wellness economy. Each Initiative is led by a Chair—renowned experts and thought leaders in their field—and focuses on a specific topic, producing open-access research, resources, and thought leadership.

Individual Initiatives meet monthly to advance their missions and foster member engagement, while Initiative Chairs convene quarterly to align on goals and strengthen collaboration across Initiatives. Collectively, the GWI Initiatives play a vital role in advancing the multi-trillion-dollar wellness economy and uniting the global health and wellness industries.

The GWI Initiative program is led by GWI Director of Programs and Operations Jessi Brandt. For all inquiries related to Initiatives, including participation and proposals, please get in touch with Jessi directly at jessi.brandt@globalwellnessinstitute.org.

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Foreword

Dear colleagues,

I'm pleased to introduce this year's Global Wellness Institute (GWI) ***Initiative Trends*** report, drawing on the collective intelligence and foresight of leaders within one of our six core pillars: Initiatives.

Across GWI, our initiatives are led by dedicated experts who volunteer their time and knowledge in service of a shared mission: empowering wellness worldwide. Their work reflects a collective commitment to advancing preventative health and uniting diverse sectors of the global wellness economy for the greater good.

I'd also like to thank **Vishal Patel, MD, PhD**, vice chair of the Men's Wellbeing Initiative, for authoring this year's executive summary. As former vice chair of our AI Initiative, Dr. Patel has been instrumental in helping GWI stay grounded in meaningful, evidence-based work while thoughtfully embracing the efficiencies of emerging technologies.

We're grateful to all who contribute to this growing body of knowledge—and to you for being part of the journey.

Warm regards,

Susie Ellis
Chair & CEO
Global Wellness Institute

About the Global Wellness Institute

The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and a leading global resource for wellness research and education. Its work has helped drive the growth of the multi-trillion-dollar wellness economy while bringing together the health and wellness sectors. Through its six pillars—Research, Initiatives, Geography of Wellness, Wellness Evidence, The Wellness Moonshot and BBC StoryWorks—GWI connects and informs stakeholders who can advance wellbeing worldwide. By educating public institutions, businesses, and individuals, GWI promotes prevention, reduces stress, and supports a higher quality of life. Its mission is to empower wellness worldwide.

Executive Summary of GWI's 2026 Initiative Trends Report

What 27 Initiatives and 153 Initiative Trends Reveal About Where Wellness Is Heading

By **Vishal Patel, MD, PhD**, Vice Chair of GWI's Men's Wellbeing Initiative

Each year, the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) asks its specialist initiatives to identify the trends shaping their domains. This edition synthesizes findings from 27 initiatives spanning aesthetic health, aging, breathwork, mental wellness, nutrition, psychedelics, sleep, tourism, workplace wellbeing, yoga therapy and more. The result is 153 trends drawn from practitioners, clinicians, researchers and industry leaders across four continents. Emerging from the diversity of modalities and markets, we find a small number of powerful currents pulling the wellness landscape in a coherent direction.

The body's regulatory systems are becoming wellness's central organizing principle. Nervous system regulation is the single most convergent signal in this report, identified independently by 14 initiatives working in breathwork, yoga, cryotherapy, architecture, mental health and neuroscience. The concept of neurowellness now functions as shared vocabulary across modalities that previously had little in common. Whether the entry point is a cold plunge, a pranayama session, a biophilic building or a sound therapy room, the mechanism is shared: autonomic balance, stress recovery and cognitive resilience.

Longevity has been redefined. Sixteen initiatives address aging and healthspan, shifting from anti-aging as aesthetic aspiration to functional longevity as lived capacity. The markers of this new paradigm are strength, balance, cognitive clarity, social contribution and independence. Geroscience is entering the wellness conversation. VO2 max is treated as a longevity biomarker. Purpose and intergenerational connection are positioned alongside exercise and nutrition as modifiable determinants of healthspan.

The built environment is being reimagined as health infrastructure. Twelve initiatives converge on architecture, housing and spatial design as determinants of wellbeing. Circadian lighting, neuroarchitecture, walkable neighborhoods, microplastic-free interiors and loneliness-resistant community layouts appear across multiple domains. The wellness real estate sector, projected to exceed $1 trillion by 2029, is moving from luxury aspiration to evidence-based infrastructure.

Social connection has moved from convenience to clinical variable. Ten initiatives treat loneliness as a modifiable health risk, with interventions ranging from community prescribing and group medical visits to sport-based social programs and front-porch architecture. Belonging is treated not simply as a feel-good outcome, but as a health intervention with measurable effects.

This report also surfaces signals that appear nowhere else in the mainstream wellness conversation: mass incarceration as a driver of global health inequality; neuroplastogens that may deliver neuroplasticity without the psychedelic experience; plant-based microplastic filtration; and an Afrolongevity framework integrating ancestral knowledge with genomics. These represent the frontier thinking that the *Initiative Trends* format is uniquely positioned to capture.

Taken together, the 153 trends describe a wellness landscape becoming more mechanistic in how it understands interventions, more systemic in where it locates the determinants of health, and more pluralistic in whose knowledge it draws on. The direction is from individual optimization toward collective infrastructure, from symptom management toward regulatory capacity, and from aesthetic aspiration toward functional, measurable, lived wellbeing.

Aesthetic Health Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Alison O'Neil, President & Founder, Beauty Becomes You Foundation, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Anita Murray, Managing Director, The Salon & Spa Company and Founder Be Kingdom Kind, Ireland

Aesthetic health continues to evolve as a key pillar of modern wellbeing. Simply stated, it is the art and science of understanding how the signs and symptoms of beauty impact our lives. The term "aesthetic" is defined as the philosophy of beauty, and so it makes sense that today's definition is more of an umbrella term and continues to expand. As we review the trends in beauty and health, the focus ties in with the general population's goals to live healthier overall, be attractive (as one may define it) and live a long life. Evidence continues to mount proving that there is no separation between health and appearance. Aesthetic health has been tied to humans since primitive times. Better teeth, clear skin, beautiful hair and a healthy body have always represented one's ability to continue strong family lines, and to ensure longevity, which has been a constant quest of mankind. Embracing the influence of beauty on our brains and how that ties into our overall health will take us to new heights in understanding aesthetic health.

Driven by advances in science, technology and education, the leading aesthetic health trends for 2026 highlight a future shaped by innovation, evidence-based practice and increasing accessibility, as patients seek personalized solutions that deliver natural, lasting results to support long term health and preventative care.

TREND 1: The Basic Science of Neuroaesthetics Is Evolving to Ask Questions Beyond Beauty

The reward system is deeply involved in aesthetic appreciation. The ventral striatum, including the *nucleus accumbens*, shows increased activity for pleasing and preferred objects. This reward circuitry, which normally releases dopamine and endogenous cannabinoids and opioids for biologically significant pleasures, is activated by beautiful faces, artwork, music and even pleasing architectural spaces. However, aesthetics often goes beyond pleasure and liking, and incorporates nuanced emotions. In some instances, negative emotions can contribute to powerful aesthetic experiences, like a sense of anxiety embedded in the experience of awe. Researchers in the US and Europe are uncovering a more complex cocktail of emotions experienced in aesthetic encounters.

> Explore the Aesthetic Health Initiative on the GWI Website

The rise in neurocosmetics and the mind-skin connection will bring forward compounds that interact with the skin's receptors to positively affect emotional states and link psychological health and skincare. This will support the expanding wellness industry by furthering emotional wellbeing and stress reduction, encouraging more businesses to draw on all five senses and produce services and products that customers look forward to buy and consume.

Resources:

- Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Wassiliwizky, E., Schindler, I., Hanich, J., Jacobsen, T., & Koelsch, S. (2019). What are aesthetic emotions?. *Psychological review, 126*(2), 171.
- Fingerhut, J., & Prinz, J. J. (2020). Aesthetic emotions reconsidered. *The Monist, 103*(2), 223-239.
- Christensen, A. P., Cardillo, E. R., & Chatterjee, A. (2023). What kind of impacts can artwork have on viewers? Establishing a taxonomy for aesthetic impacts. *British Journal of Psychology, 114*(2), 335-351.
- Stamkou, E., Keltner, D., Corona, R., Aksoy, E., & Cowen, A. S. (2024). Emotional palette: a computational mapping of aesthetic experiences evoked by visual art. *Scientific Reports, 14*(1), 19932.

TREND 2: Longevity Aesthetics

Longevity aesthetics is one of the biggest shifts we will see advancing in beauty and health. Instead of trying to "reverse ageing" the focus is shifting towards optimizing biological age and long term health. More brands will begin to offer treatments that improve sleep, recovery, stress resilience and cellular repair, like NAD+ therapy and cellular repair treatments.

Traditional beauty and aesthetics treated wrinkles or sagging skin as cosmetic problems. Longevity aesthetics asks a different question: How old are your cells biologically?

Skin is increasingly viewed as a window into internal health. As a result, services in this area will combine dermatology, nutrition, hormone optimization and metabolic testing.

Future longevity aesthetics will use biological data to guide treatments. Epigenetic age testing, microbiome analysis and wearable health monitors will all be used to treat collagen breakdown, inflammation markers, oxidative stress and hydration levels. The future will be more about looking young through improved health than relying on procedures to hide ageing.

Resources:

- Longevity cosmeceuticals as the next frontier in cosmetic innovation //pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12137348/

TREND 3: Psycho-Dermatology - Exploring the Brain/Body Connection and Its Effect on Our Health and Appearance

The link between our mental and physical states and their impact on our skin's condition and our general health and wellbeing continues to gain momentum. The next chapter of wellness for aesthetic health will be the mind-body beauty connection where mental wellbeing and physical health are more intertwined. The acceleration of the mind/body connection will encourage more brands, spa operators and wellness professionals to enhance the wellness journey with neuro cosmetics, incorporating stress relieving techniques, healing practices and revised routines to accelerate this understanding. People will be willing to pay more for products with mood boosting qualities. Looking good makes people feel more confident and maintaining good mental wellbeing is key to overall wellbeing.

Our current circumstances continue to bring these ideas to light, and beauty presents an opportunity to improve and target this space with new innovations like edible and drinkable products, biometric screening in spa and wellness settings, skin immunity and wider emphasis on integrative wellbeing. Integrative medicine practitioners will be aware of the role that stress plays in disease, and we will continue to see

medical and wellness approaches come together to manage stress and prevent skin conditions like acne, rosacea and premature aging.

**Did you know that the brain and skin have the same embryonic origin? Skin and brain form at the same time on day 21 of the embryo, with the outermost part of the embryo – the ectoblast – giving rise to the nervous system and the epidermis. Your skin is therefore a sort of extension of the brain. Its nerve architecture is extremely complex, with no less than 800,000 neurons, 11 meters of nerves and around 200 sensory receptors per cm3. This connection makes it impossible to dissociate the psychic realities that each of us undergoes on a daily basis from the physical ones concerning our skin.*

Resources:

- *Prof. Laurent Misery, Head of the Department of Dermatology at the University Hospital of Brest, France

TREND 4: Regenerative Aesthetic Medicine

Sound science and data-backed products and services are not just hoped for by consumers, they are expected. A huge trend is regenerative treatments that repair tissues instead of temporarily filling or freezing them.

The microbiome remains an important focus, and soon we will see a new generation of regenerative biotherapeutics featuring bioactive proteins, growth factors and nucleic acids taking center stage for skin and hair rejuvenation. Exosomes can provide similar benefits to stem cell therapy without many of the unwanted side effects and polynucleotides help improve the skin tissues on a cellular level. Rather than introducing new ingredients, hi-tech performing cosmetic brands will focus on advanced delivery systems for optimum efficacy and outcomes, bringing forth new ways to innovate legacy ingredients and equipment. We will also see tissue regeneration instead of botox style correction, with an emphasis on long term structural improvements

**The field of aesthetic health, particularly in medical aesthetics, has been experiencing significant trends and advancements. There's a growing preference for less invasive treatments that offer minimal discomfort and require little to no downtime. This trend reflects a shift towards procedures that can be done quickly, often in an outpatient setting, with rapid recovery times. This is driven by factors such as advancements in technology, growing awareness about aesthetic treatments, and an ageing population seeking anti-aging solutions.*

Resources:

- *Prof Patrick Treacy Medical Director Ailesbury Clinics MICGP, MBCAM, H. Dip Dermatology, DRCOG, DCH, LRCSI, DTM MB BCh

TREND 5: Hyper-Personalized Aesthetics Using AI and Biomarkers with an Integrative Approach to Singular Issues

Technology will allow personalized treatments tailored to an individual's biology, genetics and lifestyle using AI skin diagnosis, DNA-based skincare, predictive ageing models and real time. Skin and hair will become biomarkers of overall health, linking beauty directly to medical diagnostics.

As the concept of wellness evolves into a whole-person approach to health, 2026 will continue to see an increasing trend where specific issues are addressed through multiple modalities. Take skin health, for example. Instead of solely relying on specific skincare treatments for physical concerns, holistic approaches that incorporate aspects like diet, sleep and mental health will become a standard part of the wellness examination. Addressing aesthetics will involve an approach that encompasses the mind, body and spirit, linking the concept of improving appearance to enhancing overall wellbeing. Similarly, physical products

that extend benefits to mental states will gain heightened attention. For instance, food and beverages with ingredients beneficial for digestion that also enhance mood, and cosmetics that not only improve physical appearance but also aim to boost self-confidence and nurture self-care will continue to spotlight the expansion from traditional aesthetics to encompass elevated mental states.

TREND 6: Traditional Ingredients Paired with Innovation

Consumers want innovations, but they also increasingly want the familiar effectiveness of the ingredients and practices they have come to trust over time. In 2026, we will continue to see more products and lifestyle management approaches inspired by traditional practices like Ayurveda, homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine and Amazonian customs.

Products will blend herbal and plant medicine with modern science, offering solutions that address physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. By blending time-honored knowledge with contemporary research and technology, brands will be able to deliver more holistic and trusted results. This trend represents the fusion of ancient wisdom and modern science, offering consumers a balanced approach to beauty, health and wellness that feels both innovative and reassuringly familiar.

Resources:

- Eating for Wellness Will Be a Lot Simpler—And More Celebratory—In 2024: https://www.wellandgood.com/wellness-minded-food-brands/
- Beauty + Wellness Category Expands Market by 45% Determines NIQ Report, Dec. 13, 2023: https://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/Article/2023/12/13/Beauty-Wellness-category-expands-market-by-45-determines-NIQ-report
- Formulation Trends Driving Feel-Good Products in Self-Care Rituals: https://beautymatter.com/articles/formulation-trends-driving-feel-good-products-in-self-care-rituals
- Cosmetics Business reveals the top 5 'Ancient Beauty' trends of 2024 in new report: https://cosmeticsbusiness.com/cosmetics-business-reveals-the-top-5-ancient-beauty
- Integrative approach to lifestyle management: Implications for public health research & practice in the context of SDG-3:
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10692374/

Africa Wellness Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Mariane Akwenye, Managing Director, Nomad Group, Namibia
Initiative Vice-Chair: Michelle Saudan, Founder & Facilitator of Amanzi Wellbeing, Dubai-Zimbabwe

TREND 1: Afro-Longevity

The term "afrolongevity" represents a newly created word that sums up an African perspective for examining aging. The biophilosophical model brings together metaphysical insights from traditional thought with modern ethical analysis. Afrolongevity emphasizes the qualitative depth of aging: legacy, wisdom, ritual continuity and communal relevance.

Afro-longevity is emerging as a defining movement positioning Africa at the forefront of the global longevity conversation. No longer waiting to be a recipient of imported health models, but as a creator of culturally grounded, regenerative life-extension solutions. Initiatives like afro-longevity are pioneering this shift by integrating ancestral knowledge systems with cutting-edge biotechnology, genomics and policy innovation to address biological aging as a treatable condition.

Embodied within Africa's deep respect for elders and community wellbeing, afro-longevity reframes aging as a process of sustained vitality, dignity and intrinsic capacity rather than decline. It emphasizes health sovereignty, biodiversity as a living health infrastructure and prevention through culturally-aligned

nutrition and lifestyle practices, while advancing research and innovation tailored to Africa's unique genetic and environmental context. This movement signals a powerful redefinition of longevity, one that is ethical, inclusive and born from African ecosystems, yet globally relevant.

"With Africa's population aged 60 and above projected to more than triple by 2050, the need for culturally grounded longevity frameworks is of rising importance."

Resources:

- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392361088_Afrolongevity_and_the_Philosophy_of_Aging
- https://medium.com/@kamil.seg/longevity-clinics-are-moving-into-africa-boom-or-bust-06754ed0621c

> Explore the Africa Wellness Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 2: A-Beauty (African Beauty)

A-beauty reflects the growing global recognition of Africa's longstanding beauty traditions. Indigenous African ingredients such as shea butter, baobab, marula and mongongo oil, are a few of the many that have long powered the global beauty industry. Alongside these ingredients, cocoa butter and neem, though not indigenous to the continent, have been widely cultivated and are now deeply integrated into some African beauty practices. Today, these formulations are being reinterpreted by a new generation of African brands that honor ancestral knowledge while making products more accessible, inclusive and locally relevant.

Importantly, this shift is increasingly community-driven rather than extractive, supporting local producers and value chains. Real progress won't be defined by how these ingredients are marketed, but by how the people behind them are valued, credited and compensated.

As these practices move beyond household traditions into formalized quality product lines, they are engaging younger generations while positioning Africa as a leader in botanical, ethical and globally relevant beauty innovation.

Resources:

- https://www.africasvibes.com/beauty-en/the-promising-future-of-a-beauty/
- https://www.vogue.com/article/is-african-beauty-the-next-big-global-trend
- https://www.vogue.fr/article/a-beauty-nouvelle-tendance-skincare-rituels-afrique-beaute-naturelle

TREND 3: Indigenous & Regenerative Architecture

Indigenous African architecture in 2026 is reclaiming space as a critical reference point for climate-responsive and wellbeing-centered design, grounded in centuries of ecological intelligence and cultural continuity. Contemporary architects across the continent are increasingly revisiting these principles, reintroducing local materials, passive cooling techniques and communal spatial design as sustainable alternatives to energy-intensive construction. This shift reflects a broader recognition that Africa's architectural heritage offers not only climate-responsive solutions, but also models for holistic wellbeing, where the built environment supports social cohesion, cultural expression and environmental balance.

Resources:

- https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/building-earth-how-african-architects-redefining-caleb-oheneba-takyi-wdkqf
- https://commonwealtharchitects.org/sessions/climate-responsive-design-the-classroom-of-the-future/
- https://www.terrafriq.org/post/highlighting-the-best-of-african-architecture-top-african-architectural-works

TREND 4: Digital and AI Enabled Wellness

Africa is rapidly rising as a significant frontier for digital wellness and AI-enabled health technology, driven by widespread mobile adoption and the need to close major gaps in mental health and general healthcare access. Across the continent, local and pan-African platforms are marrying AI and culturally attuned digital tools to expand access to emotional support and wellbeing. Resources below illustrate how technology is bridging stigma and availability challenges by offering accessible, low-cost support that can be integrated with human care where needed.

Recent collaborative efforts, including regulatory frameworks and cross-border partnerships to advance AI-ready ecosystems for health and wellbeing, signal that African digital wellness innovation is not only growing, but being scaffolded for scale across countries and language groups. This trend reflects a broader digital transformation where AI is enhancing not just clinical services, but everyday wellbeing practices through culturally relevant, scalable, technology-driven solutions.

Resources:

- https://eu-africa-chamber.org/tiktok-unveils-expansion-of-global-mental-health-fund-and-innovative-safety-tools-to-champion-digital-well-being-in-africa/
- https://rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/articles/comparative-review-of-digital-mental-health-platforms-in-africa-insights-from-friendnpal-and-other-models-of-care/
- https://www.path.org/our-impact/media-center/south-africa-path-and-wellcome-launch-worlds-first-ai-framework-for-mental-health-at-g20-social-summit/

TREND 5: African Tourism Reimagined

In 2026, we are seeing a rise in multidimensional wellness tourism in Africa, where ritual, movement and spiritual-cultural immersion converge into transformative travel experiences. Visitors are seeking raw, diverse and immersive wellness experiences, from Moroccan Hammams to mud and salt baths in Tunisia, hot springs in South Africa and psychedelic plant medicine retreats such as iboga ceremonies in Central and West Africa. We also see a shift in active wellness pursuits such as surfing, whitewater rafting, kayaking, hiking and trekking across destinations like South Africa, Morocco, Zanzibar, Senegal, Zambia, Uganda and Kilimanjaro.

These experiences reflect the vastness of Africa's culturally rich, place-based journeys, offering travelers a depth of ritual, movement and nature that goes far beyond traditional wildlife safari narratives.

Resources:

- https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/kenyas-wellness-tourism-story-redefines-africa-as-the-ultimate-slow%E2%80%91travel-escape-for-tourists/
- https://theafricanmirror.africa/lifestyle/global-tourism-industry-embraces-traditional-african-eco-living-and-wellness-practices/
- https://tourismnewsafrica.com/discover-immersive-african-sports-tourism/
- https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/explore-south-africas-unique-wellness-experiences-combining-heritage-plants-mineral-springs-and-mindful-retreats/

Aging Well Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: William Wesley Myers, Mather, Assistant Vice President, Wellness Strategy, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Dave McCaughan, Aging Well Initiative Vice-Chair, Aging Well Brand Strategist, Thailand

As populations age rapidly across every region of the world, the conversation around longevity is undergoing a fundamental reset. Longer lives are no longer the achievement; longer lives lived with strength, clarity, autonomy and purpose are. These 2026 Aging Well trends reflect a convergence of forces shaping this moment: the rise of healthspan science, growing dissatisfaction with appearance-based "anti-aging," breakthroughs in preventive and predictive technologies and a recognition that environment, identity, and community are as critical to aging well as medical care. Together, these trends signal a shift from reactive, disease-oriented models toward proactive systems that enhance function, cognition, contribution and independence at scale. They matter today because healthcare systems are strained, older adults are redefining what wellness means and societies can no longer afford to separate aging from design, culture and prevention.

TREND 1: Functional Longevity Replaces Anti-Aging as the New Wellness Status

The concept of "anti-aging" is rapidly losing relevance among adults over 50, replaced by a functional longevity mindset that prioritizes strength, mobility, cognitive clarity and independence over youthful appearance. Rather than seeking to track biological vs. chronological age, older adults are increasingly focused on preserving the physical and mental capacities that enable them to live autonomously and with purpose. This shift is visible across fitness, healthcare and wellness programming, where functional

> Explore the Aging Well Initiative on the GWI Website

training, balance, fall prevention and everyday strength have become central goals.

Expert perspectives consistently identify physical activity, nutrition and sleep as the primary drivers of healthy aging, with lean muscle mass and mobility recognized as critical determinants of healthspan. At the same time, wellness brands and communities are reframing longevity as a marker of capability and resilience rather than aesthetics. This reframing aligns with broader cultural resistance to unrealistic youth ideals and supports greater engagement among older adults who previously felt excluded from mainstream wellness culture.

The rise of functional longevity is also influencing built environments and services. Wellness real estate, senior living and community-based programs increasingly design spaces and experiences around everyday function, climbing stairs, carrying groceries, getting up from the floor, rather than abstract fitness metrics.

What's next is the elevation of function as a visible form of status, with mobility, balance and functional age becoming aspirational markers of wellness.

Resources:

- U.S. News & World Report, Healthy Aging Survey 2025
  https://health.usnews.com/wellness/aging/articles/healthy-aging-survey
- Global Wellness Institute, Innovative Aging Trends to Watch in 2026
  https://online.aging.ufl.edu/2025/12/17/8-innovative-aging-trends-to-watch-in-2026/
- LiveWell Magazine, The Bold New Rules of Wellness for 2025
  https://www.livewellmagazine.org/the-bold-new-rules-of-wellness-for-2025/

TREND 2: Cognitive Health Moves from "Mental Wellness" to Core Longevity Strategy

Cognitive health is emerging as one of the most critical and proactive pillars of aging well, reframing brain health as something to be cultivated rather than preserved reactively. Adults over 50 are increasingly engaging in activities that strengthen memory, attention, emotional regulation and executive function, including lifelong learning, creative expression, social engagement and sleep optimization. This reflects growing recognition that cognitive decline is not inevitable, but influenced by daily rituals, behaviors and environments.

Research highlights the interconnectedness of cognitive health with physical activity, nutrition, sleep and social connection. Programs combining mental stimulation with movement or creativity are gaining traction, as are interventions that address loneliness and isolation—two major risk factors for cognitive decline. Wellness providers and healthcare systems are beginning to treat cognitive resilience as a preventive priority, rather than a late-stage intervention.

Technology is also shaping this shift. AI-enabled tools are beginning to predict cognitive changes years before symptoms appear, though evidence reviews emphasize that success depends on usability, trust and digital literacy.

What's next is the emergence of "brain-first" wellness ecosystems, communities and environments intentionally designed to support neuroplasticity across the lifespan.

Resources:

- Sage Collective, Latest Trends in Longevity and Older Adults
  https://sagecollective.org/latest-trends-in-longevity-and-how-they-impact-older-adults/
- Springer Nature, Technology-Enabled Interventions Promoting Healthy Ageing (2025)
  https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12982-025-01066-8
- Global Wellness Institute, What Is Happening With Aging Well? (2026)
  https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/What-is-Happening-with-Aging-Well-View-from-Leading-Experts.

pdf

TREND 3: Aging in Place Evolves into an Independence-Supporting Ecosystem

Aging in place is transforming from a housing preference into an independence-supporting wellness strategy supported by integrated technology, services and human connection. Older adults increasingly seek to remain at home longer, with enhanced support for safety, health monitoring, chronic condition management and social engagement. This evolution is driven by demographic pressures, workforce shortages in healthcare and strong consumer preference for independence.

Evidence reviews show that technology-enabled interventions can improve chronic disease management, exercise adherence, fall prevention and social connection when designed around older adults' needs. Smart home features, telehealth and remote monitoring are turning homes into responsive wellness environments, though barriers such as cost, digital literacy and privacy remain.

The frontier of this trend is predictive rather than reactive. AI-driven systems can identify early signals of decline; changes in gait, sleep, or routines, allowing for earlier, less invasive intervention.

What's next is the growth of home-centered, subscription-based wellness services that bridge healthcare, senior living and community support.

Resources:

- Springer Nature, Technology-Enabled Interventions Promoting Healthy Ageing (2025) https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12982-025-01066-8
- AARP, 6 Tech Innovations to Help You Age Better https://www.aarp.org/personal-technology/aging-tech-innovations/
- University of Florida, 8 Innovative Aging Trends to Watch in 2026 https://online.aging.ufl.edu/2025/12/17/8-innovative-aging-trends-to-watch-in-2026/

TREND 4: Purpose, Contribution, and Identity Become Central to Healthspan

As longevity increases, older adults are redefining wellness around purpose, contribution and identity rather than leisure or retreat. Research increasingly links meaning, social contribution and a sense of usefulness to improved physical health, cognitive resilience and emotional wellbeing. In response, wellness programming is shifting toward mentorship, volunteering, creativity and intergenerational engagement.

This trend reflects a broader rejection of ageist narratives that frame later life as decline. Instead, aging is increasingly recognized as a distinct life stage with its own forms of productivity and value. Programming that enables older adults to teach, advise, create or contribute to community life generates benefits that extend beyond individuals to social cohesion.

Creative and community-based initiatives are particularly effective in reinforcing purpose while reducing isolation.

What's next is the formal integration of purpose-driven roles into wellness, housing and community systems, positioning contribution itself as a core driver of healthspan.

Resources:

- Global Wellness Institute, Aging Well Initiative Overview https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/aging-well-initiative/
- Sage Collective, Vibrant Living & Longevity Insights https://sagecollective.org

- Nature Index, The Future of Ageing: Healthspan Research (2025)
  https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-03523-5

TREND 5: From Lifespan to Healthspan – Geroscience Enters the Wellness Conversation

The distinction between lifespan and healthspan is becoming central to how aging well is understood and marketed. Rather than focusing on how long people live, geroscience emphasizes how long people remain healthy, mobile, and cognitively intact. This shift is influencing both medical research and consumer wellness, bringing concepts such as biological age, inflammation and metabolic health into mainstream awareness.

Advances in longevity science are targeting the underlying mechanisms of aging rather than individual diseases. While many innovations remain early-stage, their influence is visible in personalized nutrition, biomarker testing and wellness interventions. Researchers caution that extending lifespan without improving quality of life risks increasing years lived with disability.

For adults over 50, this trend reframes wellness as long-term capacity building rather than short-term optimization.

What's next is a clearer translation of healthspan science into ethical, accessible wellness applications grounded in evidence rather than hype.

Resources:

- Deloitte, The Future of Aging and Longevity Science
  https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/Industries/life-sciences-health-care/articles/longevity-science.html
- Nature Index, Ageing Supplement (2025)
  https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-03523-5
- McKinsey Health Institute, Healthspan Science May Enable Healthier Lives for All
  https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/healthspan-science-may-enable-healthier-lives-for-all

TREND 6: The Built Environment Becomes Preventive Health Infrastructure for Aging Well

The built environment is increasingly recognized as a determinant of healthspan, shifting from a passive backdrop to an active form of wellness infrastructure. Housing design, walkability, lighting, acoustics, access to nature, transportation and social spaces directly influence mobility, cognition, mental wellbeing and social connection among adults over 50.

Research links walkable, accessible environments with reduced chronic disease risk and greater independence in later life. Wellness real estate developers are integrating evidence-based design—like circadian lighting, biophilia, intuitive wayfinding and flexible communal spaces—to support daily function and reduce stress. This trend extends beyond individual homes and buildings to neighborhood and city-scale planning.

What's next is the normalization of health-supportive design as a baseline expectation rather than a premium feature. The opportunity lies in cross-sector collaboration between planners, architects, public health leaders and wellness professionals to design environments that proactively sustain healthspan.

Resources:

- Global Wellness Institute, *Build Well to Live Well: Case Studies* (2025)
  https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/industry-research/build-well-to-live-well/
- University of Florida, 8 Innovative Aging Trends to Watch in 2026
  https://online.aging.ufl.edu/2025/12/17/8-innovative-aging-trends-to-watch-in-2026/

Breathe Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Sandy Abrams, Founder, TheCEOm.com, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Peter M. Litchfield, PhD, President, Professional School of Behavioral Health Sciences, United States

Exploring the Future of Breath as Wellness

As scientific and behavioral research continues to deepen our understanding of respiration, breathing is emerging as far more than a passive biological function. Increasingly, it is being recognized as a dynamic behavior that directly influences the nervous system, brain function and overall health and wellbeing.

As the world searches for solutions to chronic stress, digital overload and declining attention, breathing practices are rapidly moving into the mainstream of modern wellness. Once associated primarily with yoga or meditation traditions, breath is now being explored through the lenses of science, psychology and physiology, revealing its powerful role in regulating the nervous system and influencing sleep, cognitive performance, emotional regulation, recovery and long-term health and longevity.

The 2026 trends identified by the Global Wellness Institute's Breathe Initiative reflect this evolution. Together, these trends point to a fundamental shift in how breath is understood and applied.

> Explore the Breathe Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Breathing Science, An Emerging New Field

When it comes to breathing practices, until recently pseudoscience has prevailed. This is, however, changing rapidly. Practitioners interested in introducing breathing interventions into their professional work are asking tough questions. Are these interventions based on real science? Breathing practitioners of myriad traditions are communicating, speaking out and sharing their perspectives, experience and knowledge with open minds and critical thinking skills. A new field, breathing science, is emerging.

TREND 2: The Personalization of Breathing

Integrating physiology with psychology

What is good or bad breathing? The answers to this question are diverse and have evolved significantly. What seemed so simple is not. What looks like good breathing may be bad respiration or what looks bad may not be. Breathing that makes one person feel better makes another person feel sick. Assumptions are being challenged. Definitions are being reconfigured. Improving health, enhancing performance and exploring consciousness are fundamental objectives, but achieving them is not a prescriptive enterprise, it is a personal exploration in the context of understanding individualized respiratory physiology.

TREND 3: Breath as Performance Infrastructure in the Workplace

Breath is moving beyond wellness and gaining attention as a practical performance skill in high-stakes business settings. Breathwork has long been used in elite sport and tactical training to help people stay calm and composed under pressure. Now, it is starting to show up in leadership development, team meetings, and decision-making environments. In today's fast-paced business environment, cognitive load and uncertainty are rising. At the same time, more routine tasks are being automated. That makes uniquely human capacities like conflict navigation, regulation and sound judgment even more valuable. A growing body of evidence shows meaningful links between breathwork, nervous system regulation and executive function. Professionals are using breathwork to support focus, clear thinking and sustained performance under load. It is gaining traction because it is simple, trainable and easy to integrate into the flow of work.

TREND 4: NeuroWellness

Regulating the nervous system for a new era of human wellbeing

For most of human history, the nervous system evolved to respond to immediate physical threats. When danger appeared, the body activated its survival response—heart rate increased, breathing changed and attention sharpened to prepare for action. Once the threat passed, the body returned to a state of recovery. Modern life has disrupted this natural rhythm.

Instead of occasional threats followed by recovery, many people now experience continuous low-grade stress driven by digital notifications, information overload, work demands, disrupted sleep cycles and global uncertainty. These constant stimuli can keep the nervous system in a heightened state of activation for long periods of time. Over time, this chronic stress load can affect sleep quality, emotional regulation, cognitive performance, immune function, metabolic health and overall wellbeing. In response, a new category known as neurowellness is emerging.

Neurowellness focuses on helping individuals understand and regulate their nervous systems to function more effectively in daily life. Drawing from neuroscience, behavioral science, somatic practices and emerging neurotechnology, this field emphasizes practical tools that support stress regulation, emotional resilience, cognitive clarity and restorative sleep.

Breath practices are central to this movement because breathing provides a direct, accessible pathway for influencing autonomic nervous system activity. By learning how to intentionally shift breathing patterns, individuals can help move the body from states of chronic stress toward states of balance and recovery.

Resources:

- Moon, Heidi "The Rise of NeuroWellness" 2026 https://www.globalwellnesssummit.com/the-rise-of-neurowellness/

TREND 5: Micro-Dosing Breath

Small moments of interventions

One of the most practical emerging trends is the concept of micro-dosing breath—short, strategic breathing practices integrated throughout daily life. Rather than relying solely on longer meditation or breathwork sessions, people are increasingly using brief breathing resets that take 30 seconds to a few minutes. These micro-interventions can help regulate stress, restore focus and reset the nervous system in real time. As modern life becomes more fragmented and attention spans shorten, shorter breath practices are proving easier to adopt and sustain. Individuals can integrate them into transitions between meetings, before difficult conversations, during travel, before sleep or during moments of emotional overwhelm.

Technology is also accelerating this trend. Wearables, wellness apps and biofeedback devices can now prompt users to pause and breathe based on physiological signals such as heart rate variability or stress indicators. The growing popularity of micro-dosing breath reflects a broader shift in wellness behavior: people are seeking small, repeatable practices that fit into real life.

These short breathing rituals may appear simple, but their cumulative impact can be powerful. When practiced regularly, even brief moments of intentional breathing can reshape stress patterns, improve emotional regulation and help individuals maintain a more balanced nervous system throughout the day.

TREND 6: Breathing is Behavior

Moving beyond simple techniques

Breathing is behavior. It is not simply physiology to be conveniently manipulated at the right time and place. It is regulated psycho-physiologically every day, all day. We all learn breathing habits that have profound effects on health and performance. Until recently, we have overlooked this very important perspective that brings behavioral science to our understanding of breathing and its profound effects, good and bad. The amazing role of breathing in our lives has just only very recently begun to be appreciated.

TREND 7: Breathing and Longevity

Respiratory fitness VO2 Max as a biomarker of healthy aging

As longevity science evolves, researchers are increasingly looking beyond traditional health metrics to better understand what drives healthy aging. One area receiving growing attention is respiratory fitness—particularly measures such as VO_2 max, lung capacity and breathing efficiency. VO_2 max, which measures the body's ability to use oxygen during exertion, is now widely considered one of the strongest predictors of long-term health and mortality risk. Higher VO_2 max levels are associated with better cardiovascular function, metabolic health, cognitive resilience and overall longevity. At the same time, declining lung capacity and inefficient breathing patterns have been linked to increased risk of chronic disease, reduced physical performance and accelerated aging. This growing body of research is shifting attention toward the role breathing plays not only in stress regulation, but also in long-term physiological resilience. Breath practices that improve respiratory efficiency, oxygen utilization and carbon dioxide tolerance are increasingly being explored as complementary tools within longevity and preventive health strategies. As the longevity movement expands, breath training may become an important bridge between lifestyle practices and measurable health outcomes. By strengthening respiratory capacity and improving oxygen dynamics in the body, breathwork offers a simple yet powerful way to support vitality across the lifespan.

Resources:

- Yadav, Goldie. "Deep Breathing Practice Facilitates Retention of Newly Learned Motor Skills." Nov. 14, 2016 https://www.nature.com/articles/srep37069
- McKeown, Patrick. "Aerobic Capacity; How to Increase, Exercises, Benefits." https://oxygenadvantage.com/science/aerobic-capacity-how-to-increase/

Consulting Best Practices Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Lisa Starr, Consultant for Wynne Business, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Wilfried Dreckmann, Founding Director of Spa Project, Germany

The Consulting Initiative represents a global network of over 150 specialized professionals whose primary role is to guide spa and wellness businesses in defining and achieving their goals, whether financial or cultural. Whether we are engaged at the design and concept stage, or to provide guidance once a business is operational, we are afforded a front-row seat to trends in businesses in our sector. Our Task Force members have identified the following developments that we are coming across in our work.

TREND 1: Navigating Investment and Innovation in Social Wellness Clubs

Consultants globally are seeing a huge interest on the part of prospective owners in social wellness clubs and facilities, many with a thermal or bathhouse component. However, this is accompanied by sticker shock during the feasibility study, as these are capital-intensive projects, often costing three times more to create than a standard spa or wellness facility. Probably as a result of this, we are also seeing an increased

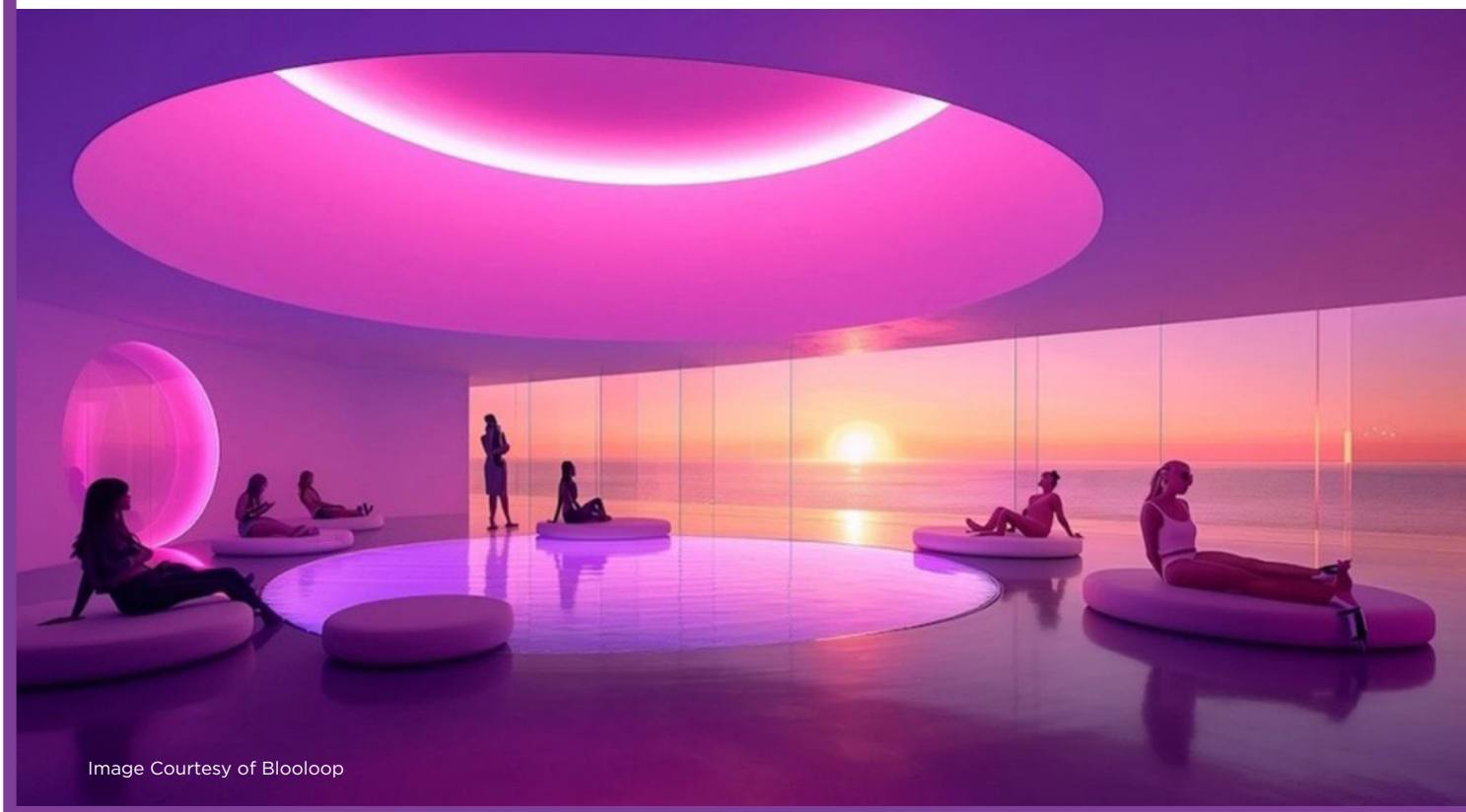

Image Courtesy of Blooloop

> Explore the Consulting Best Practices Initiative on the GWI Website

interest in creating private luxury clubs which, along with typical membership club amenities such as meeting/workspace and food service, would provide self-guided wellness rooms to combat ongoing staffing challenges. A current challenge to these trends is the lack of information on health protocols or training for some of these resources. We are looking to vendors to provide more data, health protocols and design requirements to anticipate broader deployment of these components.

TREND 2: More Expert Guidance for Wellness Startups

A side effect to the boom in interest in all things wellness is that many folks hoping to jump on the bandwagon by creating a new business or facility don't have a hospitality, wellness or retail background. They have had successful careers in other industries, but often do not have experience in client-facing models. These clients rely on consultants to provide additional education and guidance, while at the same time these prospects do not always believe what they are being told!

TREND 3: New Wellness Offerings in the Entertainment Industry

Businesses from the amusement park and attractions industry are inquiring about adding wellness components: since they already have the whole family there, why not? Examples include theme parks offering healthy food as well as wellness festivals (Disney), art and sauna exhibitions (teamLab reconnect), museums hosting events that provide yoga and wellness festivals (US National History Museum, British Museum, Museum of the Future, Dubai), and wellness spaces with immersive video, art and AI (Submersive Austin, 2027).

TREND 4: The Rise of Touchless Wellness Services in Traditional Fitness Studios

As the technology and developments in AI continue to advance in terms of equipment and products available, we are seeing traditional fitness-oriented businesses such as rock-climbing and hyper-focused studios beginning to add in touchless recovery and wellness services to expand their offering to their clients, who are obviously practicing a healthy lifestyle.

TREND 5: Incorporating Wellness – How Late Adopters Can Succeed

As the wellness economy continues to grow, some businesses currently operating in verticals that serve live clients—such as hospitality, spa & wellness and fitness—are experiencing some FOMO that they may not be successfully providing a wellness component. These businesses are anxious to jump onboard, but confusion and poor execution ensues due to the myriad options. Businesses that are late to the game need to pause a beat and craft a careful plan and assessment, so their efforts become more than just window dressing.

Cryotherapy Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Rainer Bolsinger, CSO & CMO, Art of Cryo, Germany

In 2026, cryotherapy enters a more mature era defined by scalable access, protocol standardization, intelligent sequencing and safety-led trust. Expansion is increasingly powered by professional, high-throughput cryochambers that reduce cost per session and serve high-demand urban environments with consistent performance. At the same time, credibility will come less from flashy tech features and more from evidence-based protocols that clarify screening, dosing logic, suitability and responsible language-supported by practitioner education and outcome frameworks. Innovation shifts toward cross-modal sequencing, where cryotherapy is integrated into structured recovery pathways and supported by lightweight AI tools for planning, adherence and simple progress tracking. Finally, as the market scales, safety becomes a premium differentiator—"safety-as-luxury"—with visible SOPs, trained teams and benchmarked best practices. Together, these trends move cryotherapy from niche novelty to a trusted, experience-led pillar of modern wellness.

> Explore the Cryotherapy Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Mass Expansion Through Urban Infrastructure

Access meets efficiency and the new divide between convenience and credibility

Early assumptions suggested that mainstream cryotherapy growth would be driven primarily by smaller, mobile or simplified formats. But the 2026 reality is more nuanced—and more revealing. The market is now expanding along two parallel tracks. On one side are professional, high-throughput cryochambers engineered for continuous operation, consistent ultra-low temperatures and dependable cost-per-session economics. On the other is a fast-rising wave of compact electric single-room systems promoted through the language of plug-and-play installation, standard power access, smaller footprint and faster market entry.

This dual movement is reshaping perception. Compact systems are helping cryotherapy appear easier, lighter and more commercially approachable. They are accelerating visibility, lowering psychological barriers to adoption and aligning neatly with the market's appetite for convenience. Yet visibility should not be confused with equivalence. As the category matures, accessibility may broaden the conversation, but professional-grade installations continue to define the benchmark for operational reliability, temperature stability and repeatable whole-body cryotherapy delivery.

In high-traffic environments, that distinction becomes difficult to ignore. Larger systems are designed for sustained commercial use, higher throughput and more controlled session conditions across a broad user base. They require greater spatial and technical commitment, but that commitment is often repaid through productivity, uptime, serviceability and long-horizon economic logic. In other words, the market may be opening through simplified formats, but it is still being anchored by systems built for performance.

Signals to Watch:

- Rapid growth of compact electric chambers positioned as infrastructure-light, easy-entry solutions
- Continued expansion of high throughput cryochambers in gyms, spas, hotels, stadiums and recovery clubs
- Greater emphasis on throughput, consistency, uptime and cost per session as measures of commercial seriousness
- A widening distinction between systems chosen for convenience and systems trusted for repeatable delivery at scale

Implications: Cryotherapy is no longer growing through a single narrative. One layer of the market is being propelled by accessibility, design simplification and trend momentum. The other is being shaped by a quieter but more decisive question: which systems can deliver controlled conditions, credible repeatability and lasting commercial value under real operating demand? The result is a two-speed marke—one driven by ease of entry, the other by depth of performance. Over time, the latter is likely to define the category's long-term credibility.

TREND 2: Evidence-Based Standards Over Tech Flashiness

Clinical rigor and practitioner education

Rather than pursuing gimmicky tech integrations inside cryochambers, the future lies in establishing evidence-based protocols. This includes clear guidelines on screening, timing, frequency, dose logic and client suitability, enabling cryotherapy to integrate more seamlessly into performance, rehab and preventative-care ecosystems.

Signals to Watch:

- Industry-standard protocols tailored to specific goals, such as injury recovery support, sleep readiness, stress-load reduction, DOMS/swelling management, etc.
- Practitioner education resources: screening tools, session planning guides, contraindication frameworks and outcome measurement templates

Implications: By prioritizing reliability over spectacle, cryotherapy earns trust among clinicians, operators and consumers—while reducing variability and reputational risk.

TREND 3: Guided Sequencing & Cross-Modal Programming

AI-smarter recovery pathways across modalities

Innovation is shifting away from adding complexity inside the cryochamber itself and toward more intelligent sequencing across modalities: what comes before cryotherapy, what follows it, what pairs well with it and which combinations should be limited, spaced carefully or avoided. Increasingly, cryotherapy functions not as a standalone session, but as one element within broader recovery and wellbeing pathways, alongside massage, manual therapy, acupuncture, PBM/laser therapies, compression, breathwork and contrast circuits.

In this context, AI's role is becoming more practical and more relevant. Rather than focusing on flashy automation, the real opportunity lies in AI-guided sequencing: systems that help build recovery pathways from simple inputs such as goals, soreness levels, sleep quality, stress, readiness or symptom notes. Over time, these pathways can become more adaptive, adjusting sequencing recommendations, spacing or emphasis based on user feedback and recurring patterns.

Just as importantly, AI can support operators behind the scenes through structured screening prompts, contraindication checks, session-planning logic and consistency cues. Its value is not to replace professional judgment, but to strengthen it, helping teams deliver more coherent, personalized and operationally disciplined experiences.

Signals to Watch:

- AI-enabled apps or CRM ecosystems that build recovery pathways from simple user inputs such as goals, soreness, sleep and readiness
- Adaptive sequencing tools that adjust recommendations based on user feedback, session response or recurring recovery patterns

- Operator-facing systems that support screening, contraindication checks, spacing rules and session planning across multiple modalities
- Centers publishing "sequence menus," not just modality menus, with clearer guidance on order, timing and caution notes

Implications: AI-guided sequencing has the potential to make multimodal recovery feel less fragmented and more intentional. It can improve consistency, support personalization at scale, reduce avoidable risk and strengthen retention through clearer and more responsive user journeys.

TREND 4: Safety

Trusted experiences

As cryotherapy scales, safety becomes a hallmark of quality brands. Leading providers will differentiate by making safety visible, documented and operationally disciplined: rigorous staff training, structured screening, maintenance accountability and emergency preparedness.

In other words, guests won't just buy "cold." They'll buy the confidence that the experience is controlled, supervised and responsibly delivered.

Signals to Watch:

- Documented SOPs, visible emergency preparedness and clear staff certification standards
- Emerging industry benchmarks, or third-party validation models, for safe operation and best practices
- "Trust stack" communication becoming part of marketing—not buried in compliance

Implications: Establishing safety as a premium differentiator transforms cryotherapy from a perceived risk into a dependable tool for recovery and wellbeing, enabling mainstream adoption and premium positioning.

TREND 5: Nervous System Resetting Beyond Cold Exposure

Regulation rituals for uncertain times – why now?

In a world of constant alerts, economic uncertainty and daily "unknowns," many people aren't simply stressed—they're chronically dysregulated: stuck in low-grade hypervigilance, with fragmented sleep and diminished resilience. That's why cryotherapy is evolving from "cold exposure" into a nervous-system reset ritual.

Its strength is not just intensity, but containment: a time-boxed, controlled stimulus followed by a deliberate downshift (breath cues, sound, warmth, stillness). In an unpredictable culture, a predictable physiological arc—activation, release, calm—restores a sense of agency. The winners will design cryotherapy as a repeatable state change, not a standalone session.

Signals to Watch:

- Guided breath/mindfulness integrations tied to cryotherapy pre-, during- and post-session
- Multi-sensory environments (lighting, sound, scent, recovery lounges) engineered for downshift and recovery

- "Sleep-reset" and "stress-load" programs positioning cryotherapy within lifestyle resilience—not only performance

Implications: Cryotherapy expands beyond athletic recovery into emotional and cognitive restoration, widening the market and increasing retention through ritual, meaning and regulation-focused design.

Resources:

This report combines published research, industry reports and expert interpretation of emerging operational trends within commercial cryotherapy environments.

Cryotherapy Technologies and Physiology

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Nervous System Regulation & Stress Physiology

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- Huberman, A. D., & Feldman Barrett, L. (2023). Cold exposure and autonomic nervous system regulation. *Annual Review of Physiology.*
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AI-guided Health Pathways

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- Rajkomar, A., Dean, J., & Kohane, I. (2019). Machine learning in medicine. *New England Journal of Medicine.*
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- McKinsey & Company. (2023). *The Future of Wellness: Consumer Insights.*
- Leisure Media / HCM Magazine. (2023–2025). Industry commentary on recovery technologies and cryotherapy adoption.

Safety & Regulation

- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). (2016). Consumer Update: Whole-Body Cryotherapy.
- European Commission – Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS). Reports on consumer exposure to extreme cold technologies.

Hot Springs Initiative Trends

Initiative Co-Chair: David Dronet, Owner, The Springs Resort & Spa, United States
Initiative Co-Chair: Marcus Coplin, Nerouphos Consultation, United States

TREND 1: From Relaxation to Measurable Health Outcomes

In 2026, hot spring destinations are moving decisively beyond traditional "relax and unwind" positioning toward measurable health value. Population ageing, increasing prevalence of chronic conditions and stronger emphasis on preventive care across Europe are reshaping guest expectations. Visitors increasingly seek structured balneotherapy programmes, rehabilitation modules, supervised therapeutic treatments and cooperation with medical professionals. Thermal resorts that integrate mineral waters into organised preventive health pathways, rather than offering bathing as a standalone leisure activity, will strengthen their systemic relevance within the European health landscape. This evolution aligns with broader EU health resilience priorities and the growing integration of tourism and public health strategies.

Resources:

- Dryglas, D., & Smith, M. K. (2025a). Introduction: The development of health tourism in challenging times – A focus on the Visegrád countries. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 17*(2), 152–158. https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-01-2025-0024
- Dryglas, D., & Smith, M. K. (2025b). Medical tourism in Poland: Policy, development and future challenges. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 17*(2). https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-01-2025-0025
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> Explore the Hot Springs Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 2: Energy-Smart Thermal Destinations

Energy transition pressures and rising operational costs are reshaping thermal tourism in Europe. In 2026, geothermal optimization, water recirculation systems and reduced fossil energy dependence become central elements of financial resilience. Within the framework of the European Green Deal, geothermal energy is increasingly recognised as a strategic renewable resource supporting regional decarbonization and long-term economic stability. For Polish hot spring resorts, energy-smart infrastructure is no longer solely a sustainability narrative, it is a structural necessity directly influencing profitability and competitiveness.

Resources:

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TREND 3: Longevity and Structured Recovery Programs

Hot springs are increasingly entering the longevity and structured recovery market. Demographic aging and stress-related conditions are strengthening demand for organized recovery retreats combining thermal cycles, non-geothermal hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, group yoga and mindfulness classes, sleep optimization, nutrition guidance and mental regeneration modules. Rather than offering passive bathing experiences, thermal destinations are packaging mineral waters into curated preventive and restorative programmes targeting middle-aged and senior segments. This development reflects broader strategies aimed at strengthening health system resilience and promoting healthy aging.

Resources:

- Dryglas, D., & Smith, M. K. (2025a). Introduction: The development of health tourism in challenging times – A focus on the Visegrád countries. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 17*(2), 152–158.
- OECD/European Commission. (2024). *Health at a glance: Europe 2024: State of health in the EU cycle*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/b3704e14-en
- World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2023). *Mental health and well-being in Europe: Status report*. WHO Europe. https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/e95b49f1-2426-4d8e-bfc9-25b49397ca2 b/content
- https://www.morningstar.com/news/pr-newswire/20260226la97075/dr-marcus-coplinreleases-future-wellness-2026-seven-frontiers-redefining-human-vitality-white-paper

TREND 4: Heritage as a Strategic Asset - Historic Hot Springs Revitalization

Historic thermal architecture and bathing traditions constitute important competitive assets within the thermal tourism market. In 2026, hot spring destinations that integrate storytelling, architectural preservation and heritage interpretation into their product strategy strengthen differentiation and premium positioning. Cultural authenticity enhances brand identity and long-term resilience, particularly in a market increasingly characterized by standardized wellness infrastructure. Cultural frameworks reinforce the strategic importance of historic thermal towns as part of shared continental heritage.

Resources:

- Dryglas, D., & Smith, M. K. (2025a). Introduction: The development of health tourism in challenging times – A focus on the Visegrád countries. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 17*(2), 152–158. https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-01-2025-0024
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- https://sunset.com/travel/hotels/murrieta-hot-springs-renovation

TREND 5: Multi-Day Hot-Spring-Based Wellness Retreats

Thermal travel patterns are shifting toward shorter, focused, more frequent stays. Instead of annual long medical spa holidays, guests are seeking thermal amenities within closer proximity to their homes to make two- to four-night thermal getaways a more regular part of their wellness routines throughout the year. Domestic markets increasingly stabilize demand, reducing vulnerability to international fluctuations and supporting year-round occupancy management. This “micro-seasonality” model aligns with broader tourism transition strategies focused on resilience and demand diversification.

Resources:

- Smith, M. K. (2024) New Trends in Wellness Tourism: Restoration and Regeneration, in Morrison, A. M. and Buhalis, D. (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Trends and Issues in Global Tourism Supply and Demand*, London: Routledge, pp.480-496.
- Niță, A. (2025). *Empirical investigation of the motivation and perceptions of wellness tourists in the post-pandemic era. Sustainability, 17*(14), 6590. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17146590
- https://www.pagosahotsprings.com/retreats/

Hydrothermal Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Don Genders, Founder & CEO, Design for Leisure, United Kingdom
Initiative Vice-Chair: Cassandra Cavanah, Founder, Cavanah Communications, United States

Hydrothermal bathing has deep cultural roots in many parts of the world, from the thermal traditions of Europe and Asia to Nordic sauna rituals and global spa cultures built around water, heat and recovery. In recent years, however, these practices have begun to evolve in new ways as wellness, hospitality and urban development increasingly intersect. What was once confined largely to traditional bathing destinations is now expanding into cities, hotels and purpose-built wellness environments around the globe.

Across these settings, hydrothermal experiences are becoming more intentional, immersive and economically significant. Designers and operators are rethinking how heat, cold, water and rest work together—integrating multisensory environments, guided rituals and more diverse cooling strategies, while also responding to growing demand for both communal and private wellness experiences.

Together, the following five trends illustrate how hydrothermal bathing is entering a new era: one that blends centuries-old traditions with contemporary design, science and evolving expectations around wellbeing.

> Explore the Hydrothermal Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: The Cooling Conversation Matures

Last year, we highlighted a growing ice bath backlash—a shift away from extreme, single-modality cold plunges toward gentler, more accessible forms of cooling. In 2026, that shift has matured into a broader recalibration across wellness, fitness and hospitality. Operators, clinicians and consumers increasingly recognize that sustainable, repeatable cooling practices can deliver equal—or even greater—benefits than ultra-cold immersion, while being safer and far more widely tolerated.

As a result, facilities are moving beyond the traditional cold plunge and integrating a wider spectrum of cooling experiences into the overall thermal journey. These may include snow rooms and snow showers, experience showers, Kneipp-inspired walking pools, temperature-controlled cold rooms (typically 12-15°C) and shorter, guided contrast cycles. Cold is increasingly positioned not as a singular shock experience, but as one element within a thoughtfully designed hydrothermal circuit.

This shift is also being reinforced by elite athletic programs, many of which are adopting more moderate, protocol-driven heat-and-cold approaches in place of prolonged ice immersion. The reasons are both practical and physiological: large-scale ice baths can be challenging to manage in commercial environments due to safety, hygiene and guest tolerance, while emerging research suggests that moderate cold exposure can still deliver meaningful recovery and metabolic benefits when used consistently.

Why It Matters

What we described as a "backlash" in 2025 has evolved into a more constructive recalibration. Cooling is moving from shock-and-awe toward protocol-driven, human-centered thermal design—supporting better wellbeing outcomes, operational sustainability and broader guest adoption.

Resources:

- The Effect of Contrast Water Therapy on Recovery After Exercise: A Systematic Review. *Sports Medicine* https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25689918/
- Cold Water Immersion: Sudden Cold Exposure and Its Physiological Effects. *Comprehensive Physiology* https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28135017/
- Should You Take a Cold Plunge After a Workout? https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/cold-plunge-after-workouts
- Five Trends Driving the Business of Wellness Recovery. https://athletechnews.com/five-trends-driving-business-of-wellness-recovery/

TREND 2: From Sauna Boom to Hydrothermal Circuits

In 2025, we highlighted the explosive global growth of sauna culture — from mobile and pop-up saunas to the revival of traditional heat practices often paired with natural cooldowns in lakes, oceans or open air. In 2026, that movement is evolving beyond simple heat-and-nature pairings into fully realized hydrothermal bathing circuits designed specifically for urban environments and communal social wellness.

Urban wellness venues are increasingly building complete thermal environments that integrate heat, cold, water, rest and guided ritual. Instead of a quick sauna session, guests are engaging in multi-hour thermal journeys that combine different temperatures, sensory experiences and moments of recovery. These environments typically include multiple sauna types, steam rooms, snow rooms or cold chambers, contrast pools, experience showers and dedicated relaxation spaces.

Major signals of this shift include the continued expansion of Bathhouse in the United States and the growing footprint of Othership, alongside similar concepts emerging in cities from London to Melbourne. What began as grassroots sauna culture is rapidly becoming a scalable wellness model attracting institutional investment and strong consumer demand.

What's New in 2026

- Urban thermal centers are emerging as modern communal bathing hubs, reviving social bathing culture in markets where it had largely disappeared.
- Guests are spending half-days or longer in these environments, using them as new "third places" for recovery, relaxation and connection.
- Strong early economics are attracting significant capital and accelerating expansion.
- Hospitality brands are beginning to respond by developing co-ed, communal hydrothermal circuits within hotels and resorts.

Why It Matters

What began as a sauna renaissance rooted in nature and tradition is evolving into a broader return to communal thermal culture—now reimagined for dense urban contexts. Hydrothermal bathing is moving beyond trend status to become a defining feature of modern wellness infrastructure in cities.

Resources:

- How Contrast Therapy Became 2025's Biggest Wellness Trend. *Condé Nast Traveller.* March 2, 2025. https://www.cntraveller.com/article/how-contrast-therapy-became-2025s-biggest-wellness-trend
- Bathhouse Is Changing the Face of Wellness Across America. *Forbes.* Nov. 13, 2025. https://www.forbes.com/sites/nadjasayej/2025/11/13/bathhouse-is-changing-the-face-of-wellness-across-america/
- The New York Bathing Club Boom. *Wallpaper.com*. Feb. 27, 2026. https://www.wallpaper.com/travel/spas/bathing-club-bathhouse-trend-new-york

TREND 3: From Hospitality Amenity to Anchor

Hotel brands are moving beyond the legacy model of relegating spa and wellness to the basement. Instead, wellness is becoming a central guest experience—with larger hydrothermal zones, destination-scale facilities and spa environments increasingly open to both guests and local communities. In some cases, bathing and thermal rituals are becoming a primary driver of hotel choice.

At the same time, demand for privacy-led wellness is rising. Inspired by luxury pioneers such as Aman Group, hotels are introducing bookable private wellness suites for couples or small groups, along with guest rooms that incorporate integrated saunas, steam rooms, soaking tubs and treatment spaces.

This "your room is your spa" model is already appearing in urban hospitality. At Nobu Hotel New York, select suites include onsen-style soaking tubs, steam rooms and in-room treatment setups—allowing guests to experience a full wellness ritual without leaving their accommodation.

Why It Matters

Wellness is shifting from a secondary amenity to a strategic hospitality asset. Integrated hydrothermal facilities and in-room wellness support higher ADRs, premium suite pricing, longer stays and new revenue streams through private bookings and local memberships. For hotel brands, spa is increasingly becoming a core differentiator in an increasingly wellness-driven travel market.

Resources:

- Wellness Tourism Is Reshaping Luxury Hospitality. *Forbes*. Jun. 12, 2024. https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinemccarthy/2024/06/12/wellness-tourism-luxury-hospitality/
- Aman New York: A New Benchmark for Urban Wellness. *Spa Business Magazine.*Spabusiness.com. https://www.spabusiness.com/spa-business-magazine/Aman-New-York-spa-wellness/36565
- The Rise of In-Room Wellness in Luxury Hotels. *Condé Nast Traveller.* Aug. 2024. https://www.cntraveller.com/article/wellness-hotel-room-trend
- Nobu Hotel New York Wellness Suites. Nobuhotels.com.
- https://www.nobuhotels.com/new-york/dining/wellness

TREND 4: Immersive Wellness Comes of Age

In 2025, we highlighted immersive wellness—light, sound, scent and visual storytelling—as emerging tools for evoking awe and deepening emotional connection. In 2026, that concept is moving beyond isolated installations into fully integrated multisensory thermal environments. Saunas, steam rooms, cold experiences and relaxation zones are increasingly designed to engage multiple senses simultaneously, guiding guests through emotional states such as calm, grounding, release or uplift. This shift marks a new phase in hydrothermal design: sensory intelligence becomes part of the infrastructure, not an afterthought.

One of the clearest examples is Submersive, a 25,000-square-foot immersive wellness destination developed with leadership from the experiential arts collective Meow Wolf. The concept blends thermal bathing with projection mapping, spatialized sound, interactive light environments, scent diffusion and biofeedback-driven personalization.

Why It Matters

Hydrothermal bathing is becoming more experiential and emotionally intelligent. Carefully choreographed sensory environments deepen thermal rituals, encourage repeat visitation and create moments of awe that support parasympathetic activation. Multisensory design is quickly moving from novelty to a defining feature of next-generation thermal environments.

Resources:

- Submersive: Immersive Wellness Experience Opening in Austin. https://www.submersive.com
- The Latest Spa Trend? Immersive Digital Treatments Designed to Calm Frayed Nerves. https://www.wsj.com/lifestyle/travel/the-latest-spa-trend-immersive-digital-treatments-designed-for-anyone-with-frayed-nerves-bbf20044
- Wellness Experiences in the Attractions Industry. https://blooloop.com/theme-park/in-depth/wellness-experiences-attractions-industry/
- Meow Wolf Cofounder Developing Immersive "Submersive" Spa Concept in Austin. https://www.mysanantonio.com/business/article/meow-wolf-submersive-spa-austin-opening-21222926.php

TREND 5: Guided Rituals, Free Bathing

Hydrothermal spaces are evolving from passive amenities into actively programmed recovery environments. Many venues now offer scheduled contrast sessions, aroma rituals, Aufguss performances and breathwork-and-heat classes. Much like boutique fitness studios, guests increasingly arrive for a specific recovery session—not simply to use the facilities—helping operators drive engagement, education and community.

At the same time, operators are rediscovering the value of unstructured bathing. Even highly programmed concepts such as Othership are designing new locations with free-flow thermal circuits alongside guided sessions. Guests increasingly want both: expert-led experiences when they seek structure and learning, and open bathing when they want autonomy, social connection or quiet restoration. The result is a hybrid model—curated programming layered onto flexible hydrothermal environments that allow guests to move through heat, cold and rest at their own pace.

Why It Matters

Guided experiences create differentiation, support ticketed programming and build community, while free bathing preserves accessibility and longer dwell times. Together, they broaden the audience for thermal wellness and help operators maximize both engagement and revenue.

Resources:

- Aufguss: The Sauna Ritual Bringing Theatre to the Spa Experience. https://www.spabusiness.com/spa-business-magazine/Aufguss-sauna-ritual-spa-trend/
- Social Bathhouses and Guided Sauna Rituals Are Transforming Wellness. https://www.cntraveller.com/article/social-bathhouse-wellness-trend
- Othership's Social Sauna Model Expands as Guided Breathwork and Contrast Classes Gain Popularity. https://athletechnews.com

Inclusive Wellness Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Jackie Roby, Relationship Mindset Coach, Inspired Journey Consulting, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Cherrie Catresse, Wellness Practitioner with Catreese & Co Wellness

The language and priorities surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion continue to evolve across the wellness industry. In many regions, shifting political climates and changing workplace dynamics are influencing how organizations approach inclusion, belonging and wellbeing. At the same time, new research and emerging social patterns are expanding how inclusive wellness is understood.

Increasingly, the conversation is moving beyond individual health behaviors toward the broader systems and environments that shape wellbeing. Workplace culture, social connection, health systems and the built environment are all playing a role in determining whether people have equitable opportunities to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

The trends emerging in 2026 reflect this expanding perspective. From the redesign of workplaces and the integration of neurodiversity into wellness practices to the growing longevity economy and community informed architecture, the industry is beginning to recognize that inclusive wellness requires both cultural awareness and structural change.

Together, these trends highlight an important shift. Inclusive wellness is no longer only about providing access to services. It is about designing systems, environments and practices that support the health, dignity and resilience of diverse populations.

> Explore the Inclusive Wellness Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Neurodiversity and the Rise of Whole Person Nervous System Care

Conversations around mental health and workplace inclusion are increasingly expanding to include neurodiversity, particularly conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Historically, ADHD has often been framed narrowly as a behavioral or attention disorder treated primarily through medication.

Emerging research and advocacy from the neurodivergent community are encouraging a broader perspective. ADHD is increasingly understood as involving nervous system regulation, emotional processing and executive functioning. Practices such as physical activity, mindfulness, yoga and other body-based approaches have shown potential to support attention, emotional regulation and stress management.

This shift has important implications for inclusive wellness. Individuals from historically disadvantaged groups (HDGs) often face barriers to diagnosis and treatment including financial limitations, stigma and lack of culturally competent care. As a result many individuals seek complementary approaches that support neurological regulation and overall wellbeing.

As awareness grows, organizations and wellness providers are beginning to rethink how environments are designed to support different cognitive styles. The emerging model is not medication or lifestyle, it is medication *and* lifestyle, tailored to the individual. Personalized treatment frameworks combining conventional care with mindfulness, movement and environmental design are replacing one-size-fits-all approaches across healthcare systems globally. For wellness practitioners, centering accessibility through sliding scale pricing, culturally relevant programming and practitioners from HDGs ensures these tools reach the communities who need them most and have historically been excluded from both conventional care and premium wellness spaces. This conversation naturally extends into the next phase of the workplace evolution.

Resources:

- Umbrella Review of ADHD Interventions
- East Asian Traditional Medicine Scoping Review
- The Role of Physical Activity in ADHD Management
- Yoga Intervention Research
- Self Directed CAM Use Among Students with ADHD
- Exercise and Executive Function in ADHD
- Neurodiversity and Personalized ADHD Treatment

TREND 2: From Accommodation to Design – Building Neuroinclusive Workplaces

For many years ADHD in the workplace has been treated primarily as an individual accommodation issue. Employees might request flexible deadlines, quieter workspaces or modified schedules if they felt comfortable disclosing their condition. This approach placed the burden on individuals rather than examining how workplace structures themselves might contribute to cognitive strain.

Research increasingly suggests that this model is insufficient. Studies have shown that adults with ADHD in full time employment often experience lower income, more workplace warnings and greater difficulty maintaining relationships with supervisors and colleagues due to executive functioning challenges that traditional workplace structures rarely accommodate. A 2025 Understood.org survey of neurodivergent adults in the workplace found that 82% experience pressure to mask their neurodivergence due to stigma.

Masking is exhausting work. It consumes the cognitive and emotional bandwidth employees would otherwise spend doing their actual jobs. When people cannot be their authentic selves at work, the emotional tax accumulates.

The conversation is now shifting from accommodation to design. Rather than waiting for individuals to disclose their needs, some organizations are beginning to redesign work environments so they support diverse cognitive styles from the outset. Clearer communication structures, predictable workflows, flexible work environments and leadership training on neurodiversity are becoming part of broader workplace wellbeing strategies. Emerging tools are also expanding what support can look like. Research on virtual body-doubling (the practice of working alongside another person to support focus and task completion) found that participants with ADHD completed tasks faster and reported greater sustained attention when paired with a human or AI body double versus working alone. Executive-function coaching, once considered a niche offering, is beginning to appear in broader employee benefit ecosystems alongside mental health, sleep and stress programming.

This shift reflects a deeper recognition that psychological safety and inclusion influence not only individual wellbeing but also how people experience connection at work.

Resources:

- Predicting Occupational Outcomes for Individuals with ADHD
- Neurodiversity at Work Survey – Understood.org
- Survey of Knowledge and Perceptions of ADHD and Autism in the Workplace
- Web Based Stress Management for Working Adults With ADHD
- Occupational Intervention for Quality of Work Life in ADHD
- Designing Body Doubling for ADHD in Virtual Reality
- EY Global Neuroinclusion at Work Study

TREND 3: The Reframing of DEI in a Changing Political Climate

As the political climate shifts in the United States following the most recent election cycle, the language surrounding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is undergoing significant transformation. In some contexts, the term “diversity” itself has become politically charged, with reports indicating that certain organizations and government-funded programs have been advised to avoid using the term altogether.

This evolving environment is influencing how companies communicate their commitments to inclusion and workplace wellbeing. In response, many organizations are rebranding DEI initiatives under alternative frameworks such as belonging, inclusion, respect, culture and wellness. Media reporting and industry observations suggest that departmental titles are also changing accordingly. For example, Google has reframed its DEI leadership role as Vice President of Googler Engagement, reflecting a broader trend toward shifting the language used to describe this work.

For some organizations, these changes represent an effort to continue advancing representation, fairness and bias reduction while remaining compliant with evolving legal and political expectations. In these cases, the underlying commitment may remain intact even as the terminology evolves.

However, shifts in language can also carry implications for accountability and clarity. Scholars and commentators have noted that replacing terms such as “equity” with broader concepts like “belonging” may unintentionally dilute the specificity of the work being undertaken. While belonging is an important dimension of workplace culture, it does not necessarily address structural disparities in the same way equity-focused initiatives are intended to do.

Changing terminology can therefore create both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, reframing language may allow organizations to continue advancing inclusion efforts in politically sensitive environments. On the other hand, it may introduce ambiguity, making it more difficult to evaluate whether meaningful progress toward equity is being maintained.

Ultimately, the impact of these efforts depends less on terminology and more on integration. As long as inclusion and equity remain framed as standalone initiatives rather than embedded into organizational systems, leadership accountability and operational practices, changing the name of the work alone is unlikely to produce lasting change.

As organizations reconsider how workplaces support diverse cognitive styles, broader conversations are also emerging around how inclusion itself is defined and communicated within organizations.

Resources:

- *The Guardian* – Firms rebranding diversity initiatives to avoid unwanted political attention
- CNBC – In the Trump era companies are rebranding DEI efforts, not giving up
- Diversity Resources – Rebranding DEI
- The Conversation – Rebranding equity as belonging will not advance justice

TREND 4: Employee Wellbeing as a Strategic Driver of Organizational Success

Employee engagement and wellbeing are becoming increasingly interconnected. Global workforce surveys indicate declining engagement levels, prompting organizations to reconsider how workplace culture and wellness initiatives influence long-term organizational performance.

Workplace wellbeing is also being understood more broadly than in previous decades. It now encompasses multiple dimensions including mental health, financial stability, social connection and a sense of purpose within one's role. When employees feel supported across these areas they are more likely to remain engaged, creative and committed to their organizations.

At the same time, research increasingly highlights the relationship between wellbeing and organizational outcomes. Studies from global institutions and workplace research organizations suggest that environments supporting employee health and engagement are associated with stronger productivity, improved retention and more resilient organizational cultures.

Financial stability is also gaining recognition as a component of workplace wellbeing. Economic inclusion research continues to highlight persistent pay disparities across many sectors, shaping employees' access to stability and long-term financial security. When financial wellbeing is unevenly distributed across a workforce, stress and economic uncertainty can influence both individual health and workplace engagement.

Social connection remains another critical factor. Hybrid work environments, evolving workplace dynamics and rising social polarization are changing how employees interact with colleagues and leadership. As opportunities for informal connection decline, organizations are increasingly exploring ways to foster stronger relationships and shared purpose within teams.

Together these dynamics are prompting many organizations to view employee wellbeing not as a standalone initiative, but as an integral component of sustainable workplace systems.

Resources:

- Prioritizing Employee Wellbeing Is Good for Business – World Economic Forum
- Gallup Global Workplace Report
- Thriving Workplaces – McKinsey Health Institute

TREND 5: The Longevity Imperative and the Redesign of Health Systems

Global aging is rapidly transforming the priorities of health systems and the wellness economy. By 2030, every baby boomer will be over 65. Adults over 80 are the fastest-growing demographic in many nations. Nearly 70% of older adults will require long-term support in their lifetime.

For decades healthcare systems were designed primarily to diagnose illness, treat acute conditions and discharge patients. As populations live longer this reactive model is becoming increasingly unsustainable.

The growing longevity economy is shifting attention toward prevention, functional health and the ability to age safely within communities. The World Health Organization's Decade of Healthy Ageing highlights the importance of environments that support mobility, accessibility and social participation across the lifespan.

This transformation is reshaping industries far beyond healthcare. Housing, transportation, food systems, digital monitoring and community infrastructure are increasingly viewed as part of the broader health ecosystem.

For CEOs, boards and global investors, audit your organization for longevity bias, integrate social infrastructure into capital planning, align reimbursement strategy with distributed care and treat caregiving as an economic variable. Shift dashboards to include mobility trajectories, cognitive screen trends, social isolation risk and caregiver strain metrics.

As attention turns toward how environments influence long term health, the intentional design of communities themselves is emerging as an important area of focus.

Resources:

- Decade of Healthy Ageing – World Health Organization
- The Longevity Economy Outlook
- Aging in Place Research and Policy Studies

TREND 6: Community Informed Development and the Future of Wellness Architecture

Inclusive wellness increasingly recognizes that health outcomes are shaped not only by individual behaviors but also by the environments where people live, work and gather. Architecture and development decisions influence access to nature, mobility, housing stability and opportunities for social connection. Architectural conversations around affordable housing have similarly emphasized that urban design decisions should reflect the lived experiences of local communities.

Public health research highlights that the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age strongly influence health outcomes and health equity. Built environments that support walkability, shared spaces and stable housing can strengthen community cohesion and improve long term wellbeing.

Participatory planning tools such as Maptionnaire are enabling developers to gather community insight through digital mapping and surveys so residents can identify neighborhood priorities that may otherwise be overlooked.

Architecture firms are increasingly integrating these approaches into practice. The US firm David Baker Architects has emphasized community based hospitality design, incorporating resident feedback in

projects such as the Harmon Guest House in Healdsburg, California. Global firms including Gensler and HKS are also expanding community engagement strategies within urban planning and hospitality design.

As inclusive wellness expands globally, another important conversation is emerging around the cultural origins of many healing practices.

Resources:

- Harmon Guest House Case Study – David Baker Architects
- Human Centered Urban Design Research – Gensler
- Cities and Communities Practice – HKS Architects
- Community Engagement in Planning and Design – Maptionnaire
- Affordable Housing and Urban Equity – Metropolis Magazine

TREND 7: Cultural Integrity and the Ethical Integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine

As interest in holistic wellness practices grows, traditional healing systems are gaining greater global visibility. Traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture in particular are becoming increasingly integrated into healthcare and wellness environments beyond their cultural origins.

These systems approach health through a holistic framework emphasizing balance within the body and harmony between physical, emotional and environmental factors. Practices including acupuncture, herbal medicine and mind body movement aim to restore equilibrium and support natural healing processes.

The global expansion of these practices reflects a broader shift toward integrative wellness models that combine conventional medical care with complementary therapies.

However this growth also raises important ethical considerations. When traditional healing practices are adopted without cultural context or collaboration with practitioners connected to those traditions, there is a risk of cultural appropriation and loss of historical meaning. Responsible integration requires cultural humility, proper training and recognition of the communities that developed these healing systems.

Resources:

- Intercultural Dissemination of Complementary Medicine – BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies
- Integration of Traditional Medicine into Healthcare Systems – Journal of Alternative and Holistic Medicine
- Ethical Considerations in Alternative Medicine – Journal of Integrative Health Ethics
- Cross Cultural Analysis of Complementary Medicine – BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies

Lifestyle Medicine Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Dr. Melissa Sundermann, Double Board-Certified Physician, Lifestyle Medicine Well-Being Coach, Co-Founder of REVIVE, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Prof. Dr. Sunil Kumar, Board-Certified Lifestyle Medicine Physician, United Kingdom

TREND 1: Lifestyle Medicine as First-Line Therapy

Lifestyle medicine is no longer adjunctive care. In 2026, health systems increasingly deploy evidence-based lifestyle interventions as first-line therapy for cardiometabolic disease, mental health conditions, musculoskeletal health and cancer survivorship—embedded into care pathways, quality metrics and value-based models.

Resources:

- Global Wellness Institute, The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity, January 2026: https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/global-wellness-institute-blog/2025/01/15/the-future-of-brain-health-lifestyle-medicine-vascular-vitality-neuroplasticity/
- Global Wellness Institute, Bringing Healthcare Into the Kitchen: Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine, January 2026: https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/global-wellness-institute-blog/2026/01/20/bringing-healthcare-into-the-kitchen-harnessing-the-power-of-food-as-medicine/
- Global Wellness Institute, Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis: A Systems-Based Lifestyle Medicine Approach to Burnout Prevention and Organizational Resilience, January 2026: https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/global-wellness-institute-blog/2025/01/18/workplace-wellbeing-burnout-systems-based-lifestyle-medicine/
- Kirk Voelker, Chippy Ajithan, Jordan Colbert, Mikka Ipri, Lauren Pullman, Tonya S King. Impact of a Semi-Virtual Lifestyle Medicine Program on Health Outcomes (2025, AJLM prevention-focused LM program with strong clinical effects): https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40809902/

> Explore the Lifestyle Medicine Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 2: Physical Activity Prescribed for Function and Longevity

The focus shifts beyond exercise minutes to functional capacity, strength, balance, VO_2 max and mobility across the lifespan. Resistance training and cardiorespiratory fitness are recognized as essential prescriptions for healthy aging, metabolic resilience, cognitive health and independence.

Resources:

- Global Wellness Institute, The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity, January 2026: https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/global-wellness-institute-blog/2025/01/15/the-future-of-brain-health-lifestyle-medicine-vascular-vitality-neuroplasticity/
- Mikel Izquierdo et al. Optimizing Healthspan and Quality of Life: A Global Consensus on the Role of Exercise in Aging" (2025 global consensus/translation paper): https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39743381/
- Loretta DiPietro, Physical Activity and Function in Older Age: It's Never Too Late to Start! (2025, ACSM summarizing evidence and prescribing movement for function): https://acsm.org/physical-activity-function-older-age/

TREND 3: Dietary Quality and Whole Foods Take Center Stage

Nutrition care prioritizes dietary quality over reductionism, emphasizing whole, minimally processed, fiber-rich, plant-predominant eating patterns. Clinical conversations center on sustainable food patterns, culinary skills, cultural relevance and food environments that support long-term behavior change.

Resources:

- Bringing Healthcare Into the Kitchen: Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine January 2026
- Scientific Report of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee strong emphasis on diet quality, whole foods, and plant-forward patterns.
- The Top Science Papers of 2025 Supporting Plant-Based Nutrition curated 2025 evidence on whole, plant-predominant dietary patterns and health.

TREND 4: Longevity Medicine Built on Lifestyle Medicine Foundation

Longevity medicine increasingly recognizes lifestyle medicine as its essential foundation. Daily behaviors—nutrition quality, physical activity, sleep, stress regulation, social connection and purpose—remain the primary drivers of healthspan, functional capacity and disease prevention.

Precision medicine, diagnostics and targeted supplementation play an important adjunctive role, enhancing outcomes when layered onto a strong lifestyle base. Longevity is reframed as a whole-person, systems-based pursuit focused on vitality, independence and quality of life over time.

Resources:

- The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity January 2026
- Bringing Healthcare Into the Kitchen: Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine January 2026
- Optimizing Healthspan and Quality of Life: A Global Consensus on the Role of Exercise in Aging positions physical activity as a core healthspan tool.y American Council on Exercise on January 24, 2025
- Lifestyle Medicine and Cardiovascular Health: A Concept Whose Time Has Come (emphasizes lifestyle as foundational to long-term CV health and survival.) 2025 Aug 29

TREND 5: Mental Health Evolves Into Mental Fitness

Mental health care expands to include mental fitness and emotional resilience—stress regulation, recovery, purpose and connection—integrated into routine care. These skills are positioned not only for mental illness, but for adherence, performance, resilience and overall wellbeing.

Resources:

- The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity January 2026
- Bringing Healthcare Into the Kitchen: Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine January 2026
- Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis: A Systems-Based Lifestyle Medicine
- Approach to Burnout Prevention and Organizational Resilience January 2026

TREND 6: Sleep and Circadian Health Become Clinical Priorities

Sleep is elevated as a foundational pillar, with increased attention to circadian alignment, light exposure, sleep timing, shift-work mitigation and sleep disorder screening. Sleep health is recognized as central to cardiometabolic, immune, mental and aging outcomes.

Resources:

- The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity January 2026
- Lifestyle Medicine and Cardiovascular Health: A Concept Whose Time Has Come" – discusses sleep and circadian-linked behaviors in CV risk Am J Lifestyle Med. 2025 Aug 29:1
- Optimizing Healthspan and Quality of Life: A Global Consensus on the Evidence
- American Council on Exercise on January 24, 2025

TREND 7: Social Connection and Community Prescribing Scale

Loneliness and social isolation are increasingly treated as modifiable health risks. Group visits, shared medical appointments, movement cohorts and community prescriptions grow—supporting connection, accountability and sustainable behavior change.

Resources:

- The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity January 2026
- Bringing Healthcare Into the Kitchen: Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine January 2026
- Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis: A Systems-Based Lifestyle Medicine
- Approach to Burnout Prevention and Organizational Resilience January 2026
- Am J Lifestyle Med. 2025 Aug 29:
- Review of the Plant-Based Nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine News – August 2025

TREND 8: Clinician Wellbeing and Lifestyle Medicine for the Workforce

Lifestyle medicine turns inward to support healthcare professionals and organizational vitality. Burnout prevention, resilience and sustainable performance are addressed using the same evidence-based lifestyle behaviors prescribed to patients—recognizing clinician wellbeing as essential to system transformation.

Resources:

- Bringing Healthcare Into the Kitchen: Harnessing the Power of Food as Medicine January 2026
- Addressing the Workplace Wellbeing Crisis: A Systems-Based Lifestyle Medicine
- Approach to Burnout Prevention and Organizational Resilience January 2026
- Lifestyle Medicine Core Competencies Updated: Addressing Today's Global Health Priorities" (ACLM, 2025 update includes new competencies relevant to systems, teams, and workforce

TREND 9: AI-Enabled Diagnostics and Digital Health Optimize Lifestyle Behaviors

Artificial intelligence and digital health tools increasingly act as accelerators of lifestyle medicine, enhancing—not replacing—human-centered care. AI integrates data from wearables, remote monitoring, labs, imaging and patient-reported outcomes to personalize lifestyle prescriptions and track progress in real time. Digital platforms support behavior change at scale, offering adaptive coaching, feedback loops and actionable insights that improve adherence to nutrition, movement, sleep, stress management and social connection.

Resources:

- The Future of Brain Health: Lifestyle Medicine, Vascular Vitality, and Neuroplasticity for Lifelong Clarity January 2026 2026lifestylemedicine.org/about-aclm/research-innovation/
- Impact of a Semi-Virtual Lifestyle Medicine Program on Health Outcomes" (2024, AJLM – semi-virtual health coaching model with strong clinical impacts, directly relevant to AI/digital scaling

Massage Makes Me Healthy & Happy Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Heather Zdan, Executive Marketing Professional, United States
Initiative Co-Vice Chair: CG Funk, Consultant, United States
Initiative Co-Vice Chair: Karen Short, CEO, Universal Companies, United States

Massage Makes Me Healthy & Happy aims to celebrate the healing powers of massage therapy and promote its benefits through research, education, advocacy and awareness. In doing this, the initiative consolidates existing clinical research and supports distribution of research for deeper integration of massage into healthcare and wellness practices. As part of this year's theme, Massage for Every Chapter of Life, the initiative celebrates Massage Makes Me Healthy & Happy Day on March 20th sharing new ways for therapists to elevate their practice. This was the foundation for the 2026 trends keeping in support of that theme.

TREND 1: Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)

Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) is becoming increasingly popular as both a therapeutic and wellness practice, due to a combination of growing scientific interest, broader clinical integration and cultural wellness trends. Research has documented physiological effects of MLD, such as increased opening of lymphatic pathways in patients with lymphedema, supporting its use in clinical contexts like post-surgical

> Explore the Massage Makes Me Happy Initiative on the GWI Website

swelling and chronic edema management.

Outside of medical settings, the rise of interest in holistic and non-invasive wellness practices, boosted by social media and consumer demand for natural approaches, has broadened public awareness and demand for MLD in spas and aesthetic contexts.

Resources:

- https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/lymph/article/id/5737/
- https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32803533/
- https://www.ft.com/content/d1c3f9c2-15f1-443c-9a2c-b3e7f8d8ef3f

TREND 2: Incorporating Massage Therapy into Rehabilitation and Recovery Programs

Physical therapists and occupational therapists are increasingly integrating massage and other hands-on/manual therapy techniques into their recovery and rehabilitation protocols as adjuncts to exercise and functional interventions to improve patient outcomes. In physical therapy, research supports combining manual therapy with therapeutic exercise to enhance pain management, increase joint mobility and improve functional recovery more than exercise alone in some conditions, particularly when restoring movement and reducing discomfort during rehabilitation.

Resources:

- https://www.jospt.org/doi/10.2519/josptopen.2023.1134?utm
- https://www.physio-pedia.com/Manual_Therapy?utm

TREND 3: Integration of Asian Massage Modalities into Modern Massage Therapy

In the 21st century, many massage therapists around the world have adopted, and adapted, Asian massage techniques as part of a broader shift toward holistic, integrative wellness practices. These techniques—rooted in centuries-old medical and spiritual traditions—have influenced both how massage is performed and how therapists conceptualize health and healing.

One major way Asian massage has been adopted is through integration into Western practice. Rather than replacing Western massage modalities like Swedish or deep tissue massage, techniques from traditions such as Thai massage, Shiatsu, Tui Na and Ayurvedic massage are often blended into hybrid sessions. Therapists may incorporate assisted stretching from Thai massage, acupressure from Shiatsu or energy-balancing principles from traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

Resources:

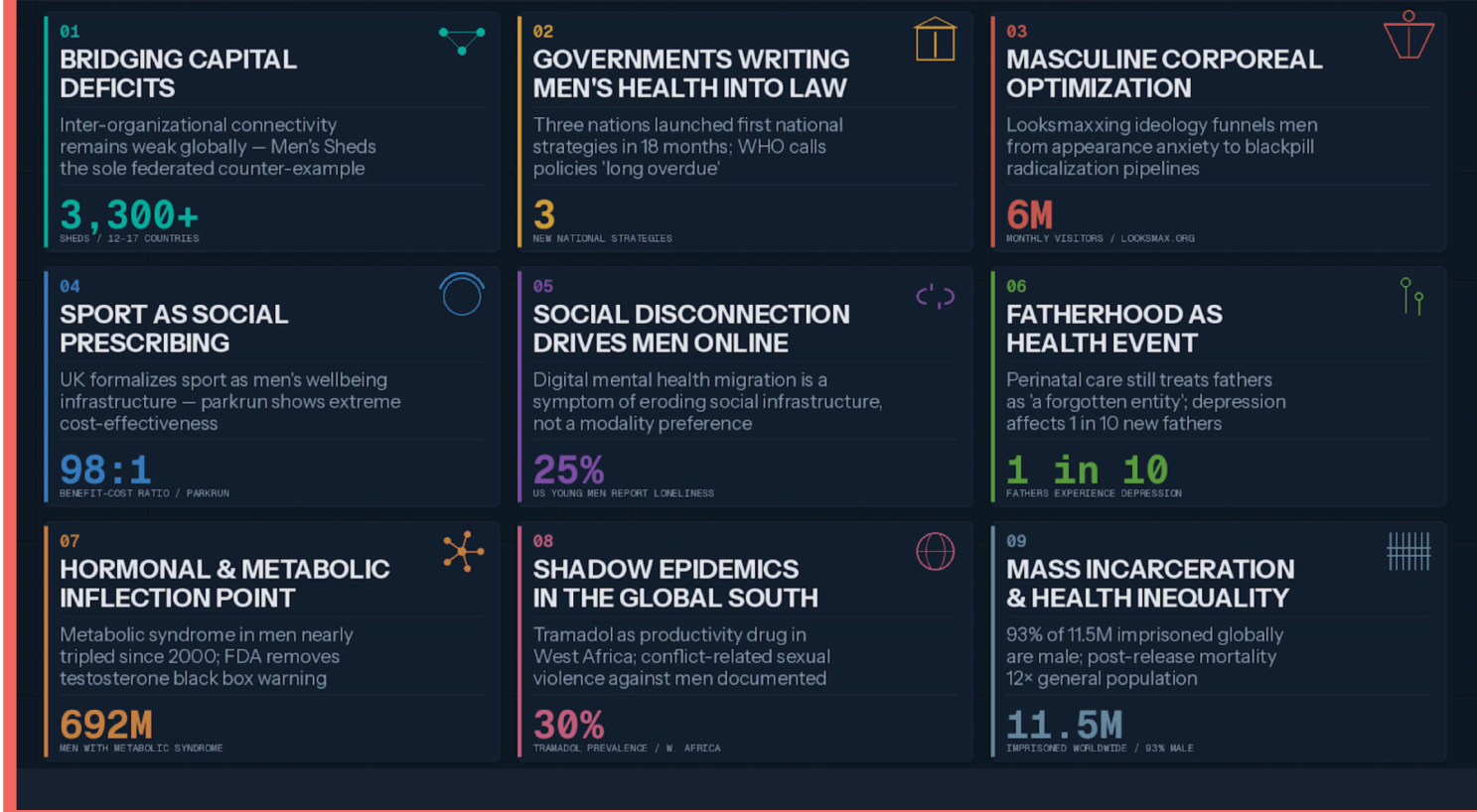
- https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25682523/
- https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27512098/
- https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/1472-6882-11-88

Men's Wellbeing Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: John Toomey, CEO, The Wellbeing Thought Leaders, Australia
Initiative Vice-Chair: Vishal Patel MD PhD, Chief Science and Innovation Officer, Sensei, United States

Men's wellbeing in 2026 is defined by a central tension: institutional momentum is accelerating while the connective infrastructure between organizations, sectors and geographies remains weak. Three nations launched their first national men's health strategies in 18 months. Sport is being formalized as social prescribing infrastructure. Fatherhood is gaining recognition as a perinatal health event for men. Governments and regulatory bodies are acting with unprecedented specificity. At the same time, men's wellbeing organizations globally operate with strong bonding capital and negligible bridging capital—no shared protocols, no referral pathways, no coordinating structures outside a few national exceptions. Meanwhile, crises compounding in the Global South—opioid-driven productivity epidemics, conflict-related sexual violence against men, mass incarceration as a disease amplifier—remain largely absent from mainstream frameworks. These nine trends map the field's advances and its structural gaps.

2026 Trends in Men's Wellbeing Globally



> Explore the Men's Wellbeing Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Bridging Capital Deficits in Men's Wellbeing Organizations Globally

The men's wellbeing ecosystem—spanning peer-support circles, retreats, coaching practices, Men's Sheds, breathwork programs and leadership foundations—has expanded rapidly, yet inter-organizational relationships, shared practices or referral pathways that connect these groups to one another have not been globally cultivated. The Men's Sheds movement stands as the single, striking counter-example. Now numbering over 3,300 Sheds across approximately 12–17 countries, the movement operates through national associations federated under the International Men's Sheds Organisation (IMSO), established in 2011. Australia's AMSA (ca. 1,300 Sheds), the UK's UKMSA (ca. 900), Ireland's IMSA (ca. 450), and newer bodies in Canada, New Zealand, Denmark and the United States share knowledge through conferences, newsletters and Shed Radio. A mixed-methods systematic review by Foettinger et al. (2022) documented benefits to self-rated health, social isolation and wellbeing across the federated network. The Australian Men and Boys' Health Alliance (AMBHA), formed in May 2023 at the invitation of the Australian Department of Health, brings together AMSA, Movember, Healthy Male, The Men's Table, MATES, OzHelp, Parents Beyond Breakup and academic researchers. It produced eight key recommendations and represents the closest example of inter-organizational bridging in the men's wellbeing space—but it is geographically limited to Australia and primarily policy-focused rather than operational. No other category of men's wellbeing organization has a comparable coordinating structure, nor any formal mechanism for cross-type knowledge exchange.

The field remains dominated by bonding capital, with weak external bridging links, and it is ripe for unification through bridge building.

Resources:

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TREND 2: Governments Are Writing Men's Health into Law

In the 18 months between November 2024 and March 2026, three of the world's largest English-speaking nations either launched or began developing their first national men's health strategies, joining a small club that previously included only Ireland (2008), Brazil (2009) and Australia (2020). England published its first Men's Health Strategy (November 2025) with £3.6 million earmarked for middle-aged male suicide prevention; Canada opened public consultations on a Men and Boys' Health Strategy (the first by any G7 nation other than the UK); and Ireland launched its second National Men's Health Action Plan.

At the institutional level, the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* published its first editorial calling men's health policies "long overdue," and the *Lancet Public Health* introduced the 5R Framework—Research, Reach, Respond, Retain, Relational—as the first actionable design tool for gender-responsive health systems serving men. The Lancet Commission on Gender and Global Health acknowledged that "gender in global health" has functioned as shorthand for women and girls. In the US, the American Institute for Boys and Men received $20 million from Melinda French Gates, and the AMA passed a resolution supporting federal and state offices of men's health. Brazil's National Policy on Comprehensive

Healthcare for Men (PNAISH) serves as a pioneering global model for integrating male-specific health services into primary care.

Resources:

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- Health Canada. "Improving the Health of Men and Boys in Canada." 2025. Canada.ca
- Cornell, M. "Men's Health Policies: Long Overdue." *Bull. WHO*, July 2025. PMC
- Galdas., et al. "Designing Men's Health Policy: The 5R Framework." *Lancet Public Health,* 2025. The Lancet
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TREND 3: Masculine Corporeal Optimization – A New Body Crisis with an Ideological Engine

A cluster of practices—looksmaxxing, cosmetic surgery, liposuction, testosterone supplementation, leg lengthening and bone smashing—has coalesced into what researchers are beginning to call "masculine corporeal optimization." Looksmaxxing is a community-driven ideology with its own pseudo-scientific taxonomy, where users rate attractiveness on numerical scales, measure facial angles and classify men into hierarchical ranks. The "blackpill"—the belief that physical appearance deterministically controls life outcomes—originated on incel forums but has been laundered into mainstream platforms through looksmaxxing discourse. This ideological scaffolding transforms diffuse appearance anxiety into a systematized worldview with diagnostic tools (PSL ratings), treatment protocols (surgical roadmaps) and a community of practice. The dedicated forum looksmax.org receives six million unique visitors monthly.

Men now account for 14.5% of cosmetic procedure patients globally (ISAPS 2024), with gynecomastia surgery, liposuction and eyelid surgery leading among US men. The global testosterone replacement therapy market exceeds $1.6 billion, the hair transplant market ranges from $6–12 billion, and anabolic steroid use carries a 6.4% lifetime prevalence among men globally. The human cost is severe: body dysmorphic disorder carries a 3.5-fold increased risk of suicide (Rautio et al., 2024, population-level Swedish cohort) and cosmetic surgery does not resolve the underlying pathology. Halpin et al. (2025) documented users encouraged toward self-harm when judged to have failed masculine appearance standards. Turing Institute researchers found 44% of looksmaxxing TikTok videos also used blackpill hashtags, suggesting that these hashtags algorithmically funnel young men from looksmaxxing content to more extreme blackpill and neo-Nazi content.

While men's body dissatisfaction has been compounding over decades, several recent trends have accelerated this phenomenon, including, but not limited to:

- Dating apps restructuring the mating market around visual appearance
- Social media algorithms amplifying unrealistic body standards
- Economic precarity eliminating alternative status pathways, disproportionally affecting men
- Influencer culture modeling a "pharmaceutical masculinity." Manosphere influencers have accumulated billions of views promoting appearance-optimization content, frequently presenting steroid-enhanced physiques as naturally achievable, creating what researchers call "the natty-or-not problem."

- COVID-19 accelerating every underlying trend. "Zoom dysmorphia" was documented as a clinical phenomenon, with dermatologists reporting substantial increases in patients dissatisfied with their appearance during and after the pandemic.
- K-pop globalizing alternative male beauty standards and normalizing men's cosmetic procedures.

Resources:

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- Rautio, D., et al. (2024). "Intentional Self-Harm and Death by Suicide in Body Dysmorphic Disorder." *Biological Psychiatry* 96(11):868–875. DOI: 10.1016/j.biopsych.2024.05.006
- Rück, C., et al. (2024). "Body dysmorphic disorder." *Nature Reviews Disease Primers* 10(1):92. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41572-024-00577-z
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TREND 4: Sport Is Becoming Formalized Social Prescribing Infrastructure for Men

The UK government's January 2026 "Team Up" campaign—backed by the Premier League, EFL, Rugby Football League, Movember and Andy's Man Club, alongside £400 million in grassroots sports facilities investment—marks the first time a national government has formally recognized sport as social infrastructure for men's wellbeing rather than recreation. The evidence supporting this shift is now substantial. Haake, Quirk & Bullas (2024) demonstrated a benefit-cost ratio of 16.7 to 98.5 to 1 for parkrun, making it several times more cost-effective than comparable physical activity interventions. A follow-up study of 967,478 UK parkrunners identified males as a priority target subpopulation, suggesting untapped potential. Football Fans in Training (FFIT) remains the most rigorously evaluated sport-based men's health intervention globally, with RCT evidence of sustained weight loss at 3.5 years and successful scale-out across four European countries. Social prescribing—clinical referral to community activities—is the bridging mechanism, but England's £5.77 million Green Social Prescribing evaluation found a familiar problem: within-sector networks were strong, but communication across sectors was weak, and no agreement existed on who should strengthen inter-organizational connections. The EFL Trust's 72 football club community charities have demonstrated through published research that their social hubs produce the greatest impact on mental wellbeing rather than physical outcomes.

Resources:

- Haake, S., Quirk, H. & Bullas, A. (2024). "The impact of parkrun on life satisfaction and its cost-effectiveness." *PLOS Global Public Health* 4(10):e0003580. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0003580
- Hunt, K., et al. (2014). "A gender-sensitised weight loss and healthy living programme (FFIT)." *The Lancet* 383(9924):1211–1221. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(13)62420-4 External Link
- Sheffield Hallam University. *Green Social Prescribing National Evaluation Final Report* (2024). https://www.shu.ac.uk/centre-regional-economic-social-research/projects/all-projects/national-evaluation-of-the-preventing-and-tackling-mental-ill-health-green-social-prescribing
- UK GOV.UK. "Team Up" campaign and grassroots sport investment, January 2026. https://teamup.campaign.gov.uk/

TREND 5: Social Disconnection—Not Digital Preference—Is Driving Men Online for Mental Health Support

The framing of digital mental health tools as men's "preferred modality" deserves scrutiny. The evidence increasingly supports a darker interpretation: men's migration to apps and AI chatbots is substantially a symptom of eroding social infrastructure, not a genuine modality preference. Gallup's 2023–2024 data found 25% of US men aged 15–34 felt lonely "a lot of the previous day," making the US the only OECD country where young men are significantly lonelier than the general population. Pew Research (2025) found men far less likely than women to turn to friends, family or professionals for support. The Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory equated the mortality impact of lacking social connection to smoking 15 cigarettes daily. Against this backdrop, Opozda et al.'s systematic review found that of 184 studies on e-mental health interventions, only seven papers (N=552 men) presented male-specific data—the entire evidence base was built without attending to the population most likely to rely on digital tools as a primary modality. Zainal et al. (2025) confirmed a gender engagement gap: women engage significantly more than men with digital interventions. In sub-Saharan Africa, where formal psychiatric workers are scarce, traditional healers and faith-based organizations function as the de facto mental health infrastructure for men, challenging the assumption that AI-enabled teletherapy will be beneficial globally.

Resources:

- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B. & Layton, J. B. (2010). "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk." *PLOS Medicine* 7(7):e1000316. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316
- Opozda, M. J., et al. (2024). "Facilitators of, barriers to, and preferences for e-mental Health Interventions for depression and anxiety in men: metasynthesis and recommendations." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 346:75–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2023.11.015
- U.S. Surgeon General. "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation." Advisory, May 2023. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK595227
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- https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2025.2547610
- Emmanuel, G. O., et al. (2024). Prevalence and patterns of substance use in West Africa. PLOS Global Public Health, 4(12), e0004019. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0004019

TREND 6: Fatherhood Is Recognized as a Men's Health Event

Approximately one in 10 new fathers experience depression and men experience significant increases in depressive symptoms in the first five years of fatherhood. Fathers remain what a 2024 BMJ Open scoping review of 37 qualitative studies across 11 countries called "a forgotten entity" in perinatal care. The health consequences are intergenerational: a 2025 Deakin University review—described as the most comprehensive to date—found consistent links between paternal distress and adverse child developmental outcomes across multiple domains. A longitudinal analysis from Australia's Ten to Men cohort found pre-conception wellbeing predicted lower post-natal depressive symptoms, suggesting screening should begin before birth. Policy is catching up. England's Men's Health Strategy identifies fatherhood as a "critical life stage." The ILO reports 105 of 186 countries now offer paid paternity leave (up from 68 a decade ago), though the global average remains four days, with a 22.5-week gap between total paid leave available to mothers versus fathers. The OECD found "father quotas" more effective than mandates alone, and *Health Affairs* called for multisector city- and county-level partnerships to address paternal depression as a population health concern. The shift underway is from treating fatherhood as a women's

health adjacency—something that happens to mothers' partners—to recognizing it as a perinatal health event for men requiring its own screening protocols, intervention pathways and evidence base.

Resources:

- Paulson, J. F. & Bazemore, S. D. (2010). "Prenatal and Postpartum Depression in Fathers ." *JAMA* 303(19):1961–1969.
- Watkins, A.E., et al. (2024) "Exploration of father's mental health and well-being concerns during the transition to fatherhood, and paternal perinatal support: scoping review." *BMJ Open*. PMC11574476. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2023-078386
- Copland, R. J. & Hunter, S. C. (2025). "Paternal Perinatal Mental Health Support." *Discovery Mental Health.* PMC11925843. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44192-025-00165-x
- ILO. *Care Economy Brief: Closing the Gender Gap in Paid Parental Leaves.* June 2025. https://www.ilo.org/publications/closing-gender-gap-paid-parental-leaves-better-parental-leaves-more-caring
- Earle, S., et al. (2024). "Perinatal Mental Health: Father Inclusion." *Health Affairs*. DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2023.01459

TREND 7: Men's Hormonal, Metabolic and Environmental Health Reaches an Inflection Point

Three converging evidence lines are making men's biological health one of the most consequential and contested domains in wellbeing. The TRAVERSE trial (Lincoff et al., 2023, n=5,246), the largest RCT of testosterone therapy ever conducted, established cardiovascular safety in monitored hypogonadal men, and in February 2025 the FDA removed the cardiovascular risk black box warning from all testosterone products—a pivotal regulatory moment. Testosterone prescriptions have grown substantially, with the sharpest increases among men aged 35–44, driven partly by telehealth platforms entering hormone therapy. The cultural shift from treating testosterone deficiency as a medical condition to framing it as "optimization" blurs clinical and lifestyle boundaries. On the metabolic side, Noubiap et al. (2025) found metabolic syndrome prevalence among men nearly tripled from 9.0% in 2000 to 25.7% in 2023, with an estimated 692 million men now affected. Low testosterone is both consequence and contributor to metabolic syndrome, driving increases in measurement and supplementation of testosterone. The male fertility debate has also sharpened: Levine et al.'s updated meta-analysis found sperm concentration declined 51.6% globally between 1973 and 2018, with the rate of decline accelerating post-2000. Yet, these findings may differ within populations, as Lewis et al. (2025) found no clinically significant decline among fertile American men. In the Global South, an epidemic of Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDu) is devastating young male agricultural workers in Central America and Sri Lanka, driven by extreme heat stress and climate-related occupational hazards.

Resources:

- Lincoff, A. M., et al. (2023). "Cardiovascular Safety of Testosterone-Replacement Therapy." *NEJM* 389:107–117. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa2215025
- Noubiap, J. J., et al. (2025). "Worldwide Trends in Metabolic Syndrome from 2000 to 2023: A systematic review and modelling analysis." *Nature Communications*. DOI: 10.1038/s41467-025-67268-5.
- Levine, H., et al. (2023). "Temporal Trends in Sperm Count." **Human Reproduction Update** 29(2):157–176. https://doi.org/10.1093/humupd/dmac035
- Lewis, T. P., et al. (2025). "Sperm Concentration Remains Stable Among Fertile American Men." *Fertility and Sterility*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2024.08.322
- Mulawkar, P. M., et al. (2023). "Anabolic-Androgenic Steroids and Male Fertility." *Journal of Human Reproductive Sciences* 16(4):268–285. *DOI:* 10.4103/jhrs.jhrs_90_23
- WHO/WMO. (2025). Climate change and workplace heat stress: Technical report and guidance. World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization. https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/climate-change-and-workplace-heat-stress/climate-change-and-workplace-heat-stress

TREND 8: The Shadow Epidemics – Substance Abuse and Violence in the Global South

Mainstream men's health frameworks are increasingly challenged by distinct, male-predominant crises in the Global South that do not fit the Western "deaths of despair" model. In West Africa, the abuse of Tramadol has reached a pooled prevalence of 30% in studied populations. Unlike recreational drug use in the West, this is often a "productivity epidemic," where manual laborers in informal economies use the synthetic opioid to sustain grueling physical work. Simultaneously, Southeast Asia is grappling with a record-breaking methamphetamine crisis, with over 230 tons seized in 2024. This surge is fueled by civil instability and cross-border trafficking, creating a cycle of addiction and economic precarity that targets young men in industrial and conflict zones.

Beyond substance use, the nature of documented violence against men is undergoing a paradigm shift. The conflict in Ukraine has provided a historic evidence base for systematic conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against men; the UN documented 350 male victims out of 484 total cases between 2022 and 2025. This data, coupled with UNICEF's first global estimates revealing that up to one in seven boys and men experienced sexual violence before age 18, shatters the long-standing "gender-neutral" or female-exclusive perception of sexual trauma. In Ukraine, the 2025 establishment of the first male survivor support network signals a growing institutional recognition of this trauma, which was previously silenced by gendered stigmas. These epidemics require interventions that move beyond individual Western-style therapy to address the specific economic and safety realities of men living in the Global South.

Resources:

- Liu, Y. E., et al. (2024). "Mass incarceration as a driver of the tuberculosis epidemic in Latin America." *Lancet Public Health* 9(11):e841–e851. DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667(24)00192-0
- "Periodic Reports on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine." United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/reports/periodic-reports-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-ukraine
- Emmanuel, G. O., et al. (2024). "Prevalence and patterns of substance use in West Africa." *PLOS Global Public Health* 4(12):e0004019. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0004019
- UNICEF (October 2024). Violence against children widespread, affecting millions globally. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/fast-facts-violence-against-children-widespread-affecting-millions-globally

TREND 9: Mass Incarceration as a Primary Engine of Global Health Inequality

With 11.5 million people imprisoned worldwide—roughly 93% of whom are male—mass incarceration has transitioned from a legal issue to a primary driver of global health inequality. Prisons now function as institutional amplifiers for infectious diseases that eventually leak back into the general population. In Latin America, incarceration is the leading risk factor for the tuberculosis (TB) epidemic, with notification rates in prisons running nearly 29 times higher than in the community. Research indicates that over 40% of prison-acquired TB cases only manifest after a man has been released, effectively "exporting" the disease into under-resourced neighborhoods and families.

The danger persists well beyond the period of confinement. The time immediately following release is a window of extreme physiological vulnerability. Men leaving prison face an all-cause mortality rate 12 times higher than the general population in their first two weeks of freedom, with drug overdose risk skyrocketing by 129 times as they navigate a sudden lack of institutional structure. This crisis is being further exacerbated by the rise of "mega-prisons," such as El Salvador's CECOT, and the record expansion of US immigration detention, the majority of whom are men. These systems represent a parallel, often

invisible, humanitarian crisis where systemic medical neglect and documented torture have become institutionalized. Addressing men's wellbeing in 2026 requires recognizing that the prison wall is a porous membrane, and the health of the community is inextricably linked to the health of its incarcerated and formerly incarcerated male population.

Resources:

- Fair, H., & Walmsley, R. (2024). *World prison population list* (14th ed.). Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (ICPR). https://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/world_prison_population_list_14th_edition.pdf
- Human Rights Watch & Cristosal. (2025). *"You have arrived in hell": Torture and abuse in El Salvador's CECOT*. https://www.hrw.org/reports
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2025). *Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025*. https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/Report-on-the-Human-Rights-Situation-in-Ukraine-1-December-2024-31-May-2025
- Borschmann, R., MARIC Consortium, & Kinner, S. A. (2024). Rates and causes of death after release from incarceration among 1,471,526 people in eight high-income and middle-income countries: An individual participant data meta-analysis. *The Lancet, 403*(10435), 1459–1470. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)00344-1
- Liu, Y. E., Mabene, Y., Camelo, S., Rueda, Z. V., Pelissari, D. M., Johansen, F. D. C., ... & Andrews, J. R. (2024). Mass incarceration as a driver of the tuberculosis epidemic in Latin America and projected effects of policy alternatives: A mathematical modelling study. *The Lancet Public Health, 9*(11), e841–e851. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(24)00192-0

Mental Wellness Initiative Trends

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Initiative Co-Chair: Alina Hernandez, Organizational Advisor, Germany

The mental wellness trends for 2026 reflect a profound shift in how humans are adapting to a rapidly changing environmental, technological and social landscape. Advances in neuroscience, digital technology and systems thinking are revealing that mental wellbeing is shaped not only by individual psychology, but also by the environments, relationships and ecosystems in which people live.

From the emerging understanding of lifelong brain development and the microbiome–gut–brain connection updates, to the role of immersive and neuro-regulated environments that help rebalance the nervous system in a digitally saturated world, these trends point toward a more integrated model of wellness. At the same time, research on social cognition and human development suggests that mental wellness evolves alongside our capacity for connection, collective intelligence and societal contribution. Together, these developments signal a new era in which mental wellness is understood as a dynamic process of human adaptation—one that supports resilience, cognitive flourishing and the realization of human potential in an increasingly complex world.

> Explore the Mental Wellness Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Lifespan Brain Health - The Era-Based Mental Wellness Model

Mental wellness is increasingly being reframed through a lifespan brain health lens, recognizing that the brain evolves through distinct phases rather than a smooth, linear progression. Emerging neuroscience and global policy efforts—including initiatives championed by the Davos Brain Alliance—are driving a shift from episodic mental health interventions toward continuous brain health strategies across the entire lifespan.

A landmark 2025 University of Cambridge study analyzing nearly 4,000 brain scans revealed that the human brain undergoes four major structural "turning points" at approximately ages 9, 32, 66, and 83, creating five major eras of neural development from birth through late life. Each era reflects shifts in brain wiring that influence cognition, emotional regulation, resilience and vulnerability to mental health conditions.

These five brain eras can be broadly understood as:

- Birth–9: Neural Foundation Era – Rapid network growth and pruning shape learning, emotional regulation and social development.
- 9–32: Adaptive Growth Era – Prolonged neurodevelopment refines connectivity and cognitive flexibility, extending "brain adolescence" well into early adulthood.
- 32–66: Cognitive Stability Era – The brain enters its longest phase of structural stability, supporting peak productivity, leadership and complex problem-solving.
- 66–83: Brain Resilience Era – Early aging processes begin, highlighting the importance of lifestyle, social engagement, and preventive brain health strategies.
- 83+: Longevity Brain Era – Neural connectivity becomes more localized, emphasizing the need for cognitive support, purpose and social integration.

This new framework is reshaping mental wellness strategies globally. Instead of focusing solely on treating mental illness, governments, healthcare systems and employers are increasingly prioritizing brain health optimization across every life stage—from childhood cognitive (and even before, in the pre-conception period or the First 1000 Days paradigm) development to midlife cognitive resilience and late-life neuroprotection.

As longevity increases worldwide, this era-based brain health model is expected to impact prevention, workforce wellbeing, education systems and aging policy—anchoring mental wellness in a lifelong neurodevelopmental perspective rather than a reactive care model.

Resources:

- University of Cambridge. *Scientists identify five ages of the human brain over a lifetime.* (2025).
- Baisas, L. *Your brain changes at 9, 32, 66, and 83.* Popular Science (2025).
- Wiseman, L. *The human brain goes through five non-linear stages of development.* ABC News (2025).

TREND 2: Gut–Brain Science Moves into Precision

Gut–brain research is becoming increasingly detailed and personalized, linking specific microbial species and metabolites to mental health outcomes. Recent studies show that gut microbes influence brain function through immune, hormonal and neural pathways—including the vagus nerve and neurotransmitter production.

Researchers are now identifying microbiome signatures associated with depression, anxiety, impulsiveness, and addiction, suggesting a more causal role for gut bacteria in psychiatric disorders.

New evidence also indicates that microbial metabolites—such as indoles and short-chain fatty acids—can directly influence stress responses, mood regulation and inflammation in the brain. These discoveries are accelerating the development of precision interventions, including targeted probiotics, microbiome-based diagnostics, diet therapies and fecal microbiota transplantation, positioning the gut microbiome as a key frontier for personalized mental health prevention and treatment.

Resources:

- Dong, T. & Mayer, E. *Advances in Brain–Gut–Microbiome Interactions.* Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology (2024).
- Frontiers in Microbiomes. *The gut–brain connection: microbes' influence on mental health and brain development* (2025).
- Duke-NUS Medical School. *Gut microbes produce metabolites that influence anxiety-related brain activity* (2025).

TREND 3: Microplastics as Brain and Mental Wellness Risk Is Firmly Established

Microplastics are rapidly shifting from an environmental concern to a human brain-health issue risk.

Early work by Bodeker and Munday helped bring attention to the wellness implications of chronic microplastic exposure, highlighting how these particles enter the body through food, air and consumer products and may contribute to systemic inflammation and neurological risk. New research suggests micro- and nanoplastics may cross biological barriers and potentially affect brain function, with scientists exploring links to neuroinflammation, cognitive decline and mood disorders.

At the same time, the Global Wellness Institute's Microplastics Watch Initiative is mobilizing the wellness sector to track emerging science and translate it into prevention strategies—from plastic-free environments to detoxification protocols. The next frontier is integrating plastic exposure reduction into proactive mental wellness and brain health strategies, recognizing environmental toxins as a growing determinant of psychological wellbeing.

Resources:

- Bodeker, G. & Munday, T. *Tackling Microplastics as a Human Health Issue.* Global Wellness Summit Trend Brief (2025).
- Global Wellness Institute. *Microplastics Watch Initiative.*
- Psychreg. *Microplastics and neurological health risks.*

TREND 4: The Evolution of the Social Mind II

From Individual Awareness to Collective Intelligence

Loneliness is increasingly understood not simply as a social deficit, but as a signal of underdeveloped social cognition and connection systems in the brain. New research in adult development and neuroscience shows that humans progress through stages of cognitive complexity, moving from individualistic thinking toward systems awareness and collective responsibility.

Studies in adult developmental psychology demonstrate that as individuals mature, their capacity for perspective-taking, ethical reasoning and societal concern expands. These shifts correspond with lifelong neuroplasticity, where social interaction strengthens neural networks involved in empathy, cooperation and complex problem-solving.

This evolution toward a "social mind"—where wellbeing is tied to collective flourishing—is supported by growing evidence that meaningful social connection improves mental health, cognitive resilience and life satisfaction. In a world facing complex global challenges, cultivating higher levels of social cognition and community connection is becoming a central pillar of mental wellness and may provide pathways to more complex conflict resolution and eventually a life-in-total perspective.

Resources:

- Hernandez, A., & Bodeker, G. (2018). Higher Human Potential Beyond Ordinary Limits**.** In *Mental Wellness: Pathways, Evidence and Horizons*. Global Wellness Institute, Mental Wellness Initiative White Paper.
- Kegan, R. *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development.* Harvard University Press.
- Davidson, R. & McEwen, B. *Social influences on neuroplasticity and mental health.* Nature Reviews Neuroscience.
- World Happiness Report 2025. *Social connections, shared meals, and wellbeing.*

TREND 5: Neuro-Regulated Environments in the Age of the Digitally Adapted Human

Human cognition is evolving in response to life in digital environments. Constant connectivity, algorithmic information flows and prolonged screen engagement are reshaping attention patterns, emotional regulation and stress physiology. As a result, mental wellness is increasingly understood through the lens of how the brain adapts to digital ecosystems—and how environments can help restore balance.

Neuroscience shows that chronic digital stimulation can heighten cognitive load and sympathetic nervous system activation, while practices that support physiological regulation—such as sensory modulation, immersive environments and guided recovery states—can strengthen resilience and emotional regulation. Advances in biometric monitoring now allow real-time insight into indicators such as heart-rate variability and stress response, helping environments respond dynamically to the needs of the individual.

In this emerging paradigm, touchless wellness technologies support—not replace—human adaptation by helping regulate the nervous system within increasingly digital lifestyles.

Examples of emerging applications include:

- Adaptive work and wellness environments that adjust lighting, sound and visual immersion to support cognitive recovery and focus.
- Biometric-guided recovery spaces using heart-rate variability and stress indicators to tailor relaxation and mental restoration experiences.
- Immersive sensory environments designed to counter digital overstimulation and promote emotional regulation and mental clarity.

As digital life accelerates, the future of mental wellness may depend on environments that help the brain periodically recalibrate from digital intensity to physiological balance.

Resources:

- Shaffer, F., & Ginsberg, J. *Heart Rate Variability and Stress: Implications for Health.* National Institutes of Health.
- Bodeker, G., & Cohen, M. *Understanding the Global Spa Industry: Spa Management.* Routledge, 2010 — foundational work on wellness environments and therapeutic modalities supporting health and stress regulation.
- Montag, C., & Elhai, J. *Digital media use and mental health: A review of emerging research.* Nature Human Behaviour.
- Global Wellness Institute. **Touchless Wellness Initiative Trends 2025** – integrating high-tech solutions with traditional wellness approaches in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Microplastics Watch Initiative Trends

Initiative Co-Chair: Professor Gerry Bodeker, Member at Green Templeton College, University of Oxford, UK and Malaysia
Initiative Co-Chair: Trent Munday, Senior Vice President, Mandara Spa, Thailand

Once seen primarily as an environmental concern, the plastic crisis has now crossed a new frontier—into our food, water, air and even our bodies. Microplastics, defined as plastic particles smaller than 5 mm (5000 m) in diameter and nanoplastics defined as even smaller, ranging from 1 to 1000 mm (0.001 to 1 m) in size, have been discovered in human blood, lungs and placentas.

These discoveries redefine plastic pollution not only as an ecological issue but also as one of the greatest health and wellness challenges of our time. Microplastics reach us through three main portals—ingestion, inhalation and skin—resulting in health consequences we're only beginning to see These include:

- Inflammation and oxidative stress
- Endocrine and reproductive effects
- Immune system disruption

As evidence mounts linking microplastics to inflammation, hormonal imbalance, cognitive disruption and fertility decline, the wellness industry faces both an ethical responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity. With its global reach, its influence over consumer habits and its alignment with sustainability and self-care, the wellness sector can lead humanity's collective detox from awareness to action.

Resources:

- *Plastic Inc.*, Beth Gardiner, Penguin Random House, New York. Feb 2026

> Explore the Microplastics Watch Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: The Wellness Industry Is Forging a New Role and Set of Responsibilities

Consumer Education

Wellness brands have the credibility to translate science into everyday action. COMO Hotels & Resorts and Six Senses have already piloted zero-plastic amenities and sustainability briefings for guests. IHG Hotels & Resorts (parent of Six Senses) is rolling out the "Journey to Plastic Freedom" playbook across its portfolio. Marriott International is actively reducing single-use plastics across their properties in response to guest demand. Soneva, a pioneer in sustainability, is using on-site water bottling and banning plastic straws. By framing plastic reduction as self-care, not sacrifice, the industry can change consumer psychology.

It is important to note that without immediate and sustained new commitments throughout the plastics value chain, annual flows of plastics into air, land and water will grow more than 120% by 2040 and cause a 75% increase in human health impacts.

This growing plastic pollution crisis poses increasing risks to corporations which could face collective annual financial risks in the hundreds of billions of dollars should governments require them to cover the waste management costs of the packaging they produce.

Resources:

- Pew Trust. Breaking the Plastic Wave, 2025: https://www.pew.org/en/research-andanalysis/reports/2025/12/breaking-the-plastic-wave-2025

TREND 2: Product Reformulation

Personal-care and supplement brands can audit formulas for hidden polymers. Aveda, Lush and Weleda have phased out microbeads and switched to biodegradable packaging. The next frontier is eliminating microplastics in emulsifiers and encapsulation agents—the invisible plastics. "Microplastic-free" can become a wellness standard, as "paraben-free" once did.

Resources:

- Global Plastics Policy Reviews, University of Portsmouth, UK: https://plasticspolicy.port.ac.uk/policy-reviews/lush-cosmetics-environmentalpolicy/#:~:text=Since%20their%20formulation%2C%20Lush%20have,has%20a%20l oyal%20consumer%20base.

TREND 3: Hospitality and Design

Hotels and spas are leading through material choices: glass dispensers, bamboo amenities and uniforms made of organic cotton or Tencel. The Well Building Standard and EarthCheck certifications now recognize plastic minimization as part of sustainable operations—linking wellness architecture with measurable health outcomes.

The Wellness Architecture Initiative of the Global Wellness Institute, in a new white paper, notes: "As buildings have become more airtight for energy efficiency, they have also begun to trap microscopic particles released from synthetic materials such as carpets, upholstery, paints and finishes. These particles are now being detected in human lungs and bloodstream, raising concerns about long-term health impacts."

Key sources in contemporary interiors include:

- Carpets and rugs – particularly polypropylene or nylon
- Synthetic textiles – polyester, nylon, acrylic
- Furniture foams and upholstery – polyurethane
- Paints and coatings – even water-based VOC-free paints derived from petrochemicals
- PVC, laminate, vinyl and rubber flooring
- MDF and melamine furniture
- Vinyl-backed wallcoverings and adhesives
- Accessories and styling objects

The white paper concludes that: "Plastic-free or plastic-reduced interiors are no longer viewed as a niche or luxury, but as a fundamental component of healthy building design. By addressing pollutants at their source, wellness architecture is evolving to create spaces that actively support human health, rather than simply mitigating harm."

Resources:

- Microplastics & Environmental Health: Designing Healthier Interiors in the Age of Plastic. Valentina Cereda, 2026. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/microplasticsenvironmental-health-bvgcf/

TREND 4: Advocacy and Policy Leadership

The economic and policy dimensions of plastic and wellness

Global health costs associated with plastic exposure, including endocrine disorders and respiratory diseases, are projected to exceed $250 billion annually by 2030. Governments are responding. The European Union plans to restrict 500 synthetic polymer types by 2030 under its Green Deal Chemicals Strategy. And the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)

is pushing for stricter regulations on synthetic polymers, prompting brands to replace them with biobased or natural materials.

Japan and South Korea have introduced taxes on virgin plastic production, while several African nations have banned single-use plastics altogether.

For the wellness economy, these shifts present both risk and opportunity:

- Risk**:** Brands reliant on cheap polymer packaging will face compliance costs and reputational backlash.
- Opportunity: Those embracing natural materials, refillable systems, and regenerative supply chains will gain first-mover advantage.

Consumers are voting with their wallets: according to NielsenIQ, 73% of global consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable packaging. Plastic reduction is thus not only an ethical stance but a competitive differentiator.

Wellness leaders—from retreat owners to skincare founders—can help shape the "plastic-lite" economy by modelling transparency, partnering with scientists and embedding plastic metrics into ESG reports.

Resources:

- NeilsenIQ, The Sustainability Shift in Consumer Behavior (2024), https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights

TREND 5: Emerging Solutions – Plant-Based Polymers for Water Filtration

In 2025, researchers from Texas A&M University found that polysaccharides from okra and fenugreek seeds can remove up to 93% of microplastics from water. These biodegradable natural gums outperform many synthetic coagulants, marking a breakthrough for sustainable filtration—a bridge between agricultural wisdom and modern science.

Resources:

- Srinivasan R et al., Okra and Fenugreek Plant Extracts Remove Microplastics from Water, ACS PressPac (2025), https://www.acs.org/pressroom/presspacs/2025/may/research-update-okra-fenugreekextracts-remove-most-microplastics-from-water.html

TREND 6: Dietary and Biological Defenses

Emerging studies indicate that dietary fibers may trap microplastics in the gut and expedite excretion. Probiotic bacteria such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium can bind toxins from plastic additives, reducing inflammation. Antioxidants like vitamin E, quercetin and polyphenols protect cells from oxidative damage induced by nanoplastics. The message: nutritional wellness is environmental wellness.

Resources:

- Sun T et al., Dietary Fibers as Defense Against Microplastic Toxicity, Frontiers in Nutrition (2024), https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2024.1412541
- Zhao Q et al., Probiotics Mitigate Toxic Effects of Microplastics in Mice, Environmental Toxicology and Pharmacology (2023), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.etap.2023.104089

TREND 7: New Frontiers in Detoxification

Early-stage medical research is exploring chelation-style therapies—natural clays, activated charcoal and chitosan—that may bind microplastics in the gastrointestinal tract for elimination. Massage and lymphatic stimulation are also being studied for improving glymphatic clearance in the brain, which could theoretically assist the removal of microscopic debris. While experimental, these approaches reflect a growing convergence between biomedical science and holistic wellness.

Already medical wellness centers have begun offering treatments to remove microplastics from the body. However, there are certain fundamentals that need to be addressed before these can become standardized and valid treatment options.

The first is measure ment. Currently, there is no consensus on the best method/s for counting microplastic presence in the blood and in organ systems. This is an opportunity for the medical wellness sector to come together and create consensus around measurement standards.

Another is the focus on blood purification using plasma exchange or apheresis. While micro and nanoplastics may be able to be removed through blood purification techniques, a bigger challenge remains in removing them from tissues and cells. Reducing levels of microplastics in the blood does not guarantee the removal of microplastics from the brain, the heart, the reproductive system, etc. There is a challenge here for the medical wellness community: how to assess and remove microplastic presence in organ systems, tissues and cells? One solution may be to focus on activating the innate capacity of cells to eject waste material at the cellular level.

Traditional Therapies: Ayurveda detox

The results of two studies on the Ayurvedic purification program, Panchakarma, suggest that lipophil-mediated detoxification may be effective in reducing body burdens of fat-soluble toxicants. Panchakarma

includes warm oil massages, herbal steam baths, elimination therapies, herbal preparations during and after treatments. Light, nourishing foods, rest and suitable exercise are considered crucial features of the program. In a cross-sectional study, analysis of nine PCBs and eight pesticides revealed that PCB levels were significantly lower in the detox subjects than in controls. Possible explanations may include activation at the cellular level of a process of discharging waste material, in this case industrial pollutants.

Medical wellness programs already offer procedures that focus on all of the above. These therapeutic procedures could be harnessed for microplastic removal and evaluated by using agreed measures for assessing levels of microplastics before and after treatment. Research is greatly needed to study these therapies as potential means of removing microplastics.

Resources:

- Singh P. et al., Potential Adsorptive and Chelating Agents for Microplastic Detoxification, *Journal of Hazardous Materials Advances* (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hazadv.2024.100284
- Li Y. et al., Manual Lymphatic Stimulation Enhances Brain Glymphatic Clearance: Implications for Neurotoxin and Microplastic Removal, *Scientific Reports* (2025), https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-51234-9
- Herron RE, Fagan JB. Lipophil-mediated reduction of toxicants in humans: an evaluation of an ayurvedic detoxification procedure. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 2002 Sep-Oct;8(5):40-51. PMID: 12233802 https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12233802/#:~:text=have%20been%20banned%20for%20decades%20but%20may,higher%20in%20detoxification%20subjects%20than%20in%20controls

TREND 8: Self-Care and How to Support Natural Detoxification

Self-care is a growing trend across the wellness sector and in the case of managing microplastic intake and facilitating removal, there are several lifestyle habits that keep these organs functioning at peak performance:

- Hydration: Drinking plenty of water to help the kidneys flush the bloodstream.
- Nutrition: Eating fiber-rich foods (to aid digestion) and cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and kale, which support liver enzymes.
- Sleep: Quality sleep (seven to nine hours) allows the brain to clear out metabolic waste.
- Exercise: Physical activity improves circulation and stimulates the lymphatic system.
- Limit toxins: Reducing alcohol and processed foods lowers the “toxic load” on the liver and kidneys.

TREND 9: Plastic Alternatives

The plant-based plastic market is experiencing significant growth driven by increasing environmental awareness, regulatory support for sustainable materials, and growing demand for ecofriendly packaging solutions. The market outlook is shaped by the rising adoption of bio-based alternatives across industries such as food and beverage, consumer goods and packaging.

Some quick statistics for the plant-based plastic market:

- Industry Value (2025): US$ 2.1 billion
- Forecast Value (2035): US$ 5.3 billion
- Forecast CAGR: 9.7%
- Leading Segment in 2025: Bio-Polyethylene (Bio-PE) (34.1%)
- Key Growth Region: North America, Asia-Pacific and Europe
- Top Key Players in: BASF SE, NatureWorks LLC, Toray

- Industries Inc., Arkema Global, Biome Bioplastics Limited, BIOTEC, Plantic Technologies Ltd., Mitsubishi Chemical Holdings Corporation, FUTERRO S.A., Danimer Scientific, Eastman Chemical Company, Polymateria Ltd, TIPA Corp Ltd, EuP Group, TotalEnergies Corbion, Neste Oyj

Two national examples:

- Researchers at Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) have unveiled a transparent cardboard made entirely from cellulose.
- In India, the company Trishula was created by engineer Kruvil Patel to help tackle the country's huge plastic problem by producing edible spoons as alternatives to plastic spoons. Some estimates suggest India uses over 120 billion plastic utensils every year. Produced using flour obtained from grain supplied directly by rural farmers, the edible spoons are available in eight different flavors, like beetroot, spinach, chocolate, masala, mint and more. Different flours, Indian natural spices, flavours and binding ingredients are mixed and baked at a very high temperature. With this process, the moisture is absorbed and spoons become stiff. They are 100% natural with no added preservatives or artificial flavors. Since launching in 2017, more than 300 million spoons have been sold, replacing the equivalent of 120 metric tons of plastic waste. In a four-month period in 2025, the company sold over 50,000 spoons in India, Australia, Norway, Malaysia and South Africa. The organization also plans to widen its scope by producing other items of cutlery. They cost as little as three cents each, making them an affordable alternative to single-use plastic. They're now being used by big brands like Domino's, and the team is working on edible forks, straws and stirrers too.

Resources:

- Market Research Future: Bioplastic Market, ID: MRFR/CnM/1432-HCR | 200 Pages | Chitranshi Jaiswal | October 2025
- Isobe N, Tanaka K, Ishii S, Shimane Y, Okada S, Daicho K, Sakuma W, Uetani K, Yoshimura T, Kimoto K, Kimura S, Saito T, Nakajima R, Tsuchiya M, Ikuta T, Kawagucci S, Iwata T, Nomaki H., Fully circular shapeable transparent paperboard with closed-loop recyclability and marine biodegradability across shallow to deep sea. Sci Adv. 2025 Apr 11;11(15):eads2426. doi:10.1126/sciadv.ads2426. Epub 2025 Apr 9. PMID: 40203094; PMCID: PMC11980830
- Swachh India: https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/album-detail/eat-it-after-eating-from-it-a-24year-old-develops-biodegradable-edible-spoons-as-alternative-to-plastic-96109/

The Road Ahead: A Wellness Imperative

Strategic focus for the wellness industry

Plastic exposure, like stress or pollution, must become a vital sign we monitor and manage.

Wellness brands that take this seriously will lead the next era of trust. Science is catching up. Solutions exist. The key now is the collective will to act—and in that action lies the next great chapter of wellness. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8455907

Music for Health and Wellbeing Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Freddie Moross, Founder and CEO, Myndstream, United Kingdom

As the intersection of music and health continues to gain momentum, new micro-trends are emerging that highlight music's important role in wellbeing. From community-based social prescribing and collective wellness festivals, to innovative approaches in healthcare and increased support for artists' mental health, these trends illustrate how music is becoming an essential tool in global efforts to address both physical and mental health.

TREND 1: Social Prescribing for Music – From the Clinic to the Community

Social prescribing—the practice of healthcare professionals connecting people to non-clinical, community-based activities to address their wellbeing needs—has rapidly evolved from a grassroots movement into a global healthcare priority, and music is emerging as one of its most powerful modalities. First developed in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, social prescribing is now practiced in over 30 countries and is increasingly being recognized as a cost-effective, evidence-based approach to addressing mental health conditions, social isolation, chronic pain and loneliness. Within this movement, music-specific prescriptions—from community choir participation and music therapy sessions, to live concert attendance and collaborative music-making—are gaining significant momentum.

> Explore the Music for Health and Wellbeing Initiative on the GWI Website

The evidence base is compelling and growing. In England, the NHS has far exceeded its own targets, with an estimated 5.5 million social prescribing referrals logged through primary care by 2023, and over 3,600 link workers now embedded across the country. The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan projects a need for 9,000 link workers by 2036/37, signalling the scale of commitment to this approach. A 2025 study published in *The Lancet Public Health* confirmed that England's national roll-out has made social prescribing a fundamental service within the NHS, with arts and cultural activities (including music) comprising a key pillar of the model. The National Academy for Social Prescribing continues to champion the approach, with a January 2026 statement highlighting global recognition for England's leadership in the field.

Music-specific social prescribing programs are now proliferating worldwide. In Canada, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal partnered with Médecins Francophones du Canada in 2025 to launch *Music on Prescription*, enabling physicians to prescribe tickets to live orchestral performances to boost patients' mental health and social connection. Data from the Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing shows that arts-based social prescribing programmes can reduce primary care visits by up to 42% and emergency department use by 24%, while generating an estimated return of $4.43 for every dollar invested. In the United States, a 2026 paper co-authored by Dr. Joanne Loewy of Mount Sinai's Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine and eight-time Grammy Award winner Jon Batiste introduced a framework for "Social Music as a Prescription for Maintaining Wellness," proposing shared musical experiences as a formal social prescription for individuals experiencing, or at risk for, depression.

For the music industry, this trend represents a significant opportunity and responsibility. As music becomes formally integrated into healthcare pathways through prescription, referral and community-based delivery, there is growing demand for evidence-based, accessible and culturally-responsive musical experiences designed for wellbeing outcomes. Cross-sector collaboration between healthcare systems, cultural institutions, music creators and technology platforms will be essential to ensure that music-based social prescriptions are equitable, scalable and grounded in rigorous research. The momentum is clear: music is moving from the margins of healthcare into its very infrastructure.

Resources:

- Bu, F., et al. (2025). National roll-out of social prescribing in England's primary care system: a longitudinal observational study using Clinical Practice Research Datalink data. *The Lancet Public Health*. Available at: https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00217-8/fulltext
- Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing (2025). Social Prescribing in Canada: Bridging the Gap Between Health and Social Care. [online] Available at: https://irp.cdn-website.com/92bb31b3/files/uploaded/CISP_SP_in_Canada_Report-final-spreads-web.pdf
- Loewy, J. & Batiste, J. (2026). Social Music as a Prescription for Maintaining Wellness. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*. Available at: https://voices.no/index.php/voices/article/view/4497

TREND 2: The Festivalization of Wellness – Music as Collective Medicine

A powerful new movement is reshaping the relationship between music, nightlife and wellbeing. Across the globe, a wave of communal, music-driven wellness experiences—from sober morning raves to sauna parties with live DJs and multi-day wellness festivals—is reframing health as something to be felt collectively rather than optimized in solitude. The Global Wellness Summit named "The Festivalization of Wellness" as one of its top 10 trends for 2026, describing how these gatherings respond to widespread economic stress, social fragmentation and digital overload by prioritizing human connection, collective energy and emotional release. Music sits at the very heart of this trend: it is the primary vehicle through which participants access the neurochemical benefits of group movement, emotional expression and social bonding.

The scale and speed of growth is remarkable. Eventbrite reported a 478% year-on-year increase in "coffee clubbing" events in 2025—sober daytime dance parties held in coffee shops, bakeries and cultural venues worldwide. Daybreaker, a pioneer of the sober morning rave format since 2013, now has a community of over 800,000 people across 64 cities and is hosting over 100 events per year, including sauna raves and its first full-day sober music festivals. In the UK, London's House of Happiness has become the capital's largest alcohol-free club event, while Morning Gloryville has expanded to 25 cities globally, hosting sober raves at iconic venues with artists including Fatboy Slim and Basement Jaxx. A 2025 Night Time Industries Association study found that 61% of UK respondents aged 18–30 reported going out less frequently in the past year, with financial pressures, safety concerns and transportation barriers all cited. This is driving demand for alternative, wellness-oriented formats that music is uniquely positioned to fulfill.

The science supports what participants feel intuitively. Research consistently shows that group music-making and communal dancing trigger the release of dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins, which form the neurochemical foundations of pleasure, social bonding, mood regulation and pain relief. A 2026 randomized controlled study published in *Scientific Reports* found that the physical co-presence of musicians during live performances produced significantly stronger emotional and physiological responses in audiences compared to live-streamed equivalents, underscoring the irreplaceable value of shared, in-person musical experiences. This is consistent with what is already being demonstrated by events like Daybreaker, Sanctum's headphone-led somatic dance sessions, and the emerging "sauna rave" format offered by brands like Heatwave and Othership: when music, movement and community converge in a wellness-intentional space, the health benefits are amplified.

This trend also intersects with a broader cultural backlash against wellness "over-optimization", which refers to the exhausting pursuit of perfect health through constant self-monitoring based on data. As the Global Wellness Summit's 2026 report notes, the new generation of wellness gatherings emphasizes participation over performance, joy over metrics, and sensory experience over clinical prescription. For the music industry, this represents a significant commercial and creative frontier. Wellness raves and conscious gatherings require curated soundscapes, skilled DJs, live musicians and purpose-designed music, creating new revenue streams and career pathways for artists and producers. As nightclub closures continue across the UK and globally, and as younger generations drink less and seek meaning-driven social experiences, music's role as collective medicine is not a niche phenomenon, but an emerging mainstream category that the wellness and music industries are only beginning to tap.

Resources:

- Global Wellness Summit (2026). The Festivalization of Wellness. *2026 Future of Wellness Trends Report*. [online] Available at: https://www.globalwellnesssummit.com/the-festivalization-of-wellness/
- Axios (2025). Coffee raves are the new club scene. [online] Available at: https://www.axios.com/2025/10/02/coffee-raves-daybreaker-soft-clubbing

- CNN (2026). An aversion to alcohol is moving the global party scene in an unexpected direction. [online] Available at: https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/03/travel/sober-raves-cafe-bakery-parties
- EDM.com (2026). Rave Culture Shapes "Festivalization of Wellness," One of the Global Wellness Summit's Top Trends for 2026. [online] Available at: https://edm.com/lifestyle/rave-culture-shapes-festivalization-of-wellness-trends-2026/
- *Scientific Reports* (2026). Musician presence and its effects on physiological and psychological well-being in live versus livestreamed concerts. [online] Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-026-38194-3
- Night Time Industries Association (2025). Consumer Report 2025. [online]
- 303 Magazine (2026). This Denver Party Trend Is Up 343% – Meet Soft Clubbing. [online] Available at: https://303magazine.com/2026/04/soft-clubbing-denver-sober-nightlife-trend/

TREND 3: Geographic Spotlight – The United States on Social Prescribing

The United States is part of the evolution of social prescribing, with music positioned as a core component of community-based health infrastructure. Music is being seen as a scalable intervention and one that easily resonates across cultures, addressing issues like loneliness and mental health challenges through participation, access and shared experiences.

There is a noticeable acceleration within institutions, with a 2025 viewpoint from *The Lancet Public Health* identifying 23 arts and social prescribing programs across the country. This highlights how arts-based prescriptions—including music lessons, concert access and group music-making—are becoming embedded within care pathways. At the ecosystem level, organizations such as Social Prescribing USA now count around 250 providers engaging in the practice, which signals growth in both awareness and implementation. Additionally, state-level innovation is also playing a critical role in scaling the movement. Massachusetts has launched the nation's first statewide social prescribing ecosystem in partnership with Art Pharmacy to integrate arts and culture into the state's healthcare system. Other states like Connecticut, New York, Georgia and California are actively developing similar infrastructure too, pointing toward a future in which music and arts prescribing is systematically integrated into public health strategies rather than remaining a patchwork of local pilots.

We're also observing how the private sector is beginning to engage. Health insurers, known to be slow adopters of non-clinical interventions, are starting to recognize the cost-saving and outcomes-enhancing potential of arts-based prescribing. Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield's partnership with the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, which connects high-utilizing patients to arts and cultural programs, is an early but vital signal that this shift could unlock additional funding streams and bring music-based interventions into mainstream healthcare delivery. Equally important, support for research on social prescribing is growing, and funders like the National Endowment for the Arts now underwrite research that explores the impact of the arts on individuals and communities. This growing evidence base is essential to legitimizing music within clinical and policy contexts, helping to translate anecdotal and experiential benefits into measurable health metrics.

When you combine all these insights, the current developments suggest that the US is moving beyond experimentation and potentially toward systematization, where social prescribing for music is less likely to be confined to isolated programs and instead become an integrated, multi-stakeholder ecosystem including healthcare providers, cultural institutions, insurers and research bodies.

Resources:

- ArtPride New Jersey (2025). ArtsRX at NJPAC: Social Prescribing Art as Holistic Alternative. [online] Available at: https://artpridenj.org/blog/artsrx-njpac-social-prescribing-art-holistic-alternative
- Marshall, R., et al. (2025). Social prescribing in the USA: emerging learning and opportunities. *The Lancet Public Health*, 10(6), e531–e536. Available at: https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00066-0/fulltext
- Mass Cultural Council (2024). Art Pharmacy announces Massachusetts launch of innovative healthcare program in partnership with Mass Cultural Council. [online] Available at: https://massculturalcouncil.org/blog/introducing-the-first-statewide-social-prescribing-solution-in-the-u-s/

TREND 4: Rise in Resources to Help Heal, Stem Mental Health Crises Among Musicians and Songwriters

Music is one of our greatest healers. But there still is a profusion of songwriters and artists who struggle with their own mental wellbeing. For many, the "suffering equals better art" trope weighs heavily; they believe they are unable to achieve the same level of creativity—and success—if they are happy, if they evolve to a place of better self-care and, for some, if they are sober. A 2026 survey by Ditto Music of more than 2,000 independent artists and industry professionals found that 86% report significant mental strain or creative burnout, driven by the pressure to commodify personal trauma for social media algorithms.

Singer/songwriter Noah Kahan addressed this topic head-on during his recent appearance on Jay Shetty's *On Purpose* podcast. "Just now, I'm trying to unwind this idea that I have to be unhealthy physically or in pain in some emotional way in my life to create good music," he said.

This year, the trend toward supporting the mental wellness of artists and their teams is growing, from elevated conversations about the results joy and curiosity can yield to expanded resources in the field. Examples include the organization Backline in February launching a 24/7 crisis line for music artists and professionals with support from Spotify, Live Nation, AEG Presents, Kahan and his organization, The Busyhead Project, among others. Amber Health, a company that provides tailored mental health care for artists and their teams for global tours, festivals and events, has seen an escalation in contracts during the past year with no signs of slowing down. Additionally, MusiCares, the non-profit arm of the Recording Academy that provides financial and mental health support, in April launched a suicide prevention training and mental health resource microsite for music professionals, developed in partnership with nonprofit The Jed Foundation. The initiative follows findings from MusiCares' 2025 Wellness in Music Survey that 11.4% of music professionals reported experiencing suicidal ideation in the past year, more than double the rate of the general US population.

Resources:

- Ditto Music Survey, March 2026: https://press.dittomusic.com/creative-burnout-at-all-time-high-86-of-artists-report-mental-strain
- MusiCares 2025 Wellness In Music Survey: https://www.musicares.org/news/2025-wellness-in-music-survey-results-insights
- Jay Shetty On Purpose Podcast with Noah Kahah: https://open.spotify.com/episode/5s5WR1hqV6qITmWiRl1XTZ

Nutrition for Healthspan Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Michael Don Ham, Founder, Wild Orchard Tea Company, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Alina Tyszkiewicz, International Business Development, Chief Wellbeing Officer, Poland

In 2026, nutrition is evolving toward a more targeted and functional approach, with foods designed to deliver specific health outcomes such as metabolic, cognitive and immune support. At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence and biological data are enabling precision nutrition, where dietary recommendations are tailored to individual biology, lifestyle and real-time health data. Protein consumption is becoming more diverse, with consumers embracing a wider range of traditional, plant-based, and next-generation protein sources based on functionality, sustainability and quality. Alongside these innovations, growing scientific evidence on ultra-processed foods is driving demand for simpler, minimally processed products and greater transparency across the food system.

TREND 1: The Ultra-Processed Food Backlash and Radical Transparency – Redefining What "Real Food" Means

In 2026, a growing backlash against ultra-processed foods is reshaping the global wellness conversation. Consumers are increasingly questioning not only what is in their food, but also how it was produced, processed and formulated.

> Explore the Nutrition for Healthspan Initiative on the GWI Website

Much of this debate stems from the NOVA food classification system, which categorizes foods based on the degree of industrial processing. Ultra-processed foods typically contain ingredients rarely used in home kitchens, such as emulsifiers, flavor enhancers, stabilizers, colorants and synthetic preservatives. While these ingredients help manufacturers achieve consistency, shelf stability and large-scale distribution, they are now under growing scrutiny as consumers seek foods that remain closer to their original agricultural form.

Public awareness has accelerated in recent years as scientific research and media coverage highlight correlations between high consumption of ultra-processed foods and rising rates of obesity, metabolic disease and cardiovascular conditions. Books such as *Ultra-Processed People* by Chris van Tulleken have helped bring the issue into mainstream discussion, prompting consumers to rethink what "healthy" food truly means.

As a result, consumers are shifting their attention away from heavily formulated foods and toward ingredients that are simpler, minimally processed and nutritionally intact.

This shift is driving several notable changes across the food and wellness industries:

- **Greater demand for minimally processed foods and beverages that preserve the natural integrity of ingredients**. Products that remain closer to their whole-food origins are gaining favor among health-conscious consumers.
- **Retailers placing greater emphasis on ingredient transparency and sourcing practices.** Major retailers such as Whole Foods Market have long championed strict ingredient standards and continue to push brands toward cleaner formulations and more transparent supply chains. As consumer awareness grows, retailers are increasingly curating assortments that prioritize simple ingredients, traceable sourcing and authentic wellness claims.
- **Shorter ingredient lists and simplified formulations**, as manufacturers reformulate products to reduce reliance on stabilizers, emulsifiers and artificial additives.
- **Rise of regenerative agriculture as a marker of both environmental stewardship and nutritional quality.** Farming systems that rebuild soil health and biodiversity are gaining recognition for their ability to produce crops with stronger nutrient profiles. Certifications such as Regenerative Organic Alliance's Regenerative Organic Certified® standard help provide verification that products are grown using practices that support soil health, ecosystem resilience and social fairness.

At the same time, this movement is exposing the complexity of modern food systems. Many foods marketed as nutritious or functional may still fall into the ultra-processed category due to the industrial methods used to produce them. As a result, consumers are learning to look beyond marketing terms such as "natural," "clean," or "plant-based," and instead evaluate how foods are actually made.

To address this growing demand for transparency, new technologies are emerging that allow brands to share more detailed information about their supply chains. QR codes, digital traceability systems and blockchain-enabled ingredient tracking are making it possible for consumers to trace products back to the farms and regions where they were produced.

The wellness industry is particularly influenced by this shift. As consumers become more discerning, brands that can demonstrate ingredient integrity, minimal processing, regenerative sourcing and nutrient density are gaining a competitive advantage. Transparency is no longer just a marketing strategy. It is becoming a key component of consumer trust.

As awareness of ultra-processed foods continues to expand, the future of the wellness economy may be defined not only by nutrient content, but also by how close a product remains to its natural origins and the health of the soil in which it was grown.

By prioritizing minimally processed foods, regenerative agricultural systems and radical transparency, the food and wellness industries have an opportunity to rebuild trust, reconnect consumers with the origins of their food and support healthier dietary patterns for both people and the planet.

Resources:

- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *"Ultra-Processed Foods and Health Outcomes."*
- National Institutes of Health, *"Highly Processed Diets and Calorie Intake Study."*
- Food and Agriculture Organization, *"Ultra-Processed Foods, Diet Quality, and Health."*
- The BMJ, *"Ultra-processed foods and risk of chronic diseases."*

TREND 2: AI-Driven & Precision Personalized Nutrition

In 2026, nutrition is becoming increasingly data-driven and personalized, enabled by advances in artificial intelligence (AI), digital health technologies and biological testing. Instead of generalized dietary advice designed for population averages, AI systems can analyze complex, multi-dimensional health data to generate individualized nutrition recommendations tailored to a person's biology, lifestyle and health goals.

Precision nutrition platforms integrate data from genetics, gut microbiome profiles, biomarkers, dietary patterns and wearable devices to predict how individuals respond to specific foods. These insights enable highly tailored dietary strategies that can optimize metabolic health, energy levels, disease risk and overall wellbeing.

As a result, the industry is shifting from static diet plans to dynamic, adaptive nutrition guidance, where recommendations continuously evolve based on real-time physiological and behavioral data.

Key Drivers of the Trend

1. Advances in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

AI models can process large and complex datasets—including genomic, microbiome, dietary and clinical data—to identify patterns between nutrition and health outcomes. These systems enable predictive, individualized dietary recommendations that are more precise than traditional guidelines.

2. Growth of Digital Health and Wearable Technologies

Wearables and continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) provide real-time physiological data (e.g., glucose response, sleep, activity), enabling dynamic feedback loops for personalized dietary adjustments.

3. Expansion of At-Home Biological Testing

Consumer testing kits measuring gut microbiome composition, genetic variation, and metabolic biomarkers are becoming more accessible, enabling biologically tailored dietary strategies.

4. Increasing Demand for Preventive Health

Consumers are increasingly seeking nutrition strategies that support metabolic health, weight management, gut health, and longevity, reflecting a shift toward proactive and preventive healthcare models.

How the Trend is Appearing in the Market

- AI-powered nutrition platforms generating personalized meal plans
- Continuous glucose monitoring to assess individual food responses
- Microbiome-based nutrition programs
- DNA-based dietary guidance
- AI-enabled food tracking and image recognition tools

These innovations are enabling closed-loop nutrition systems, where recommendations continuously adapt based on new biological and behavioral data.

The precision nutrition market is expanding rapidly, driven by the convergence of digital health, biotechnology, and consumer wellness demand. Growth in microbiome-based nutrition and AI-enabled health platforms reflects increasing adoption of individualized dietary solutions.

Implications for the Food and Nutrition Sector

- Shift from population-level guidance to individualized nutrition
- Development of products tailored to specific metabolic and health profiles
- Expansion of data-driven nutrition platforms and services
- Increased collaboration between food, tech, and healthcare sectors

The precision nutrition powered by artificial intelligence is redefining dietary guidance. In 2026, nutrition is moving toward dynamic, continuously optimized dietary strategies tailored to individual biology, lifestyle, and health outcomes.

Resources:

- "Artificial Intelligence in Personalized Nutrition and Food Manufacturing: A Comprehensive Review of Methods, Applications, and Future Directions" Agrawal, K. et al. (2025)
  Published in *Frontiers in Nutrition* (Vol. 12, July 2025)
- "Microbiome-Based Approaches to Personalized Nutrition: From Gut Health to Disease Prevention", *Folia Microbiologica* (2025)
  Nisa, P. et al.
- General scientific consensus (multi-study reviews, 2024–2026), published in *Frontiers in Nutrition, Folia Microbiologica*
- National Science Review (Oxford Academic)

TREND 3: Food as Medicine – The Rise of Functional Foods for Targeted Health and Longevity

Consumers are increasingly turning to functional foods—foods designed to deliver specific physiological benefits—as a proactive strategy to support metabolic health, gut health, cognitive function and healthy aging.

For centuries, cultures around the world have recognized the healing potential of food. Today, modern science is increasingly confirming this ancient wisdom. A growing global trend is the rise of functional foods designed to support specific health outcomes, ranging from digestive health and metabolic balance to cognitive performance and healthy aging.

This shift reflects a broader understanding that everyday dietary choices play an important role in shaping healthspan—the portion of life spent in good health, free from chronic disease and disability. Rather than waiting to address illness later in life, many individuals are turning to nutrition as a proactive strategy to support vitality and resilience across the lifespan.

Functional foods are generally defined as foods that provide benefits beyond basic nutritional value due to biologically active compounds such as fiber, probiotics, polyphenols, omega-3 fatty acids and bioactive peptides. While the concept has existed for decades, interest in these foods has accelerated as research continues to reveal how nutrition influences metabolism, inflammation, immune response and the aging process.

Consumer demand reflects this shift. According to the International Food Information Council's 2024 *Food & Health Survey*, 52% of Americans say they actively seek foods and beverages that provide functional health benefits, particularly those related to digestive health, immune support, heart health and energy.

One of the most influential drivers of functional food innovation is the expanding body of research on the human microbiome. Scientists now understand that the trillions of microorganisms living in the digestive system influence many aspects of health, including immune regulation, metabolic balance and inflammation. Research published in *Nature Reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology* highlights the dynamic relationship between diet, gut microbes and overall health, demonstrating that foods rich in fiber and fermented ingredients can significantly influence microbial diversity and downstream health outcomes (Zmora, Suez & Elinav, 2019).

As a result, digestive health has become one of the most established areas of functional nutrition. Foods containing probiotics, prebiotics, fermented ingredients and emerging postbiotic compounds are appearing across a wide range of categories. Market analysis from Innova Market Insights continues to identify gut health as one of the most important drivers of food and beverage innovation globally.

At the same time, the functional foods landscape is expanding beyond digestive health to address a broader range of physiological systems. Key areas of growth include:

- High-protein foods supporting muscle maintenance and satiety
- Fiber-rich foods supporting digestive and metabolic health
- Nutrient-dense foods aimed at cardiovascular health
- Functional beverages supporting hydration, focus and stress resilience
- Foods rich in plant compounds and antioxidants associated with healthy aging

These developments coincide with growing global interest in longevity and healthy aging. The World Health

Organization estimates that by 2030, one in six people worldwide will be age 60 or older, underscoring the importance of lifestyle strategies—including nutrition—to support long-term health and independence

Another emerging dimension of this trend is personalized nutrition. Advances in nutrigenomics and microbiome science are helping researchers better understand why individuals respond differently to the same foods. Over time, personalized dietary approaches may allow functional foods to be developed with greater precision to support individual health outcomes.

As the functional foods category continues to expand, responsible communication and scientific credibility remain essential. Regulatory agencies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration distinguish among nutrient content claims, health claims and structure-function claims to ensure that consumer messaging remains evidence-based and transparent (U.S. FDA, 2023).

Looking ahead, functional foods designed for targeted health outcomes are likely to play an increasingly important role in global wellness strategies. As scientific understanding of nutrition deepens, food may become one of the most accessible tools for supporting long-term health and extending healthspan.

For the wellness industry, the opportunity lies not simply in adding functional ingredients, but in aligning food innovation with credible science, transparency and everyday accessibility. When thoughtfully developed, functional foods have the potential to bridge the gap between daily nutrition and preventive healthcare—empowering individuals to support healthier, longer lives through the foods they eat each day.

"Food is one of the most powerful daily decisions we make for our health. As science continues to deepen our understanding of nutrition and longevity, functional foods offer a meaningful opportunity to support longer, healthier lives—one meal at a time."

Functional foods represent one of the most promising opportunities to translate nutrition science into everyday lifestyle choices that support longer, healthier lives.

Psychedelics and Healing Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Mary-Elizabeth Gifford, Chief of Global Impact, Clearmind Medicine, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Dingle Spence, MD, BSc., MBBS, DIP PALL MED, FRCR & Consultant in Oncology and Palliative Medicine; International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC) Board Emerita, Jamaica
Initiative Honorary Chair: Rick Doblin, Ph.D., Founder and President, Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), United States

If it seems the world is falling in love with psychedelics, it may be easy to understand why. Groundbreaking studies on these innovative medicines continue to make headlines in peer-reviewed journals from *The New England Journal of Medicine* to *JAMA Psychiatry*. And as FDA-approved clinical trials for psychedelic candidates move forward, positive results are informing decisions in policy and investment, building to a velocity of political will and clinical ambition.

This new cartography of healing reveals a path forward guided by a spirit of bipartisan concern and cooperation, a heightened collaboration with federal regulators and a continued focus on patient safety and evidence-based medicine. Daniel Goldberg, founder of Palo Santo, a venture capital fund investing in next-generation neuroscience companies developing breakthrough therapeutics for mental health, states: "Psychedelics may be America's only bipartisan issue."

> Explore the Psychedelics and Healing Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: YAY FOR THE FDA

Despite the avant-garde counter-culture outlaw legacy long associated with psychedelics, most of those working in the field today see FDA-approved and regulated medicinal psychedelics as the best and most effective way to reach those most in need.

Daniel Goldberg of Palo Santo explains psychedelic medicines can be "effective and show great promise, and they are helping people today—but we believe that in order to create the scale and access to reach over a billion people in need, it will require true integration into our health care system."

Goldberg acknowledges that "although our health care system is indeed flawed and sometimes very unfair, the broadest access to effective healthcare solutions will eventually need to include FDA-approved, safe, legal innovative medicines and therapies that are also reimbursable by insurance." Goldberg observes: "Despite the headlines, the reality is that the FDA is very receptive, truly receptive, to novel psychedelic compounds."

The numbers say it all. FDA "breakthrough therapy" designations, which grant expedited review, have been granted to eight psychedelic candidates under review:

1. Compass for Comp 360 (Psilocybin)
2. Usona for Psilocybin
3. Cybin (now renamed Helus) for Cyb003 (Psilocybin analog)
4. MindMed (now renamed Definium) for an LSD-based compound
5. Lykos (now renamed Resilient Therapeutics) for MDMA
6. Beckley Psytech (now renamed AtaiBeckley) for intranasal 5-MeO-DMT
7. Transcend Therapeutics for TSND-201 (Methylone)
8. Reunion for RE104 (Subcutaneous Luvesilocin)

NOTE: Spravato, the intranasal Ketamine (esketamin) therapy—J&J's great success—earlier received an FDA breakthrough therapy designation. Analysts estimate its global sales will reach $2 billion in 2025.

Seven psychedelic candidate drugs have reached FDA Phase 3, the final stage before consideration for final approval:

1. Comp360 (Psilocybin), the Compass candidate drug to treat Treatment-resistant Depression
2. Psilocybin, the Usona candidate drug to treat Major Depressive Disorder
3. Cyb003 (Psilocin analog) the Cybin (now renamed Helus) candidate drug to treat Major Depressive Disorder
4. MM-120 (LSD-based compound) the MindMed (now renamed Definium) candidate drug to treat Generalized Anxiety Disorder
5. MM-120 (LSD-based compound) the MindMed (now renamed Definium) candidate drug MM-120 to treat Major Depressive Disorder
6. MDMA, the Lykos (now renamed Resilient Therapeutics) candidate drug to treat PTSD
7. VN-100 (Ketamine) the Solvonis Therapeutics candidate drug to treat Severe Alcohol Use Disorder

TREND 2: Neuroplastogens – The Quiet Redefinition of Psychedelic Medicine

While classic psychedelics seem to blaze most of the headlines, a quiet next generation psychedelic category—the neuroplastogens—have begun to write the next chapter of psychedelic medicine.

"As 2026 begins, the psychedelic medicine conversation looks very different than it did even two years ago," reports Madison Roberts in the news site Microdose Buzz. "The early focus on guided experiences, clinic based delivery and transformative subjective states has not disappeared, but it is no longer the center of gravity. Instead, a quieter and more technically demanding race is underway. Researchers and drug developers are now chasing the biological engine beneath psychedelics rather than the experience itself. That engine is neuroplasticity." She adds: "Neuroplastogens, a growing class of small molecules designed to promote structural and functional changes in the brain, are becoming one of the most strategically important areas in neuropsychiatric drug development. These compounds aim to deliver the rapid and durable benefits associated with psychedelics while avoiding hallucinations, dissociation and the logistical complexity of supervised dosing."

These non-hallucinogenic psychedelic-adjacent compounds are an approach that may deliver a more rapid, just as durable mental-health benefit seen with classic psychedelics such as psilocybin but without the trip, a longer clinic stay or many of the disqualifying pre-existing conditions that prohibit usage, according to *The New Yorker* in its March 2026 report.

The magazine chronicled the work of Professor David E. Olson, whose research has suggested that many psychedelic molecules—including psilocin, LSD, DMT and MDMA—can stimulate the growth of dendritic spines, the tiny, branch-like projections that help neurons connect.

According to *The New Yorker*, Olson has been able to demonstrate that it may be possible to incubate the dendritic growth and neuroplasticity that drives therapeutic change, enhancing plasticity but removing the hallucinations.

Delix Therapeutics, where Olson serves as co-founder and chief innovation officer, announced positive early clinical results for its pharmaceutical candidate, a "pioneering non-hallucinogenic neuroplastogen."

And the neuroplastogen biopharma ecosystem appears to be incubating its own form of "dendritic growth." AbbVie's multi-billion-dollar collaboration and subsequent asset deal with Gilgamesh is explicitly focused on "novel neuroplastogens" for psychiatric disorders, signaling that Big Pharma now sees plasticity-first molecules as a strategic pillar of its neuroscience portfolio.

So does industry leader AtaiBeckley, which describes itself as "on a mission to transform patient outcomes by developing rapid-acting durable and convenient mental health treatments."

AtaiBeckley, founded by global investor Christian Angermayer, has received up to $11.4 million in non-dilutive NIH (NIDA) funding to develop non-hallucinogenic 5-HT2A/2C agonists for opioid use disorder, which industry experts see as a landmark affirmation of the promise of non-hallucinogenic psychedelic medicines. According to a statement from the biopharma, this "recognition helps to establish atai as a leader in the non-hallucinogenic 5-HT2A agonist drug space and accelerates the timetable to bring these innovative treatments to patients suffering from addiction."

Clearmind Medicine's non-hallucinogenic neuroplastogen candidate to treat Alcohol Use Disorder, 5-MeO-AI (also known as MEAI) was recently named in bipartisan US federal legislation supporting veterans health. Under the guidance of the only woman CEO leading a psychedelic biopharma, Dr. Adi Zuloff-Shani,

an elite portfolio of FDA-approved clinical trials for MEAI at the Yale School of Medicine and the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine has begun to report positive results.

Enveric Biosciences has secured patents on a new class of low-hallucinogenic neuroplastogens and is advancing EB-003, a non-hallucinogenic DMT analogue designed for outpatient dosing in mood and anxiety disorders.

All this suggests that the center of gravity in psychedelic research is shifting from guided hallucinogenic experiences to a focus on the underlying biology of neuroplasticity. The promise is simple but profound: FDA-approved psychedelic pharmaceuticals that act quickly, with fewer adverse side effects, and that fit seamlessly into standard outpatient care—without the need for all-day monitored sessions. All of which may contribute to an approach to ensuring scalability, affordability and greater health equity for all.

Resources:

- *The New Yorker* – "Why Do Mind-Altering Drugs Make People Feel Better?" (Mar 2026)
- https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/why-do-mind-altering-drugs-make-people-feel-better
- https://www.clearmindmedicine.com/science-and-ip
- Delix Therapeutics/Yahoo Finance – "Delix Therapeutics Study Demonstrates that the Non-Hallucinogenic Neuroplastogen Zalsupindole Promotes Neuroplasticity Like Ketamine and Psilocybin" (Oct 2025)
- https://finance.yahoo.com/news/delix-therapeutics-study-demonstrates-non-120000952.html
- Delix Therapeutics – Neuroplastogen pipeline update (Mar 2026)
- https://www.linkedin.com/posts/delix-therapeutics_neuroplastogens-chiefinnovationofficer-psychedelics-activity-7438293415710195712-XXXX[21]
- Drug Hunter – Commentary on zalsupindole as a leading at-home neuroplastogen (Mar 2026)
- https://x.com/drughunter_com/status/2033930664353906785[22][23]
- Microdose – "Starting 2026: Why Neuroplastogens Are Quietly Redefining the Psychedelic Medicine Narrative" (Jan 2026)
- https://microdose.buzz/news/starting-2026-why-neuroplastogens-are-quietly-redefining-the-psychedelic-medicine-narrative/[1]
- Enveric Biosciences – Low-hallucinogenic neuroplastogen patent and EB-003 program (Jun 2025)
- https://www.enveric.com/news/enveric-biosciences-receives-notice-of-allowance-for-new-class-of-low-hallucinogenic-neuroplastogens[20]
- Atai Life Sciences – NIDA grant up to $11.4M for non-hallucinogenic 5-HT2A/2C agonists (Sep 2025)
- https://finance.yahoo.com/news/atai-life-sciences-awarded-grant-121057387.html

TREND 3: Big Pharma Steps Up

By 2026, psychedelic medicine is no longer just a story of scrappy biotechs and visionary philanthropists; it is also a story of Big Pharma decisively stepping forward.

AbbVie, the world's third biggest pharma, reported paying $1.2 billion to psychedelic biopharma Gilgamesh Pharmaceuticals to acquire its Bretisilocin (GM-2505) program, a short-acting psychedelic candidate for major depressive disorder.

Industry analysis notes that the AbbVie deal can be framed as a cornerstone for its future psychiatry portfolio, and as a sign that major drugmakers now see psychedelic-based medicines as serious business.

A commentary in *Nature* went further, describing AbbVie as "betting on psychedelic drugs" and highlighting that a top-five global company is now building out a commercial roadmap for next-generation psychedelic therapies.

AbbVie's move is not happening in isolation. The Japanese biopharma Otsuka is also known for its early support of the psychedelic biopharma Compass Pathways, having invested in the Compass Series B round in 2019. Kabir Nath, CEO of Compass previously headed global pharmaceutical at Otsuka, as the

senior managing director for that portfolio, is said to build synergy in the pharma community. Otsuka also purchased the psychedelic biopharma Mindset Pharma, and now has a proprietary psychedelic-based FDA Phase 2 candidate drug candidate under evaluation for Major Depressive Disorder.

Resources:

- *Nature* – "AbbVie bets on psychedelic drugs in Gilgamesh buy out" (Sept 2025) https://www.nature.com/articles/d41573-025-00149-0[14][5]
- BioPharma Dive – "AbbVie wagers more than $1B on Gilgamesh's psychedelic drug" (Aug 2025) https://www.biopharmadive.com/news/abbvie-gilgamesh-psychedelic-drug-asset-deal-acquisition/758522/[9]
- Pharmaceutical Technology – "AbbVie signs to acquire Gilgamesh's bretisilocin for $1.2bn" (Aug 2025) https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/abbvie-signs-gilgamesh-bretisilocin/[13]
- AbbVie–Gilgamesh collaboration press release (background, still central in 2026) https://news.abbvie.com/2024-05-13-AbbVie-and-Gilgamesh-Pharmaceuticals-Announce-Collaboration-and-Option-to-License-Agreement[17]
- Otsuka – "Otsuka Signs Joint Research Agreement with Keio University on Social Implementation of Psychedelics" (May 2025) https://www.otsuka.co.jp/en/company/newsreleases/2025/20250508_1.html[15]

TREND 4: Psychedelics as a Bipartisan Bridge—for Veterans

Amid geopolitical tension and domestic polarization, psychedelic medicine has become perhaps the only bipartisan issue in Washington, DC, with veteran health at its heart. Suicide prevention, traumatic brain injury, treatment of PTSD and alcohol use disorder is on the agenda as is an open acknowledgement of the unwavering moral obligation to care for those who served.

And it has already sparked the beginning of a shift to improve mental healthcare for US veterans through supporting research into- and access to FDA-approved pharmaceutical psychedelic medicines.

The unlikely duo behind this initiative come from opposite sides of the aisle. General (Ret.) Jack Bergman, who served in the Marine Corps for 40 years, is the highest ranking combat veteran ever elected to congress. He is a Republican. His counterpart, Congressman Lou Correa, who represents a district in California, is a Democrat.

Yet despite an atmosphere of increasingly fractured political polarization and partisanship in the nation's capital, this pair of US Congressmen have teamed up to co-chair the first Congressional psychedelic caucus, called PATH (Psychedelics Advancing Therapies).

The two have spearheaded legislation to direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to expand clinical trials and establish a national investigational research and extended access/compassionate use treatment program utilizing innovative treatments and emerging therapies to address conditions facing veterans with urgent unmet medical needs. These include PTSD, traumatic brain injury, depression, substance use disorders and chronic pain. The two have also introduced legislation to establish five VA Centers of excellence with a focus on psychedelic medicine.

Melissa Lavasani, CEO of the nonprofit Psychedelic Medicine Coalition, welcomes the focus on seeking evidence-based psychedelic medicine therapies. Lavasani has termed this a "mindshift in the future of mental health in America." Noted Lavasani, the Veterans Health Administration is America's largest integrated health care system, with 9 million patients, as many as 400,000 in staff and over 170 medical centers and 1,000-plus outpatient sites. Lavasani added the focus on veteran mental health is "more than policy proposals—it's a blueprint for a new era of mental health care in the United States." She added: "By working together to help our veterans, we have the chance to create a healthier and happier nation for all."

The US Senate is now moving to support this initiative. Psychedelic innovation and mental health treatments for veterans take another step forward as US Senator Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and US Senator David McCormick (R-PA) introduce the Innovative Therapies Centers of Excellence Act in the US Senate in March of 2026.

Resources:

- Psychedelic Alpha – "Inside a Bipartisan Effort to Bring Psychedelic Therapy to Veterans" (Apr 2025) https://psychedelicalpha.com/news/behind-the-bill-inside-a-bipartisan-effort-to-bring-psychedelic-therapy-to-veterans[40]
- Marijuana Moment – "VA Secretary Tells Trump About Psychedelics' Potential To Combat Military Veteran Suicide Crisis" (Apr 2025) https://www.marijuanamoment.net/va-secretary-tells-trump-about-psychedelics-potential-to-combat-military-veteran-suicide-crisis/[42]
- Marijuana Moment – "Trump's VA Secretary Touts How He 'Opened That Door' To Psychedelic Therapy For Veterans" (Jul 2025) https://www.marijuanamoment.net/trumps-va-secretary-touts-how-he-opened-that-door-to-psychedelic-therapy-for-veterans/[41]
- Military.com – "'Saving Lives': Bill Would Fund Psychedelic Therapies for Military Veterans" (Mar 2026) https://www.military.com/daily-news/2026/03/09/saving-lives-bill-would-fund-psychedelic-therapies-military-veterans.html[44]
- *Filter* – "Bill Would Require the VA to Study and Provide Psychedelic Treatment" (Mar 2026) https://filtermag.org/bill-va-psychedelic-treatment/[43]
- Psychedelics Today – "Senate Bill 4031 Signals Moves in Federal Psychedelic Policy" (Mar 2026) https://www.psychedelicstoday.com/2026/03/17/senate-bill-s-4031/[10]

TREND 5: Developing a Psychedelic Workforce

With FDA approvals for psychedelic medicine candidates expected in 2027, the need for psychedelic-informed healthcare workers to treat patients before, during and after psychedelic therapy means that training and education is already underway.

Fluence, the leading educators in the field, are already working with clinicians. Elizabeth Nielson, PhD, co-founder and CEO of Fluence, is recognized as the field's voice for professional education and its conscience. Dr. Nielson describes Fluence's curriculum and training as "transforming how psychedelic-assisted therapy is taught, delivered and integrated into modern clinical care," for physicians, psychotherapists, other prescribers and wellness professionals.

Since its founding in 2019, Fluence has educated over 8,000 therapists and professionals through its continuing education programs, in collaboration with leading drug developers and psychedelic biopharmas in the psychedelic therapy field. Dr. Nielson notes that therapists who enroll with Fluence for education in psychedelic therapy are increasingly "seeking programs that emphasize a rigorous, ethical and safety-focused approach at every stage of use."

As psychedelics become more accessible and widely used in medicine, Fluence is widely acknowledged as playing a crucial role in meeting workforce development needs. Fluence equips clinicians, coaches and industry professionals with high-quality education in psychedelic therapy. As the regulatory landscape continues to evolve, high-quality training must be grounded in best practices and designed to help practitioners remain compliant with current laws and professional standards.

Globally, Otsuka and Keio University's work on professional-development systems for psychiatrists and psychologists—explicitly focused on preparing clinicians to deliver psychedelic therapies in Japan—shows that workforce planning is now being written into research partnerships and policy design.

This emphasis on systems, rather than a single molecule, hints at a future where Big Pharma's role is not only to develop psychedelic-class drugs, but to help architect the regulatory, training and reimbursement frameworks that will govern their use.

An emphasis on accreditation is the focus of the Psychedelic Medicine Association, led by physician and jurist Lynn-Marie Morski, MD/JD. Dr. Morski is spearheading this effort because, she says, "one of the biggest barriers to integrating psychedelic medicine into the current medical model [is] accreditation."

Dr. Morski notes, "Right now, there is no standardized baseline for what it means to be a 'trained' psychedelic therapist. Programs offer certifications, but patients have no way of knowing what those certifications actually represent, as training programs vary widely."

Resources:

- fluencetraining.com
- https://psychedelicmedicineassociation.org/
- Otsuka – Keio University psychedelics collaboration (professional development focus) https://www.otsuka.co.jp/en/company/newsreleases/2025/20250508_1.html[15]
- Psychedelics Today – Senate Bill 4031 analysis (training and academic affiliations) https://www.psychedelicstoday.com/2026/03/17/senate-bill-s-4031/[10]
- *Filter* – VA psychedelic centers of excellence coverage; https://filtermag.org/bill-va-psychedelic-treatment/

TREND 6: Ibogaine? Texas-Size Ambition, but Cardiac-Size Caution

Few psychedelic-adjacent medicines embody both promise and peril as vividly as ibogaine. In 2026, the global conversation is shaped by two opposing forces: Texas-style ambition on one side, and a growing cardiology caution on the other.

Texas "awarded $50 million to a collective of public universities across the state to establish the Texas Ibogaine Research Consortium. The funding, authorized by the state legislature after last year's passage of the Texas Ibogaine Initiative," launched a "comprehensive, statewide clinical trial initiative known as Ibogaine Medicine for PTSD, Addiction and Cognitive Trauma (IMPACT)," according to Jack Gorsline in *Lucid News*.

He notes: "The two-year, multicenter project aims to evaluate the safety and efficacy of ibogaine—a powerful psychoactive alkaloid derived from the West African iboga shrub—in treating some of the state's most pressing behavioral health challenges, including opioid dependency and traumatic brain injury (TBI)."

At the same time, science is raising red flags. A February 2026 scoping review of ibogaine's therapeutic potential and cardiac safety concluded that ibogaine can block the hERG potassium channel, prolong the QT interval and trigger malignant ventricular arrhythmias—risks that have been linked to sudden deaths in both clinical and non-clinical settings. The authors argue that ibogaine's narrow therapeutic window demands meticulous screening, monitoring and risk-mitigation strategies if it is to be used responsibly, and they stress the need to weigh its benefits against existing high-risk treatments such as methadone with low rates of remission high rates of relapse.

Ibogaine's 2026 story offers a powerful cautionary tale: breakthrough outcomes, especially for people facing addiction and TBI, may coexist with non-trivial mortality risk. The questions now being asked go beyond simply "Does ibogaine work?" but "How can we design systems and standards that make its use as safe, effective and equitable as possible?"

Resources:

- UTHealth Houston – "UTHealth Houston, UTMB awarded $50 million by the state of Texas to lead ibogaine research" (Dec 2025) https://www.uth.edu/news/story/uthealth-houston-in-collaboration-with-utmb-health-awarded-50-million-by-the-state-of-texas-to-lead-ibogaine-research[7]
- Dallas Express – "Texas Funds $50M Ibogaine Trials For PTSD And Addiction" (Jan 2026) https://dallasexpress.com/state/impact-partnership-texas-universities-unite-for-ibogaine-clinical-trials-on-behavioral-health/[47]
- News-Medical – "Ibogaine treatment shows major breakthrough for veterans with brain injuries" (Jul 2025) https://www.news-medical.net/news/20250724/Ibogaine-treatment-shows-major-breakthrough-for-veterans-with-brain-injuries.aspx[48]
- Ibogaine cardiac safety review – "Ibogaine: Therapeutic Potential, Cardiac Safety, and Translational Challenges" (Feb 2026) https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12899015/
- https://www.lucid.news/partners-announced-for-texas-ibogaine-research-consortium-funding/

TREND 7: Doors of Perception Opens Doors to the White House

Perhaps the clearest sign that psychedelic medicine has entered a new era was when the White House livestreamed a cabinet meeting in which Veterans Affairs Secretary Doug Collins, replied to President Trump's concern about the the veteran suicide rate by stating: "We're working with Secretary Kennedy … on the possibility of psychedelic treatment." Collins, who is himself a combat veteran and former congressman, has said the VA is "actively conducting about a dozen clinical trials into various different substances" such as MDMA and psilocybin." Secretary Collins has also made a personal visit to an MDMA trial site at a VA health center in the Bronx.

That psychedelics ever made their way to the level of a cabinet meeting in a Republican White House is widely attributed to the work of Rick Doblin, PhD, founder of MAPS, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychiatric Studies. Doblin, who serves the Global Wellness Institute's Psychedelics & Healing Initiative's Honorary Chairman is a tireless advocate for evidence-based scientific research. Doblin's achievement, as chronicled in the *New York Times* headline "The Psychedelic Revolution is Coming. Psychiatry May Never be the Same," is said to have destigmatized psychedelics by cross-pollinating breakthroughs that benefit military veterans and psychiatric patients alike.

Doblin's uniquely non-partisan and politically agnostic approach has won support across the policy spectrum, from alternative soap scion David Bronner to the right-wing libertarian Koch family.

So it is perhaps no surprise that in addition to the appointment of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.—an outspoken advocate for psychedelic research—as Secretary of Health and Human Services, the nominee for next US Surgeon General, Casey Means, MD, has written about and publicly discussed therapeutic psychedelic mushroom experiences. Dr. Means has also suggested that psychedelics may be healing for some patients, even as she acknowledges current legal constraints and the need for continued research

Resources:

- *New York Post* – "Trump's surgeon general pick Casey Means credited psychedelic mushrooms with helping her 'find love'" (May 2025) https://nypost.com/2025/05/15/us-news/trumps-surgeon-general-pick-casey-means-credited-psychedelic-mushrooms-with-helping-her-find-love/[50]
- *Politico* – "A psychedelics hire at HHS" (May 2025) https://www.politico.com/newsletters/future-pulse/2025/05/28/a-psychedelics-hire-at-hhs-00371416[51]
- Marijuana Moment – VA Secretary / Trump Cabinet briefing on psychedelics (Apr 2025) https://www.marijuanamoment.net/va-secretary-tells-trump-about-psychedelics-potential-to-combat-military-veteran-suicide-crisis/[42]
- Marijuana Moment – VA Secretary Doug Collins "opened that door" interview (Jul 2025) https://www.marijuanamoment.net/trumps-va-secretary-touts-how-he-opened-that-door-to-psychedelic-therapy-for-veterans/[41]
- Military.com – "'Saving Lives': Bill Would Fund Psychedelic Therapies for Military Veterans" (Mar 2026) https://www.military.com/daily-news/2026/03/09/saving-lives-bill-would-fund-psychedelic-therapies-military-veterans.html[44]
- https://www.politico.com/news/2026/02/26/surgeon-general-casey-means-vaccines-nomination-rfk-00801331

Sleep Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Allison Howard, Founder and CEO, Nollapelli, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: JD Velilla, Founder, Designing Sleep, United States

Sleep continues to have a moment. Once treated as passive downtime, it is now recognized as one of the most powerful drivers of human health, performance and longevity—and one of the most dynamic frontiers in the global wellness economy. As scientific understanding deepens and consumer awareness grows, the sleep landscape is being reshaped by technology, design, lifestyle shifts and changing social realities. The trends in this report capture a pivotal transition: from luxury sleep experiences to growing awareness of sleep inequality, from relentless optimization to simplicity, from habits to environments, from schedules to circadian alignment, and from clinical sleep labs to at-home diagnosis. Together, these shifts signal a new era in which sleep is becoming more intentional, more measurable and more central to how we design healthier lives.

TREND 1: Sleep Tourism and the Growing Sleep Divide

Sleep tourism has rapidly emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global wellness economy. Luxury hotels, wellness resorts and destination spas are increasingly designing immersive experiences aimed specifically at improving sleep, from circadian-aligned lighting systems and sound-engineered

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rooms to guided sleep rituals, sleep-tracking consultations and specialized bedding environments. For travelers navigating jet lag, stress and digital overload, these programs promise something many people struggle to achieve at home: deeply restorative rest. Industry analysts estimate the broader sleep economy at over $585 billion globally, with wellness travel providers increasingly integrating sleep-focused offerings into their programming.

Major hospitality brands have moved quickly to capitalize on this demand. Hotels including Six Senses, Equinox Hotels and other wellness-oriented properties now offer dedicated sleep programs that combine environmental design, sleep coaching and recovery technologies. As awareness of sleep's importance to overall health grows, consumers are increasingly willing to travel—and pay—for experiences that help them reset their sleep.

Yet the rise of sleep tourism also highlights a deeper and less comfortable reality: access to sleep itself is increasingly stratified. While affluent travelers can purchase optimized sleep environments and curated sleep experiences, millions of people struggle to obtain the basic conditions necessary for healthy rest. Research consistently shows that financial insecurity, unstable housing, shift work and high-stress environments significantly reduce both sleep duration and sleep quality.

This disparity creates what some researchers describe as a "sleep gap." Sleep is now widely recognized as foundational to physical and mental health, yet the ability to achieve it remains unevenly distributed across populations. Poor sleep is associated with higher rates of chronic illness, reduced cognitive performance and decreased productivity, meaning that sleep inequality can reinforce broader cycles of social and economic disadvantage.

For the wellness and hospitality industries, the expansion of sleep tourism presents both opportunity and responsibility. On one hand, these programs reflect a growing recognition that sleep environments matter and that intentional design can dramatically improve sleep quality. On the other hand, they raise important questions about accessibility. If the most advanced sleep environments exist only within high-end resorts and luxury homes, the benefits of the sleep revolution may remain concentrated among those who already have the greatest health advantages.

The next phase of innovation may therefore focus not only on premium experiences but also on broader access to sleep-supportive environments. As the science of sleep continues to shape hospitality, product design and urban planning, the most meaningful progress may come from extending the principles behind sleep tourism—quiet, dark, cool and biologically aligned environments—to everyday living spaces. The future of sleep wellness will not be defined solely by how well travelers sleep on vacation, but by whether restorative sleep becomes more attainable for everyone.

Resources:

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- Trellis Group. "The Sleep Gap: How Social Inequality Affects Good Rest."

TREND 2: From "Sleepmaxxing" to Simplicity

Sleep has rapidly become one of the most dynamic areas of the global wellness economy. Over the past decade, consumer awareness of sleep as a pillar of health has expanded dramatically, driving innovation across mattresses, wearables, supplements, digital sleep coaching and environmental technologies. Alongside this growth, a cultural trend known as "sleepmaxxing" has emerged across social media and wellness communities. The term describes the pursuit of optimal sleep through a layered combination of supplements, wearable trackers, smart mattresses, cooling systems, mouth tape and increasingly

elaborate bedtime routines. At its core, this movement reflects a positive shift in public health awareness. More people now recognise sleep as foundational to wellbeing. Yet as the market matures, evidence and consumer behaviour suggest that the pursuit of perfect sleep has, for some, become overly complex.

Sleepmaxxing sits within the broader "quantified self" movement, where health behaviours such as exercise, nutrition and recovery are increasingly tracked and analyzed through consumer technologies. Sleep tracking has become one of the fastest-growing areas of this movement. These tools can provide valuable insight into patterns and behaviors, but clinicians have also begun to identify unintended consequences when monitoring becomes excessive.

One example is orthosomnia, the obsessive pursuit of perfect sleep metrics generated by wearable devices or apps. The term was first described in "The Tale of Orthosomnia: I Am so Good at Sleeping that I Can Do It with My Eyes Closed and My Fitness Tracker on Me" (Baron et al., *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*). The researchers documented patients whose anxiety about improving sleep scores actually worsened their sleep quality. Subsequent research has explored this phenomenon further, showing that individuals fixated on sleep tracker data may spend excessive time in bed attempting to improve their metrics. This behavior can lead to insomnia-like symptoms, including difficulty falling asleep, frequent night awakenings and heightened anxiety about sleep performance (Jahrami et al., *Nature and Science of Sleep*).

Technology itself is not the only challenge. The broader digital environment surrounding sleep can also interfere with healthy rest. Research examining "The Impact of Bedtime Technology Use on Sleep Quality and Excessive Daytime Sleepiness in Adults" (Exelmans and Van den Bulck) found that engaging with digital devices before sleep is associated with poorer sleep quality and increased daytime fatigue. Screens, notifications and cognitive stimulation can disrupt the physiological conditions required for restorative sleep.

As awareness of these issues grows, consumer behavior is beginning to shift. People are not abandoning sleep technology, but they are becoming more selective in how they use it. The National Sleep Foundation's *Sleep Health and Consumer Technologies Position Statement* recognises that consumer sleep technologies can be valuable tools for awareness and pattern recognition, particularly when they support behavioural change rather than constant monitoring.

Increasingly, individuals use sleep data to identify patterns such as the impact of caffeine, stress or irregular schedules. Once those insights are understood, the focus often shifts toward consistent routines, supportive sleep environments, and evidence-based habits. Technology still has a role, but it is most valued when it operates quietly in the background and integrates seamlessly into daily life.

This shift reflects a broader recalibration across wellness as consumers move away from relentless optimization and toward approaches that prioritize sustainability, nervous system balance and long-term wellbeing. For the sleep sector, the opportunity lies in supporting this evolution. The goal was never a perfect sleep score. It was restorative, sustainable rest. In the next era of sleep wellness, the most valuable innovations may be the ones that simplify sleep rather than optimize it, helping people reconnect with the natural biological rhythms that allow sleep to happen in the first place.

Resources:

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TREND 3: Sleep by Design

For many years, sleep advice focused almost exclusively on behavior. Consistent bedtimes, reduced caffeine, limited screen exposure before bed: the message was always about what people did. That framing is changing. A significant shift is underway in how the wellness sector understands sleep, and the bedroom itself is now at the centre of the conversation.

Scientific research increasingly confirms that the physical conditions in which we sleep are as important as the habits we bring to them. Temperature, air quality, light exposure, noise and bedding materials all measurably affect how easily the body transitions into restorative rest. Thermoregulation is particularly critical: the human body naturally lowers its core temperature as it prepares for sleep, and environments that are too warm actively interfere with that process. Research published in *Environmental Research* (Basner et al., 2023) and *Sleep Medicine Reviews* (Chevance et al., 2024) demonstrates that bedroom temperature, humidity and air quality can affect sleep duration, sleep fragmentation and time spent in deeper sleep stages. A further study in *Building and Environment* (Buonanno et al., 2024) reinforces that optimizing these variables produces measurable physiological benefits.

Light is equally powerful. Artificial light in the evening suppresses melatonin release and delays the circadian signals that regulate sleep timing, a finding established in foundational chronobiology research (Gooley et al., *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 2011) and now shaping how lighting designers, architects and product developers approach the bedroom.

Consumer behavior is responding. Mattresses engineered for personalized comfort and temperature regulation, breathable bedding materials, blackout systems and acoustic management solutions are being integrated into what researchers and designers now describe as the sleep ecosystem. Hospitality brands have moved quickly in this space: hotels including Six Senses, Equinox Hotels and 1 Hotels have introduced sleep-focused room designs that treat temperature, light and sound as active wellness variables rather than incidental features.

This evolution reflects a wider principle taking hold across the wellness industry: health outcomes are the product of systems and environments, not individual habits alone. As consumers move beyond tracking fatigue and optimization culture, attention is shifting toward spaces that quietly support the body's natural biological processes. The future of better sleep may not be found in more routines or more data, but in environments designed to simply get out of the body's way.

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TREND 4: Living (and Sleeping) by the Clock

Sunrise alarm clocks. Morning light therapy panels. Meal timing apps. Blue-light filtering glasses worn at 9pm. These are not fringe biohacking behaviours: they are the visible consumer face of one of the most consequential shifts in sleep and wellness science. Circadian health, long the province of specialist researchers, is entering mainstream lifestyle practice, and the implications for the sleep industry are profound.

The circadian rhythm is the body's master biological clock, governing not just sleep and waking but hormone production, metabolism, immune function and cognitive performance. Anchored in the suprachiasmatic nucleus of the brain and synchronised primarily by light exposure, this internal timing system works best when daily life, morning sunlight, consistent wake times, meals and activity, aligns with its natural cycle. The problem is that modern life works against it almost by design. Artificial lighting, late-evening screen use, irregular schedules, shift work and jet lag all contribute to circadian misalignment, and research is increasingly clear about the consequences. Studies have linked chronic circadian disruption with metabolic disorders, impaired cognitive performance, mood dysregulation and elevated risk for cardiovascular disease (Vetter, *Nature Reviews Endocrinology*, 2020).

A new consumer vocabulary is emerging in response. Chronobiology concepts once confined to academic journals, including circadian hygiene, sleep timing consistency and light anchoring, are appearing in wellness media, health coaching and product marketing. Individuals are becoming more intentional about morning light exposure as a biological signal, consistent wake times even on weekends and reducing artificial light after dark. The timing of meals and exercise is also increasingly recognised as influencing the internal clock, giving rise to a growing category of circadian-informed lifestyle products and programs.

Industry innovation is moving quickly to meet this demand. Circadian lighting systems that shift colour temperature across the day are being integrated into homes, offices and hotels. Sunrise simulation alarm clocks have moved from specialist wellness retailers into mainstream consumer electronics. Architects and workplace designers are beginning to incorporate circadian principles into building standards, recognizing that light environment and daily structure have measurable effects on both sleep quality and daytime performance.

This shift represents a deeper evolution in how sleep itself is defined. Duration alone is giving way to a richer understanding in which the timing, consistency and biological alignment of sleep matter as much as the hours clocked. As circadian science continues to move into mainstream wellness culture, the industry's opportunity lies in designing products, spaces and services that work with the body's clock rather than simply around it.

Resources:

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TREND 5: Sleep Diagnostics Come Home

For most of the history of sleep medicine, getting a diagnosis meant spending a night wired up in a clinical sleep laboratory, an experience that was inconvenient, expensive and for many people simply out of reach. That model is being fundamentally disrupted. Sleep diagnostics are moving into the home, and the commercial and clinical evidence confirms this is no longer an emerging trend but an accelerating reality.

The market numbers tell a clear story. The global home sleep apnea testing market is projected to grow from US$ 712.3 million in 2025 to US$ 966.1 million by 2035, driven by rising consumer awareness and advances in portable diagnostic technology (Future Market Insights, 2025). Among Medicare beneficiaries alone, unattended home sleep tests grew by 632.6% between 2011 and 2021, a figure that reflects both the clinical validation of home testing and a profound shift in how patients and providers approach diagnosis (Singh, 2025).

Sleep disorders are more prevalent than most people recognize. Obstructive sleep apnea affects an estimated one billion people globally, yet the majority of cases remain undiagnosed. Insomnia disorder affects between 10 and 15 percent of the adult population. The consequences of leaving these conditions untreated are serious: unmanaged sleep apnea is associated with hypertension, type 2 diabetes, stroke, depression and increased accident risk. The traditional barriers to diagnosis, including cost, access and the inconvenience of laboratory testing, have meant that millions of people live with debilitating, treatable conditions without ever receiving a clinical explanation.

Home sleep apnea testing is now changing that picture rapidly. Portable diagnostic devices can monitor breathing patterns, oxygen saturation, heart rate and sleep interruptions during a normal night at home. Clinical research confirms that home testing provides reliable diagnostic information for a broad range of patients when used appropriately and reviewed by trained clinicians (Hussein et al., 2024). Telemedicine platforms now allow sleep specialists to interpret that data remotely, removing the need for laboratory attendance entirely. Research published in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine* (Bailly et al., 2024) demonstrates that this model reduces barriers to diagnosis and enables earlier treatment initiation, with measurable benefits for patient outcomes.

Consumer wearables are playing a supporting role in this shift. Devices including the Apple Watch, Oura Ring and Withings Sleep Analyzer have introduced millions of people to the concept of monitoring their own sleep patterns, raising awareness of disrupted breathing, poor sleep efficiency and irregular sleep staging. While consumer devices do not replace clinical diagnosis, they are increasingly functioning as a first signal that prompts individuals to seek professional evaluation.

For the wellness industry, the expansion of accessible sleep diagnostics represents both a responsibility and an opportunity. Better sleep begins with understanding how the body actually sleeps. As home testing becomes more widely adopted and telemedicine normalizes remote clinical care, the boundary between sleep wellness and sleep medicine is becoming more permeable. The most forward-thinking wellness brands will be those that help bridge that gap, guiding consumers from awareness to action and, where needed, toward the clinical support that can genuinely change their health.

Resources:

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TREND 6. The Age of Intelligent Sleep

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming how consumers understand, monitor and improve their sleep. As sleep health gains recognition as a critical pillar of overall wellness, AI technologies are enabling more sophisticated sleep monitoring, personalized optimization and predictive health insights. These developments are occurring amid a broader public health concern: roughly one-third of adults in the United States report not getting sufficient sleep and millions suffer from undiagnosed sleep disorders such as insomnia and sleep apnea (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). AI-powered sleep technologies aim to address this challenge by making sleep monitoring and optimization more accessible, personalized and scalable.

One of the most visible impacts of AI on consumer sleep is the rapid adoption of wearable sleep tracking devices. Smartwatches, fitness trackers and smartphone-based sleep apps collect data on physiological signals such as movement, heart rate variability, respiratory patterns and body temperature. Machine learning algorithms analyze these data streams to estimate sleep duration, sleep stages and sleep disturbances. A review of consumer sleep technologies found that wearable sleep trackers can provide useful insights into sleep behavior and have become widely adopted tools for monitoring sleep patterns outside clinical settings (de Zambotti et al., 2019). While these consumer devices are not as precise as laboratory sleep studies, they enable long-term monitoring and provide individuals with actionable feedback on their sleep habits.

Beyond monitoring sleep, AI is increasingly being used to actively improve sleep quality through personalized optimization. Smart sleep environments—including connected mattresses, adjustable beds and intelligent bedroom systems—can respond to physiological signals during sleep. Sensors embedded in sleep surfaces can monitor breathing patterns, heart rate and body movement throughout the night. AI systems analyze these signals and adjust environmental factors such as temperature, mattress support, lighting or sound to promote deeper and more restful sleep. According to Mass General Brigham, emerging sleep technologies that integrate sensors and data analytics may help optimize sleep conditions and improve sleep outcomes (Mass General Brigham, 2022).

AI is also transforming sleep medicine by improving the detection and diagnosis of sleep disorders. Machine learning models can analyze sleep data to identify patterns associated with conditions such as obstructive sleep apnea, insomnia and circadian rhythm disorders. These systems may allow earlier detection of sleep disorders and enable remote monitoring through home-based sleep devices. Researchers have suggested that AI-assisted analysis could significantly expand access to sleep diagnostics and help physicians interpret complex sleep data more efficiently (Moss et al., 2023).

Perhaps the most promising long-term application of AI in sleep research is the use of sleep data as a predictive indicator of overall health. Sleep involves interactions among multiple physiological systems, including the brain, cardiovascular system and respiratory system. Because of this complexity, sleep data can reveal early signs of broader health conditions. Recent research has demonstrated that AI models trained on sleep study data can predict the risk of numerous diseases, including cardiovascular disease

and neurological disorders, by analyzing physiological signals recorded during sleep (Stanford University, 2026). This suggests that sleep monitoring could become an important component of preventive healthcare.

Despite these benefits, AI-powered sleep technologies also raise important challenges. Data privacy is a major concern because sleep data contains sensitive health information. Additionally, consumer sleep trackers vary in accuracy and experts caution that they should not replace clinical diagnosis. Another emerging concern is "orthosomnia," a condition in which individuals become overly focused on optimizing sleep metrics, potentially increasing anxiety about sleep.

Overall, AI is poised to reshape the consumer sleep landscape by enabling continuous monitoring, personalized optimization and predictive health insights. As technology advances, sleep may evolve from a passive biological process into a central component of personalized health management. If implemented responsibly, AI-powered sleep technologies could play a significant role in addressing the global sleep crisis and improving long-term health outcomes.

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Sport and Hospitality Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Patricia Ladis, Holistic Physical Therapist, Behavioral Breathing Analyst, Biomechanical Analysis Founder & CEO, WiseBody PT, United States

Initiative Vice-Chair: Lynelle Lynch, Owner, Running Y Resort & Bellus Academy, United States

The goal of the Sport and Hospitality Initiative is to establish a comprehensive, actionable framework that enables communities to integrate wellness through sport into their local culture and infrastructure—empowering municipalities, organizations and individuals to use sport as a vehicle for improved wellbeing. The Initiative will also support the hospitality and spa sectors by providing them with the tools, education and best practices needed to better serve professional and recreational athletes alike. Through cross-sector collaboration, evidence-based resources and global outreach, it aims to drive sustained improvements in both mental and physical health, leveraging the universal language of sport to foster connection, resilience and holistic wellness around the world.

> Explore the Sport and Hospitality Initiative on the GWI Website

The sports hospitality sector is evolving as we enter 2026. Professional athletes are elevating their travel experience to include sleep, movement and dietary priorities. Teams have experts that specialize in creating the ideal travel lifestyle to ensure maximum health and wellness in preparation for competition. Hotels are selected based on a variety of amenities and accommodations that will support the athlete's program of wellness. These trends will provide insight for collegiate athletes as well as the guests who travel for sporting adventures. The future of sports hospitality is as much about wellness and innovation as it is about the games themselves. These trends reflect the future-forward trajectory of this rapidly expanding space.

TREND 1: The Surge of Sports Tourism

Sports tourism is emerging as one of the fastest-growing segments in the hospitality industry and is projected to generate billions in economic impact. Events such as the Olympics, the World Cup and Formula 1 attract waves of international travelers, prompting hospitality providers to create packages that combine event access with luxury accommodations, wellness treatments and curated experiences. Cities like Melbourne, which hosts the Australian Grand Prix, report over $50 million in economic benefits from such events. This surge is compelling hoteliers to incorporate sport-centric experiences into their guest offerings.

Resources:

- *The Australian*. Sydney Fireworks vs Taylor Swift. 2025
- Knowland. Sports Tourism Events for Hotels. 2024
- TBRC. "Sports Hospitality Market Overview." March 2025

TREND 2: The Responsibility of Hotels to Provide Wellness Accommodations for Athletes

Professional teams have hired wellness experts that focus on numerous aspects of the travel experience. Directors of wellness are responsible for planning teams travel itinerary to ensure arrival at the site with enough time to stay on their meal plan and ensure adequate sleep. Hotels are required to have black-out drapes, quiet down-time spaces for the athletes, spaces for movement activities and a chef that will prepare menus aligned with the very specific dietary team requirements. In addition, the hotel should be located near outdoor walking paths to facilitate the required 30 minutes of circadian outdoor activity. While many teams have hotel partnerships in certain cities, others might select accomodations less than 30 minutes away from the event location to maintain their wellness requirements. As hotels are modifying their accommodations for athletes, similar requests are coming from regular guests seeking wellness for their travel. If a fitness center was previously considered adequate, the evolution of wellness in hotels is moving in a different direction.

Resources:

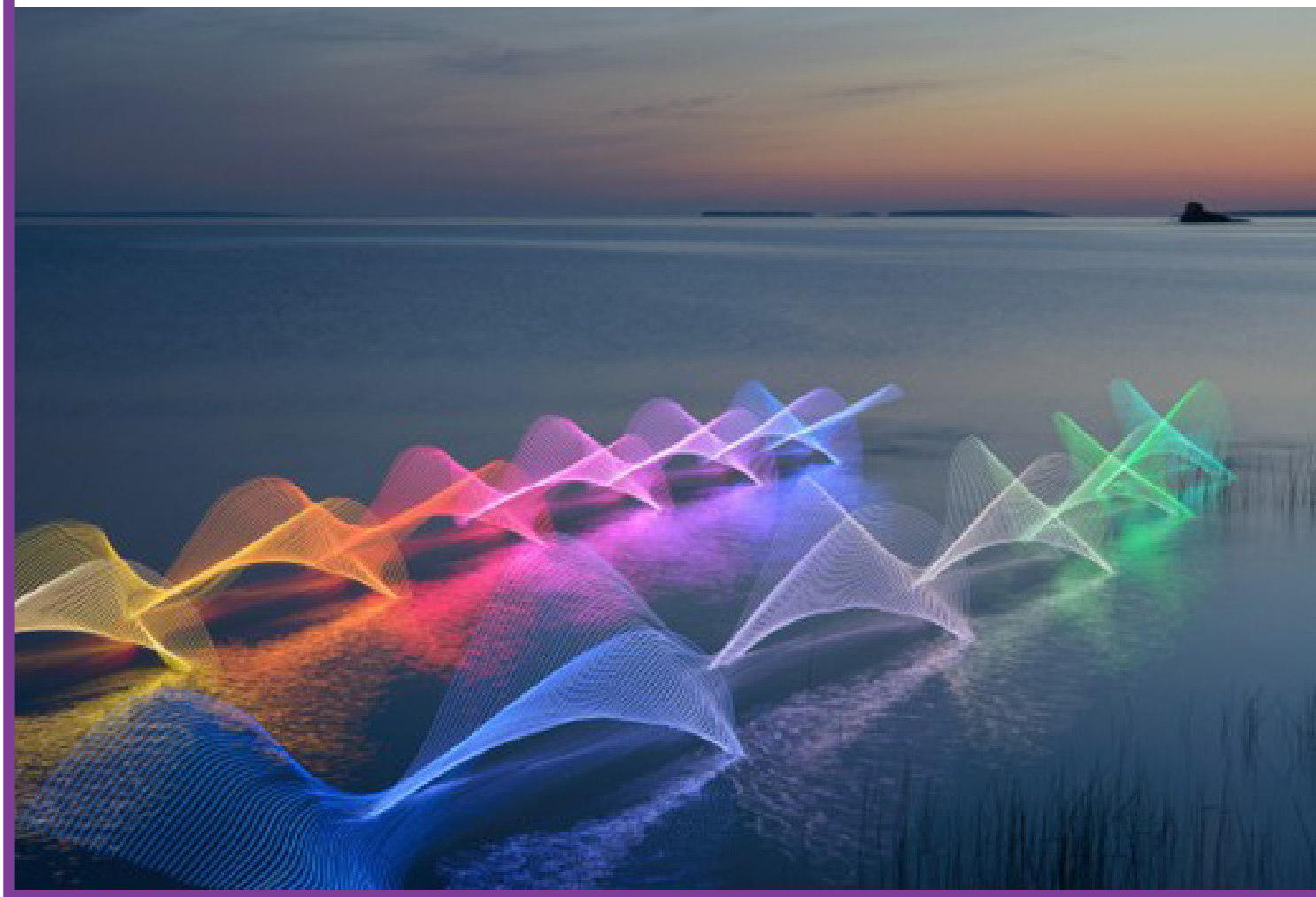
- Luke Jenkinson, Performance Manager for San Diego FC, MLS

Touchless Wellness Initiative Trends

Initiative Co-Chair: Erin Lee, Founder of the Touchless Wellness Association, United Kingdom
Initiative Co-Chair: Alina Hernandez, Wellness Concept Creator/Advisory Board Member, Germany

As wellness expands beyond traditional hands-on services, touchless wellness is emerging as a powerful model—integrating immersive environments, intelligent systems and evidence-informed technologies that support wellbeing without constant human intervention.

Our trends highlight how wellness spaces are evolving into integrated ecosystems that support relaxation, recovery and human performance. From ambient environments that influence the nervous system to emerging sensing technologies and transformation-focused experience design, the future of wellness is becoming more accessible, scalable and inclusive, supporting a broader vision of wellness for all across hospitality, healthcare, workplaces and everyday life.



> Explore the Touchless Wellness Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Think Quantum III

Quantum thinking is entering its next phase, and is now moving from theory into practical biological and technological applications. The Third Quantum Wave is less about philosophy and more about measurement. It focuses on how subtle energetic and informational exchanges in living systems can be detected, mapped and eventually integrated into wellness technologies, allowing for the possibility to measure biological signals that were previously invisible.

For the wellness field, this signals an important shift. The opportunity goes way beyond borrowing language from quantum physics; it involves applying recent discoveries to develop tools that support greater precision in health and human performance. Future applications may include ultra-sensitive biosensors, improved imaging technologies and computational systems capable of interpreting complex biological data in new ways.

The implication for touchless wellness is profound: the next generation of wellness innovation will increasingly focus on detecting and working with subtle biological signals—bringing science, technology and human vitality into closer alignmen—and seeing the individual human body as a "system," and as "bio-informational."

Resources:

- Abrahams, B. et al. *Nature* (2026). Quantum spin resonance sensing using engineered fluorescent proteins in living cells.
- Wang, X. et al. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2025). Evidence for quantum effects in biomineral formation.
- Li, Y. et al. *npj Genomic Medicine* (2025). Quantum computing and the implementation of precision medicine.

TREND 2: Experience Design for Transformation

Experience design is becoming a defining capability in the evolution of touchless wellness. The most impactful wellness environments are intentionally designed journeys that guide guests through a sequence of moments—arrival, immersion, restoration and integration—each contributing to a meaningful personal outcome.

The focus is shifting from individual treatments to the guest journey as a system. When thoughtfully designed, this journey not only enhances the individual's sense of restoration and transformation, it also creates measurable value for the business. Structured wellness pathways increase engagement, extend dwell time and encourage repeat visitation because guests perceive progress in their wellbeing rather than a single isolated service.

For touchless wellness environments, this approach is especially powerful. Sensor-enabled technologies, immersive environments and automated programming allow operators to deliver consistent, scalable journeys that support relaxation, recovery and cognitive reset, while also improving operational efficiency. Designing the guest journey with intention enables wellness operators to align human impact with sustainable business growth.

Resources:

- Pine, B. Joseph II. *The Transformation Economy: Guiding Customers to Achieve Their Aspirations.* Harvard Business Review Press, 2026.
- Pine, B. Joseph II & Gilmore, James. *The Experience Economy.* Harvard Business School Press.
- Hernandez, Alina M. "Experience Design in the Future of Spa and Wellness." *Spa Business Handbook*, 2025.

TREND 3: Autonomous Precision – Where Human Choice Meets Intelligent Systems

The next evolution of wellness lies at the intersection of behavioral autonomy and precision intelligence. While AI, biometrics and digital health assets now enable unprecedented precision—processing real-time physiological, genetic and behavioral data—the success of these systems still depends on human agency and willingness to engage.

Behavioral science reminds us that people only adopt practices they feel ownership over. As a result, the most effective wellness ecosystems will blend objective data with voluntary engagement. AI will curate increasingly precise recommendations, but adoption will be driven by environments that respect autonomy and foster intrinsic motivation and sustained behavioral change.

The emerging category is therefore neither purely technological nor purely human experiential: it is an integrated ecosystem where intelligent systems guide, while individuals ultimately choose how to engage

Resources:

- Chiam, J., Lim, A., et al. "Co-Pilot for Health: Personalized Algorithmic AI Nudging to Improve Health Outcomes." *arXiv / Digital Health AI Research* (2024). Research shows that AI systems using wearable and behavioral data can deliver personalized health recommendations and nudges that measurably improve physical activity and engagement.
- Ntoumanis, N., et al. "Applying Self-Determination Theory to Behavior Change Technologies." *Frontiers in Psychology* (2025). Research highlights that digital health technologies are most effective when designed to support autonomy and intrinsic motivation, which are critical for sustained engagement and long-term behavior change.
- "Why Wellness Needs a New Operating System." Alina M Hernandez and Nigel Franklyn (February 2026)

TREND 4: The Shift Toward Adaptive, Individualized Regulation within the Environment

The future of touchless wellness will be personalized to the nervous system of the individual.

As neuro-wellness evolves, the field is moving beyond one-size-fits-all interventions toward environments and technologies that respond to an individual's physiological state.

Since the advances in wearable devices, biometric feedback and AI-driven wellness platforms are making it possible to measure indicators such as heart rate variability, sleep patterns and stress levels in real time, it is shaping the evolution of touchless modalities and their application. These insights may allow touchless wellness environments to adapt dynamically through adjustments in lighting, sound, visual immersion or sensory inputs designed to support regulation and recovery—impacting better outputs.

From a behavioral science perspective, personalization is critical as individuals differ in sensory sensitivity, stress responses and regulatory patterns. The next generation of wellness spaces may therefore be responsive environments that support each person's unique nervous system needs.

Resources:

- Shaffer, F., & Ginsberg, J. (2017). *An Overview of Heart Rate Variability Metrics and Norms.* Frontiers in Public Health. This paper explains HRV as a key biomarker of autonomic nervous system regulation and stress recovery, widely used in wearable technologies and biofeedback systems.
- Küller, R., Ballal, S., Laike, T., Mikellides, B., & Tonello, G. (2006). *The Impact of Light and Colour on Psychological Mood: A Cross-Cultural Study of Indoor Work Environments.* Ergonomics. Research demonstrating how environmental factors such as lighting influence mood, physiological arousal, and psychological regulation—supporting the concept of adaptive wellness environments.
- Shaffer and Ginsberg, Heart Rate Variability and Stress: Implications for Health. National Institutes of Health

TREND 5: Ambient Wellness

Ambient wellness is becoming a defining feature of touchless wellness environments. Instead of relying on hands-on services, wellness is embedded directly into the space through lighting, soundscapes, air quality, temperature and biophilic elements that influence the nervous system and circadian rhythms.

These environments allow guests to experience restoration simply by being present in the space. As research advances in environmental psychology and circadian lighting, wellness operators are increasingly able to design spaces that passively support relaxation, sleep regulation, cognitive recovery and emotional balance.

For touchless wellness, the opportunity is to create passive therapeutic environments that deliver consistent wellbeing benefits without physical touch—making wellness more accessible, scalable and inclusive for a broader population.

Signals to watch:

- Circadian lighting systems that regulate sleep, mood, and alertness.
- Therapeutic soundscapes and acoustic environments that reduce stress.
- Biophilic design elements that support mental restoration.
- Integrated environmental controls that create continuous passive wellness experiences.

Resources:

- Brown, T. et al. "Recommendations for Daytime, Evening, and Nighttime Indoor Light Exposure to Support Physiology and Sleep." *PLOS Biology*, 2022.
- Landvreugd, A., Nivard, M., & Bartels, M. "The Effect of Light on Wellbeing: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 2024.
- Alvarsson, J., Wiens, S., & Nilsson, M. "Stress Recovery during Exposure to Nature Sound and Environmental Noise." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Wellness Architecture & Design Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Kailas Moorthy, Director and Practice Head at (the London Studio of) DP Architects, ARB | RIBA | WELL AP | Fitwel Amb, United Kingdom
Initiative Vice-Chair: Valentina Cereda, Founder & Integrative Architect, Dubai

Discover the latest trends in wellness architecture and design, where primal architecture reconnects us to nature and ancestral patterns, and neuroarchitecture shapes spaces that support mental and emotional wellbeing. Explore how circadian lighting aligns environments with our biological rhythms, and how emerging strategies aim to design out microplastics and hidden pollutants from interiors. From regenerative thinking to healthier material choices, these approaches redefine the built environment as a system that prioritizes wellbeing, sustainability and deeper human connection.

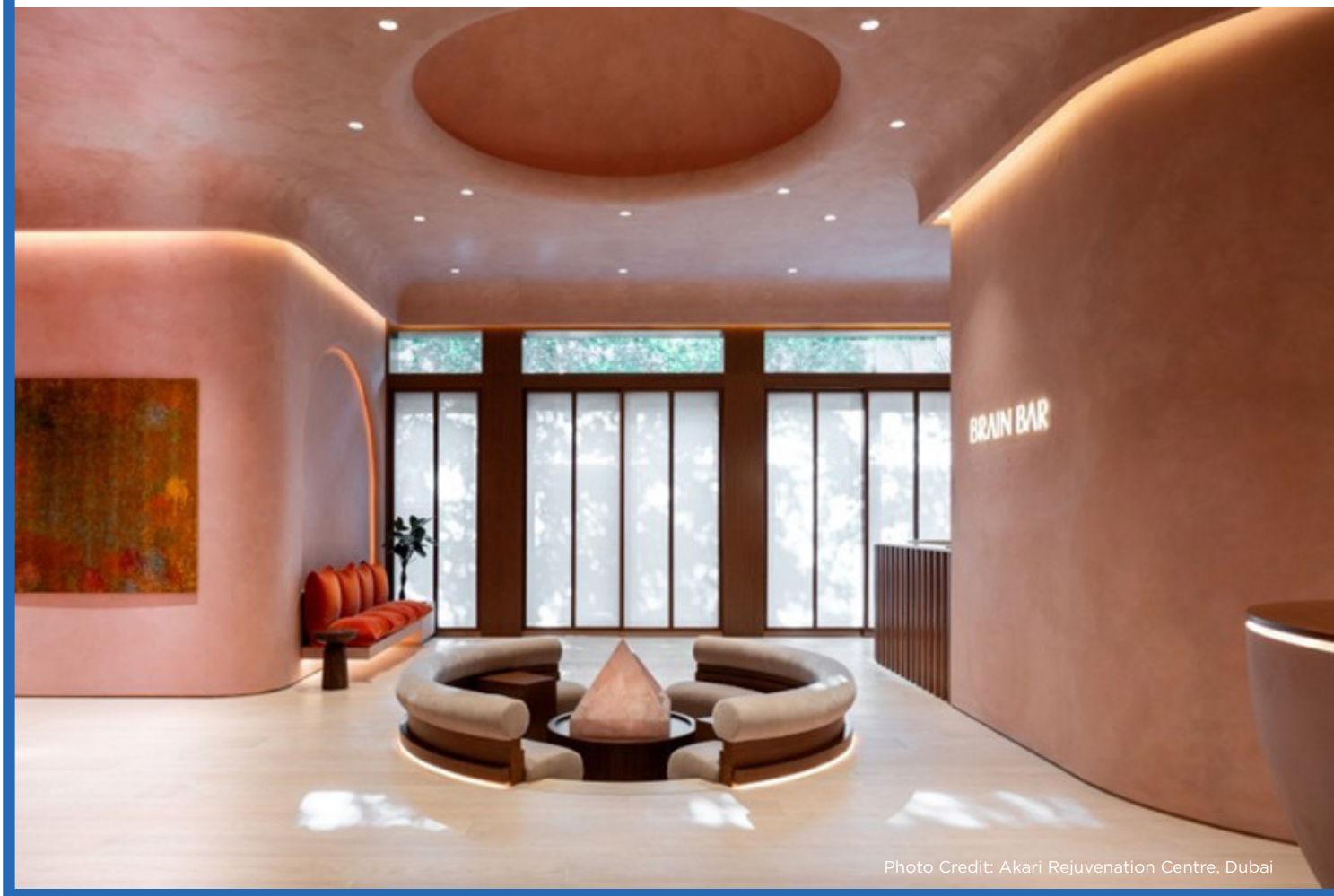


Photo Credit: Akari Rejuvenation Centre, Dubai

> Explore the Wellness Architecture & Design Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Primal Architecture – Designing for Psychological Safety and Human Regulation

Today, many people live in a constant state of stress due to lifestyle pressures, environmental factors and digital overload. Before conscious awareness, the body continuously scans its surroundings for safety or threat through a process known as neuroception. When stress becomes prolonged, this system can remain on high alert, even in objectively safe environments, leading to fatigue, anxiety and reduced resilience.

This is where a new wellness design trend, often referred to as **primal architecture**, is emerging. It places the human nervous system at the center of design thinking. Rather than focusing only on aesthetics or function, it considers how spaces are *felt* at a physiological level. Elements such as lighting quality, acoustics, spatial clarity, ceiling height, materiality and visual complexity all influence whether a space is perceived as calming or overwhelming.

Design strategies may include softer, indirect lighting, natural materials, clear wayfinding, human-scaled proportions and reduced sensory clutter. These interventions help shift the body from a state of vigilance to one of relaxation and regulation.

Primal architecture moves beyond conventional wellness design by prioritizing safety as a foundational condition. In doing so, it creates environments that not only reduce stress but actively support emotional balance, cognitive clarity and long-term wellbeing.

TREND 2: Neuroarchitecture – How Buildings Change the Way our Brains Function

For decades, modern science and design were shaped by reductionist thinking, dividing knowledge into specialized silos. Yet the human organism does not function in isolated parts. Environment, behaviour, physiology and psychology are deeply interconnected, continuously influencing one another, even at the level of gene expression. Today, a growing body of research is challenging this fragmented approach and reshaping how we think about the built environment.

This shift is driving the rise of **neuroarchitecture**, an emerging field that integrates neuroscience, architecture, environmental psychology and epigenetics. It explores how the spaces we inhabit directly affect cognition, mood, creativity, stress levels and even immune function. Rather than treating buildings as neutral backdrops, neuroarchitecture recognises them as active participants in human health.

By incorporating scientific measurement tools, such as tracking brain activity, heart rate variability and stress responses, designers can better understand how elements like light, materiality, acoustics, color and spatial configuration impact the body and mind. This evidence-based approach enables more intentional design decisions that support focus, relaxation and emotional balance.

Ultimately, neuroarchitecture represents a paradigm shift: from designing spaces that simply accommodate human activity to creating environments that actively enhance wellbeing, performance and resilience.

Resources:

- Sarah Williams Goldhagen (2017), *Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives* (Key idea: environments influence cognition, emotion, and behaviour), https://sarahwilliamsgoldhagen.com/
- Roger Ulrich (1984), View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery, *Science.* (Landmark study showing nature views improve healing outcomes), https://naturesacred.org/researcher/roger-ulrich-phd/
- Colin Ellard (2015), *Places of the Heart* (Examines how urban environments affect mood and mental states), https://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/journal2-ellard.html

TREND 3: Designing Out Microplastics

A growing trend in wellness architecture is shifting focus from air filtration to source control, addressing an often-overlooked indoor pollutant: microplastics. As buildings have become more airtight for energy efficiency, they have also begun to trap microscopic particles released from synthetic materials such as carpets, upholstery, paints and finishes. These particles are now being detected in human lungs and bloodstream, raising concerns about long-term health impacts.

This has led to a new design approach centered on "plastic-conscious interiors." Rather than relying solely on mechanical systems like HVAC and air purifiers, architects and designers are rethinking material selection from the outset. The emphasis is on reducing petrochemical-based products and prioritizing natural, low-emission materials.

Key strategies include specifying natural fibers such as wool, cotton and linen; using solid wood, stone and ceramics instead of engineered or plastic-based materials; and avoiding finishes that release volatile compounds or microplastic particles. Transparency tools like Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) are increasingly used to assess material composition and lifecycle impact.

Ultimately, plastic-free or plastic-reduced interiors are no longer viewed as a niche or luxury, but as a fundamental component of healthy building design. By addressing pollutants at their source, wellness architecture is evolving to create spaces that actively support human health, rather than simply mitigating harm.

Resources:

- Bodeker, G., Munday, T., *Understanding the Microplastics Crisis: Framing a Wellness Response*, 20 September 2025
- Baker, P., Banta, J., Elliott, E., *Prescriptions for a Healthy House*, New Society Publishers, 1 October 2014
- Stelmack, A., *Sustainable Residential Interiors*, John Wiley & Sons, 2014

TREND 4: Circadian Lighting Design

A key trend in wellness architecture is the integration of circadian lighting, a design approach that aligns indoor environments with the body's natural biological rhythms. For most of human history, daylight regulated our internal clock, shifting from cool, blue-rich morning light that promotes alertness to warm evening tones that signal rest. Modern lighting, however, has disrupted this balance, exposing occupants to constant, blue-tinged illumination that suppresses melatonin and keeps the body in a perpetual "midday" state.

This has significant implications for sleep quality, mood and overall health. As awareness grows, architects and designers are moving beyond static lighting schemes toward dynamic systems that mimic the natural progression of sunlight throughout the day. These systems adjust both color temperature and intensity, supporting energy levels in the morning and facilitating relaxation in the evening.

Circadian lighting is particularly impactful in windowless or low-daylight spaces, such as bathrooms, basements and work areas, where natural light cues are limited. When integrated thoughtfully, it can also help mitigate seasonal effects, especially in regions with reduced winter daylight.

This trend reflects a broader shift toward human-centric and neuro-responsive design, where lighting is no longer purely functional or aesthetic but a critical component of health. Combined with access to natural daylight, biophilic elements, and consistent daily routines, circadian lighting offers a practical, evidence-based strategy to improve wellbeing.

Ultimately, wellness architecture is moving toward environments that work with human biology rather than against it, using light as a powerful tool to restore balance in increasingly artificial settings.

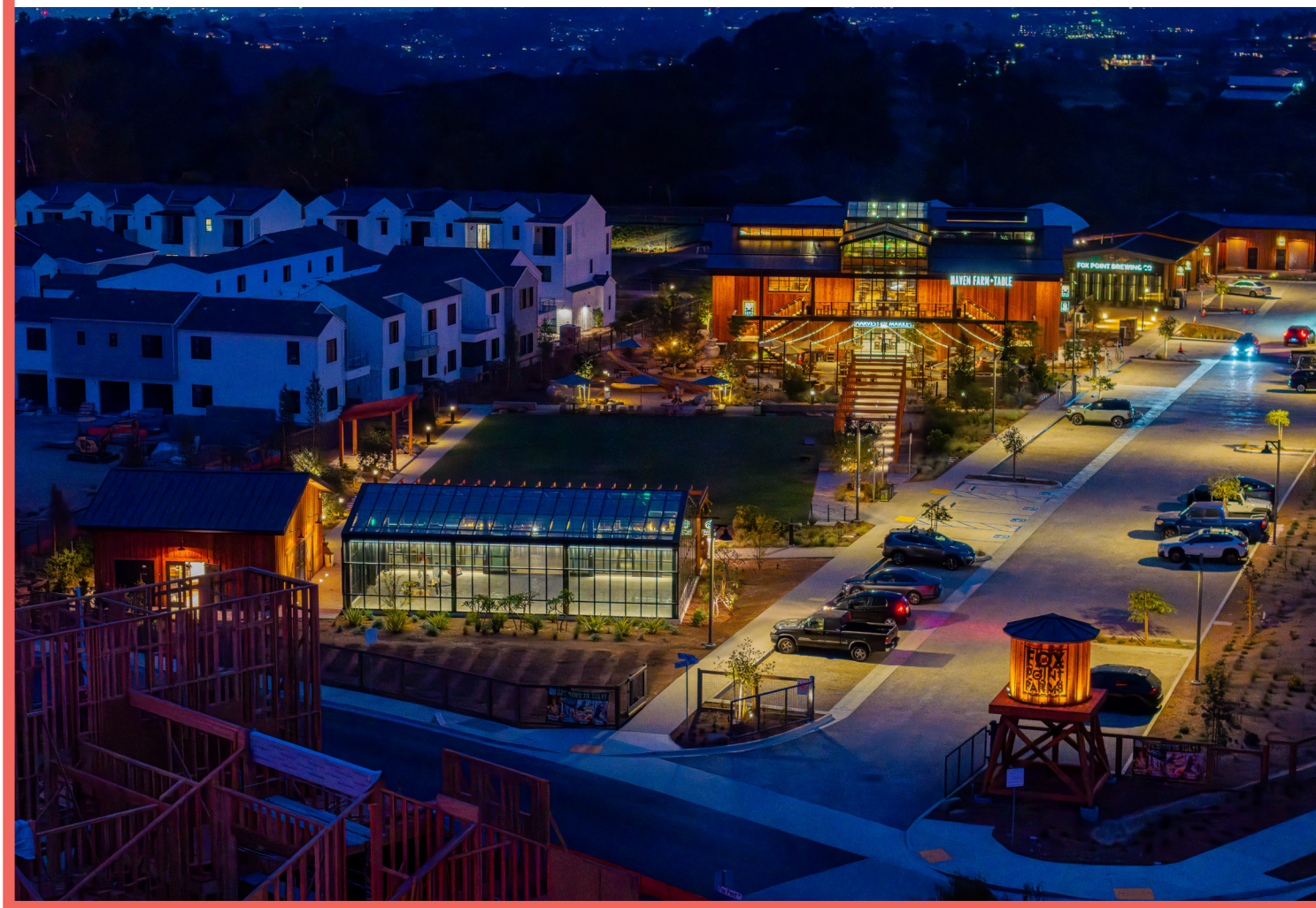
Resources:

- Figueiro, M.G. et al. (2017) The impact of daytime light exposures on sleep and mood in office workers, *Sleep Health*, 3(3), pp. 204-215. doi: 10.1016/j.sleh.2017.03.005
- Viola, A.U. et al. (2008) Blue-enriched white light in the workplace improves self-reported alertness, performance and sleep quality, *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 34(4), pp. 297-306.

Wellness Communities & Real Estate Initiative Trends

Initiative Co-Chair: Teri Slavik-Tsuyuki, Principal, tst ink LLC, United States
Initiative Co-Chair: Jean-François Garneau, Chief Development Officer, INITIAL Real Estate, Founder & Chief Possibilities Officer, ALIŌ – Building Wellbeing, Switzerland

The wellness real estate sector, now valued at $548 billion globally and projected to reach over $1 trillion by 2029, is the fastest-growing sector in the wellness economy. In 2026, we are observing a market that is maturing—moving from aspiration to evidence, from luxury to broader accessibility, from building-centric design to community-scale thinking, and from amenity lists to integrated systems that actively support how people live, connect and age. This report identifies six trends shaping the next chapter of wellness real estate, each reflecting an observable shift already underway, supported by data, and creating real opportunities for developers, investors, designers and policymakers.



> Explore the Wellness Communities & Real Estate Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: The Wellbeing Address – Where You Live Is How Long You Live

A fundamental shift is underway in what people expect from the places where they live, work and play. In the latest America at Home Study, 60% of all consumers cited health and wellness as the number one reason they desire certain home features, up 17% from two years prior. This is a market-wide demand signal reshaping how developers, designers and investors approach real estate at every scale.

Consumers are no longer satisfied with spaces that simply shelter. They want environments that actively support their health, wellbeing and longevity. A new category of development is emerging: communities and hospitality projects embedding preventive medicine, clinical partnerships and personalized health protocols directly into the real estate product. The home and the community are becoming points of care, not adjacent to healthcare, but structurally integrated with it. Healthspan is no longer adjacent to real estate. It is becoming infrastructure.

Wellness is now a foundational expectation influencing site selection, programming, spatial design and long-term operations. The built environment is not just a backdrop to life, but an active participant in how well and how long we live.

Resources:

- America at Home Study, consumer wellness priority data, 2025.
- Allen, J.G. & Macomber, J.D., Healthy Buildings, Harvard University Press, 2020.
- Global Wellness Summit, "Longevity Residences," *Future of Wellness 2026 Trends Report*.
- National Association of Realtors, "Wellness Trend Driving Real Estate Price Premiums," 2025.

TREND 2: Land First – When the Site Becomes the Strategy

A meaningful shift is taking place in how wellness real estate projects begin. Instead of acquiring a site and layering amenities onto a cleared parcel, a growing number of developers are starting with the land itself, its ecology, agricultural capacity, water systems and cultural assets, and designing real estate in response to it. The land is no longer a backdrop. It is becoming the framework.

Across asset classes, agriculture, biodiversity corridors, watershed systems and working landscapes are shaping site planning, phasing strategy and long-term value creation. The farm, vineyard or regenerative system comes first; real estate is designed around it. This is not farm-to-table branding. It is land-led master planning.

Consumer data supports the shift. Expedia's Unpack 2026 report identified a 300% year-over-year increase in VRBO listings mentioning farm stays. The UN identifies rural and nature-based travel as one of the fastest-growing global tourism segments. US federal policy is also signaling alignment: the USDA's $700 million Regenerative Pilot Program establishes soil health and land stewardship as national priorities with direct public health implications. Productive land systems diversify revenue through agriculture, hospitality, education and limited residential ownership, creating more resilient and differentiated development models.

Resources:

- Expedia Group, Unpack 2026 Travel Trends Report
- UN Tourism, Rural Tourism and Sustainable Development, 2024
- USDA, Regenerative Pilot Program, $700M federal investment, December 2025.
- Regenerative Farming as Climate Action, *Journal of Environmental Management*, 2023

TREND 3: The 3 Rs – Rest, Reset, Rejuvenate

Real estate designed for life balance

Something is shifting in what residents and buyers are telling the market they need. After years of optimizing for productivity, connectivity and performance, a counter-signal is emerging: people are seeking environments that actively support recovery, downtime and nervous system regulation as part of daily life. This is not a retreat from wellness. It is its maturation.

Gen Z and millennial buyers are increasingly prioritizing analog experiences, unplugging and in-person connection. Developers are responding with projects where rest and recovery are treated as programmable infrastructure—dedicated quiet zones, sensory-calibrated spaces for decompression, biophilic circulation paths, flexible micro-spaces for solitude and community programming built around restorative practices. The underlying insight is grounded in neuroscience—environments that support autonomic regulation and reduce sensory overload produce measurably better health outcomes and stronger emotional connection to place.

In an era of chronic overstimulation, the ability to offer genuine rest and recovery is becoming a competitive differentiator. Communities designed around life balance are seeing stronger resident engagement, and the rest ethic is emerging as a complement to the wellness features the market has already embraced.

Resources:

- The Design of Neighborhood Open Spaces to Improve Mental Health, *Landscape and Urban Planning, 2024*
- The Association of Resilience with Mental Health in a Large Population-Based Sample, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2022
- Disconnect to Recharge: Wellbeing Benefits of Digital Disconnection in Daily Life, *Communication Research*, 2025
- Disconnected from complexity: on nature exposure, sociality, and the self-organizing self, *New Ideas in Psychology,* 2025
- Sax, David, *The Future is Analog*, PublicAffairs, 2022.

TREND 4: The Great Rebalance – Wellness Finds the Middle Market

Wellness real estate entered the market from the top. Most early projects have lived in the luxury segment. But an important shift is underway. The severe global housing supply gap, growing inequality and rising consumer demand for healthy homes at attainable price points are creating what may be the sector's biggest unmet opportunity.

Early examples are emerging—master-planned communities demonstrating that wellness-centered design can be delivered at accessible price points without high-end amenity packages. Public-private partnerships and workforce housing developers are incorporating wellness principles like green space access, healthy building materials, walkability and social infrastructure into middle-market, affordable and rental projects. Housing is well established as a social determinant of health. National studies demonstrate that housing quality, stability and affordability directly affect health outcomes, and that renters face measurably higher health risks compared to homeowners.

Wellness design principles (walkability, biophilic elements, clean air, community connectivity) do not inherently require a luxury price tag. The developers and policymakers who figure out how to deliver wellness at scale and at price are positioned to impact wellness outcomes for all at a greater pace and scale.

Resources:

- Health Affairs, Housing and Health: An Overview of The Literature, 2020.
- *American Journal of Public Health*, Housing Status and Health in the United States, 2025.
- UnitedHealth Group, Affordable Housing Investments and Health Outcomes, 2025.
- *Social Innovations Journal*, Workforce Housing as a Population Health Strategy, 2025.

TREND 5: From Smart Homes to Sentient Neighborhoods

In 2025, we explored how AI-integrated homes are learning and adapting to their occupants' needs. This concept is now scaling beyond the individual unit to the neighborhood and community level, increasingly powered by AI and informed by neuroscience.

Early adopters are deploying connected platforms that go beyond optimizing building systems, using data and AI to personalize community programming, facilitate social connectivity and activate shared wellness experiences. Community platforms are identifying which fitness classes, social gatherings or wellness resources residents engage with, and adapting offerings in real time. Neuroscience is also informing design—research confirms that light, acoustics, vegetation and spatial sequencing directly influence stress response, cognitive performance and emotional regulation. Environments with intuitive flow, circadian lighting, acoustic control and biophilic elements measurably reduce cognitive load. When combined with AI-driven community systems, the built environment moves from static infrastructure to a responsive, adaptive wellness platform.

Important questions around data governance, privacy and maintaining human connection are part of the emerging conversation. The next generation of wellness communities will not just be designed for wellbeing: it will learn and evolve with its residents.

Resources:

- PwC & Urban Land Institute, Emerging Trends in Real Estate, 2026.
- Terrapin Bright Green, The Economics of Biophilia, 2022.
- National Institutes of Health (NIH), research on neuroarchitecture and built environment stress response.
- Exploring the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Enhancing Social Participation for Community-Based Health Promotion: A Qualitative Study, *Mass Gathering Medical Journal*, 2025.

TREND 6: Designing Against Loneliness – Social Connection as a Design Brief

Something new is entering the developer's design brief—the direct correlation between social infrastructure and human connection. The US Surgeon General's 2023 advisory on loneliness and isolation spotlighted what researchers have documented for years—the built environment is an active agent in shaping, or preventing, social connection. This research is now influencing real estate design and programming decisions at the project level.

A growing number of master-planned communities are incorporating "social infrastructure" like front-porch architecture, third places designed for lingering, walkable layouts that create opportunities for casual encounter and intentional programming that give residents reasons to gather. A 2025 study in Health & Place confirms that well-maintained social infrastructure is a measurable factor in reducing loneliness. People with access to social infrastructure are three times more likely (32% vs. 9%) to say they have close friends. Gen Z and millennials are driving demand for spaces that foster belonging, not just shelter.

Developers are recognizing that social connection is not a soft amenity. It is a design decision with measurable impacts on resident satisfaction, tenant retention, community health and asset performance. The communities that intentionally design for belonging are differentiating themselves and becoming part of a solution to a broad social issue.

Resources:

- U.S. Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, 2023.
- How the Neighbourhood-Built Environment Shapes Loneliness, *Health & Place*, Vol 97, 2026
- RE/Max Consumer Survey, Community and Social Connection Preferences, 2024.
- Survey Center on American Life, American Social Capital Survey, 2024.

Wellness for Cancer Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Julie Bach, Wellness for Cancer Charity, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Joelle Kaufman, Crushing the Cancer Curveball, United States

Cancer and its prevention are no longer only about medical treatment. They are about thriving. These five trends highlight how health education in lifestyle medicine, combined with health and wellness coaching and community engagement, is being integrated into care to support physical, emotional and social wellbeing across a person's healthspan and for the rest of their life.

TREND 1: Oncology Moves into Wellness

Cancer care is expanding beyond disease management to address how people live during and after treatment. Survivors often face fatigue, metabolic changes, emotional distress and uncertainty about how to rebuild daily life, reconnect with identity beyond cancer and reduce risk of recurrence.

Oncology programs are increasingly incorporating lifestyle medicine and behavioral change support into survivorship care. This transition is being facilitated by physician-led initiatives.

Oncologist Amy Comander, MD, DipABLM co-created PAVING the Path to Wellness, a lifestyle medicine program at Mass General Brigham for breast cancer survivors. It covers 12 lifestyle domains as PAVING STEPS to promote lasting health and resilience.

- PAVING (Physical Activity, Attitude, Variety, Investigations, Nutrition, Goals)
- STEPS (Stress Resiliency, Time Outs, Energy, Purpose, Sleep and Social Connection)

> Explore the Wellness for Cancer Initiative on the GWI Website

At AdventHealth in Central Florida, radiation oncologist Amber Orman, MD, DipABLM co-founded HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyle), an eight-week lifestyle medicine program designed to help breast cancer patients and survivors adopt habits that support recovery and reduce recurrence risk.

At the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami, survivorship initiatives such as Believe in You: Survivorship in Motion combine progressive exercise training, plant-forward nutrition education and wellness coaching in a 20-week survivorship program designed to help patients regain strength and confidence after treatment.

As oncology moves into wellness, lifestyle medicine and behavior change support are becoming central to survivorship care. Wellness professionals supporting individuals touched by cancer should be trained in the latest evidence and certified in health and wellbeing coaching and lifestyle behavior change.

Resources:

- Comander A. PAVING the Path to Wellness for Breast Cancer Survivors. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8120622/
- AdventHealth Cancer Institute. HEAL: Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyle Breast Cancer Program. https://www.adventhealth.com/institute/cancer/heal-breast-cancer
- University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center. Believe in You: Survivorship in Motion. https://news.med.miami.edu/believe-in-you-cancer-survivorship-in-motion/
- Bach J, Daniel R, Natrins I. Integrating Health Coaching in Oncology: Answering the Call. *Journal of Integrative and Complementary Medicine.* 2025;31(7):591-595. doi:10.1089/jicm.2025.0344.

TREND 2: Precision Prevention Adds Health Coaching for People with Genetic Cancer Risk

Precision medicine is expanding the ability to identify people with inherited cancer risk. Cancer prevention strategies are becoming more personalized for people with higher risk profiles.

At the University of Miami's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, Paola Rossi, MD, MSEd, clinical program director for lifestyle medicine, is part of a model that pairs genetic counseling with health coaching for people with cancer predisposition, family history or other elevated risk factors. Patients in Sylvester's high-risk pathway often see a genetic counselor and a health coach on the same day, combining risk assessment with practical support for behavior change.

The logic for this program is simple but powerful: genetic information alone does not change behavior.

Nearly half of cancer cases are linked to modifiable factors. According to Paola Rossi, MD, MSEd, clinical program director "the health coach will meet with patients and identify weak spots in behaviors that, if targeted, could reduce cancer risk." The program's design and effectiveness stem from the ability to accurately assess individual risk and personalize cancer prevention strategies.

Nicholas Borja, MD, at Sylvester, underscores that having a genetic risk *does not mean* "there's nothing you can do."

Demand for this approach is growing. The program estimates seeing around 100 patients per month, reflecting increasing interest in prevention and risk reduction among individuals with inherited predisposition. The coaching workforce is expanding by 200%, illustrating the rapid demand for behavior change support alongside genetic counseling.

Programs like Sylvester's suggest a new frontier in precision prevention. As more people learn they carry genetic risk for cancer, pairing genetic counseling with health coaching may become an important strategy for helping patients move from awareness of risk to practical action.

Resources:

- University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. *Lifestyle Medicine for High-Risk Cancer Patients.* https://news.med.miami.edu/lifestyle-medicine-for-high-risk-cancer-patients/
- UHealth Collective. *The Health Coach Will See You Now.* https://news.umiamihealth.org/en/the-health-coach-will-see-you-now/
- Interview Julie Bach with Dr. Rossi, March, 2026

TREND 3: Community as Medicine Expands Through Group Wellness Visits

Evidence increasingly shows that social connection and community engagement improve wellbeing for people affected by cancer. Participation in structured group activities reduces isolation, enhances emotional resilience and supports adoption of healthy behaviors such as movement, nutrition and stress management.

Open Source Wellness's Community as Medicine (CAM) model puts these ideas into action. CAM features group health coaching led by board-certified health coaches and encourages health, wellbeing and social connection with culturally sensitive, trauma-aware programs created alongside communities and healthcare providers. Sessions integrate movement, nutrition, stress management and peer support to reinforce sustainable behavior change. The program is designed not only for chronic disease prevention, but also to reach underserved communities and expand equitable access to wellness education and supportive social networks.

Open Source Wellness CAM programs are delivered in partnership with community organizations such as YMCAs and other trusted community gathering spaces. By hosting programs in locations where people already connect and participate in community life, the model strengthens social support while making health coaching more accessible. Evaluations of CAM-style programs show reductions in anxiety and depressive symptoms, increased engagement in healthy behaviors and improvements in overall psychosocial wellbeing.

As mentioned in Trend 1, programs such as PAVING the Path to Wellness, HEAL and Believe in You: Survivorship in Motion are explicitly designed around community and social learning theory. These programs support behavior change by fostering social learning and self-efficacy.

In clinical settings, shared medical visits foster this community approach. In a shared medical visit, patients with similar conditions or health concerns meet together to learn about a health topic, then meet individually with the physician and, when applicable, a health coach. Shared medical visits improve patient knowledge, foster peer support and increase engagement with care plans.

The community and shared medical visit models create opportunities for the wellness sector to re-envision impactful programs beyond traditional wellness workshops. Programs can integrate shared wellness visits or community-based wellness initiatives staffed by healthcare professionals together with certified dietitians, personal trainers and health coaches.

Resources:

- Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Baker M, Harris T, Stephenson D. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2015;10(2):227–237.
- Markle E, Emmert-Aronson B. Community as Medicine: The Open Source Wellness model for group health coaching and social connection. Open Source Wellness.

- Emmert-Aronson B, Markle E. Community-based group health coaching improves mental health and health behaviors: Outcomes from the Community as Medicine model. Open Source Wellness evaluation reports.
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- Kirsh SR, Aron DC, Johnson KD, Santurri LE, Stevenson LD, Jones KR. A realist review of shared medical appointments: How, for whom, and under what circumstances do they work? BMC Health Services Research. 2017;17:113.

TREND 4: OncoMenopause, the Double Whammy, Is Hot and Trending

A rapidly emerging conversation in women's health is the intersection of menopause and cancer. As cancer survival improves globally, millions of women are now living decades beyond diagnosis while also navigating menopause that can begin during treatment and continue into survivorship. Cancer therapies including chemotherapy, ovarian suppression, radiation and endocrine treatments can disrupt ovarian function and trigger sudden or treatment-induced menopause. What was once considered a secondary side effect of treatment is now increasingly recognized as a major survivorship issue affecting quality of life for many women.

Cancer-related menopause is often more abrupt and more severe than natural menopause. Women may experience hot flashes, sleep disruption, sexual health changes, joint pain, cognitive shifts and accelerated bone loss. Because systemic hormone therapy may not be appropriate for some survivors—particularly those with hormone-sensitive cancers—managing symptoms requires careful clinical guidance. Increasingly, clinicians recognize that menopause care must be addressed as part of cancer treatment and survivorship planning.

Navigating menopause in the context of cancer often requires a combination of strategies. Clinical guidelines emphasize lifestyle approaches such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep support and stress management alongside non-hormonal therapies, with localized hormonal treatments (such as vaginal creams) considered in selected cases.

Clinical and education initiatives are beginning to close this gap in care. The OncoMenopause Consortium brings together oncologists, gynecologists, menopause specialists and other clinicians to advance education and collaboration at the intersection of oncology and menopause care. The initiative also provides educational resources for survivors navigating menopause after cancer.

As awareness grows, clear guidance matters. Providing support for women experiencing cancer-related menopause necessitates the involvement of professionals who possess specialized training and expertise. This is especially important in wellness environments, where support for people affected by cancer should come from qualified health professionals, as well as wellness practitioners who are trained in up-to-date, evidence-based methods and certified in cancer health and wellness coaching, lifestyle medicine and behavior change.

Resources:

- American Cancer Society. Cancer Treatment & Survivorship Facts & Figures. https://www.cancer.org
- MedlinePlus. Cancer treatment–induced menopause. https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000912.htm
- Biglia N, et al. Menopause after breast cancer: a review of management of menopausal symptoms. *Climacteric.* https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/
- The Menopause Society. Menopause management in cancer survivors. https://www.menopause.org
- Servayge J, et al. Clinical guidelines for managing menopausal symptoms in women with (a history of) breast cancer. *Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn.* https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10832648/
- OncoMenopause Consortium. https://www.oncomenopause.org

TREND 5: Libido Liberation

Written by Claire Rumore, C&I (Cancer & Intimacy)

An often-overlooked concern in cancer recovery is coming into focus: what happens to desire after illness. Many survivors report that while they may be medically cleared, they are not relationally or erotically restored. This gap is prompting new conversations across oncology, wellness and mental health sectors, reframing libido not as performance but as a vital dimension of recovery and quality of life.

"Libido liberation" reflects a shift away from goal-oriented sexuality toward permission-based desire. Rather than expecting survivors to return to a pre-illness sexual norm, this emerging perspective recognizes that body changes, hormonal shifts, nervous system sensitivity, grief and identity disruption can reshape how intimacy is experienced. In cancer care specifically, practitioners are increasingly acknowledging that body image distress and changes in desire are not secondary concerns—they are central to emotional health, partnership and long-term wellbeing.

These ideas are being advanced through intimacy-informed survivorship models, including the libido liberation framework developed by Cancer & Intimacy. The framework highlights three dimensions: **erotic grief**, acknowledging the loss of former identity, sensation or sexual function; **listening**, learning to attune to what the body genuinely wants after treatment; and **liberation**, giving survivors permission to redefine intimacy and sexuality on their own terms.

Psycho-oncology professionals and integrative care programs are beginning to incorporate these perspectives into patient-centered support models. As whole-person care continues to gain traction globally, libido liberation reflects a broader shift in survivorship.

Recovery is no longer defined solely by remission, but by the restoration of vitality, connection and embodied belonging after illness.

Resources:

- Rumore C., Cancer & Intimacy: Libido Liberation Framework. https://cancerandintimacy.com
- Cancer & Intimacy Institute. https://cancerandintimacy.institute

Wellness for Children Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Christine Clinton, President, International Spa & Salon Services, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Connie Morris, Founder, Budding Yoga, United States

According to the World Health Organization, one in seven children in Europe is experiencing mental health challenges. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WHO developed a strategy for child and adolescent health and wellbeing for the region for 2026-2030, "A Healthy Start for a Healthy Life," highlighting the need for preventive wellbeing in the formative years. In China, the most recent statistics show 17.5% of children 6-16 experience mental health disorders and in the USA, according to the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 16% of adolescents have anxiety, 8.4% have depression and 6.3% have behavioral/conduct issues.

In addition, WHO has reported that an average of 80% of school-aged adolescents are insufficiently physically active globally. According to Dr. Regina Guthold, one of the study's authors, "urgent policy action to increase physical activity is needed now, particularly to promote and retain girls' participation in physical activity."

> Explore the Wellness for Children Initiative on the GWI Website

In our work with the Wellness for Children Initiative, we receive input from parents, guardians, teachers and therapists, and of course from the children themselves. These adults are proactively showing trends to address children's wellbeing. Science supports family and community relationships being strongly associated with improved mental health outcomes and contemporary lifestyles affecting negative health outcomes such as poor dietary habits, weight gain and emotional distress.

For these reasons, we have identified various solutions that focus on the health crisis, recognizing the need for increased awareness and improved outcomes. Many of the trends will not only benefit children's long-term wellness, but also improve the wellbeing of adults, families and communities.

Resources:

- https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/13-11-2025-one-in-7-children-and-adolescents-in-the-who-european-region-lives-with-a-mental-health-condition--finds-new-who-europe-report
- https://www.unicef.org/eca/child-and-adolescent-health-and-well-being-strategy-2026-2030
- https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12434409/
- https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/data-research/nsch-data-brief-adolescent-mental-behavioral-health-2023.pdf
- https://www.who.int/news/item/22-11-2019-new-who-led-study-says-majority-of-adolescents-worldwide-are-not-sufficiently-physically-active-putting-their-current-and-future-health-at-risk#:~:text=health%20at%20risk-,New%20WHO%2Dled%20study%20says%20majority%20of%20adolescents%20worldwide%20are,and%20future%20health%20at%20risk&text=The%20first%20ever%20global%20trends,gap%20widen%20between%202001%2D2016.
- https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11855907/

TREND 1: Holistic Wellness Family Rituals

More and more families are fostering wellbeing by establishing sleep rituals, practicing gentle morning routines, taking walks after meals and enjoying warm drinks at night instead of supplements. Many of them are also adopting calming techniques and setting aside screen-free time during agreed family periods to help everyone feel more connected and relaxed.

TREND 2: Better Microbiome Nutrition

Gut health is emerging as a key trend for children's wellness, with a focus on probiotics, prebiotics and understanding "good" bacteria. Offering a wide variety of food groups in the formative years (especially between ages 1 and 3), limiting sugar and processed foods and growing herbs together in the kitchen will help strengthen the immune system and boost the production of beneficial metabolites.

1. **Nervous System Literacy**
    - Breathwork as a reset
    - Movement, shake and stretch activities
    - Sensory integration sessions
    - Sharing BIG feelings together
    - Co-regulation modeling
2. **Micro Mindful Moments**
    - Nature exposure - simple acts of taking shoes off and walking in the grass, being outside for a picnic, forest bathing and forest schools are on the rise.
    - Visualization and imaginative play
    - Gratitude and self awareness time to start the day, during meals and at bedtime

TREND 3: Family Travel and Spa

Many families are becoming health-focused, working on brain and body health, so the need for healthy choices and inclusiveness in the travel sector is more important than ever. Large hospitality brands are seeking certification in sensory sensitivity for their concierge and front of house staff. According to the World Economic Forum, between 10 and 20 percent of the global population is neurodivergent, a term used to describe people living with ADHD, autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, among others. Awareness, support and having another point of differentiation is an attractive opportunity for the spa and hospitality sector.

Resources:

- https://www.cntraveler.com/story/the-biggest-wellness-travel-trends-of-2026
- https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/10/explainer-neurodivergence-mental-health/

Wellness Tourism Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Katherine Droga, Founder, Well Traveller + Well Traveller TV, Wellness Tourism Summit, Droga & co., Australia
Initiative Vice-Chair: Lindsay Madden-Nadeau, Senior Director Wellness Strategy- Development, Meraki Bespoke Wellness Strategies, Global Head of Wellbeing- Accor Luxury Brands, France

TREND 1: Cocooning Wellness

As global uncertainty continues to shape how we travel, many wellness seekers are turning inward, choosing restorative escapes closer to home for much needed nervous system resets.

Short flights, easy-drive journeys and regional retreats are replacing long-haul trips, offering reassurance and simplicity, while still delivering meaningful and much needed wellbeing.

These "cocooning" wellness trips allow travellers to step away from daily pressures and reconnect with nature without the complexity of global travel. From countryside retreats to coastal sanctuaries and nearby nature escapes, travellers are prioritizing simplicity, safety and emotional restoration.

The result is a form of travel that feels protective and nurturing—wellness journeys that wrap around us like a cocoon when the world feels uncertain.

Resources:

- NSW South Coast Wellness Experiences https://www.welltraveller.com.au/destinations/new-south-wales/south-coast

> Explore the Wellness Tourism Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 2: Urban Recovery Travel

City-based travellers want short, clinical-grade recovery without a long journey—less about "detox" claims and more about reducing load: sleep debt, inflammation, stress, pollution exposure and tight bodies.

The scalable format is 48–72-hour urban micro breaks combining recovery technology, movement, nutrition and calm. Biohacking has moved from niche to mainstream motivation, with travellers choosing destinations for diagnostics, recovery technologies and longevity protocols packaged with hospitality-level comfort and design. Some examples include performance-led recovery menus at city wellness clubs/hotels and short "urban renewal" retreat models in Bangkok, New York City and London.

This evolution is transforming cities into accessible wellness hubs where travellers can experience meaningful recovery with easy access to all they need.

Resources:

- RAKxa Integrative Wellness Bangkok https://rakxawellness.com/programme/

TREND 3: Destination-Scale Wellness

Wellness tourism is increasingly being enabled by policy and planned at destination scale. Governments, tourism boards and investors are recognizing the economic and social value of wellness tourism and are developing infrastructure that supports wellbeing at a regional level.

Walkable environments, nature protection, thermal bathing traditions, outdoor recreation and year-round wellbeing programming are becoming part of destination strategy rather than simply hotel amenities.

This approach reflects a growing understanding that wellness tourism can enhance both visitor experiences and community wellbeing.

Resources:

- AMAALA Wellness Destination Development https://www.redseaglobal.com/en/our-destinations/amaala/

TREND 4: The Rise of Heat Rituals

Traditional bathing cultures are experiencing a renaissance. Sauna is becoming an event featuring guided ceremonies, music, scent, craft and shared etiquette, turning heat bathing into a social ritual with real emotional payoff. The destination opportunity is public-facing thermal culture that's inclusive, repeatable and programmatic, designed as an accessible "third space," not a niche luxury add-on. This can scale through scheduled rounds, rotating hosts/ritual leaders, and culturally rooted storytelling that makes the ritual feel meaningful rather than performative.

Resources:

- Finnish Sauna Culture (UNESCO cultural heritage) https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sauna-culture-in-finland-01596

TREND 5: The Demand for Cool Climate Travel

As global temperatures rise and peak seasons feel draining, travellers are shifting towards cooler travel times and destinations where the environment supports vitality.

It is about climate, crowding and comfort considerations—fresh air quality, sunlight and opportunities for outdoor movement without exhaustion.

The demand is also creating new "wellness windows" across the year, where destinations are embracing off-peak months as the optimal time to visit for wellbeing.

Resources:

- Swiss Alpine Wellness Destinations https://www.myswitzerland.com/en-au/planning/about-switzerland/sustainability/sustainable-activities/sustainable-winter-activities/wellness-with-a-clear-conscience/

TREND 6: The Nervous System Reset

Wellness travel is increasingly shifting from performance-driven wellness toward nervous system regulation. After years of overstimulation, stress and digital overload, travellers are seeking experiences that help the body slow down and recover rather than push harder.

Retreats and destinations are responding with programs built around breathwork, slow movement, mindfulness, sound therapy and nature immersion—practices designed to move the body out of a constant "fight or flight" state. Quiet environments, gentle daily rhythms and digital disconnection.

As travellers seek ways to recover from modern lifestyles, wellness journeys that support nervous system balance are becoming essential tools of travel.

Resources:

- Six Senses https://www.sixsenses.com/en/wellness-spa/personalized-wellness/relax-and-renew/

TREND 7: The Luxury of Privacy

Privacy is becoming the new status signal. It is less about public "wellness theatre" and more about space, quiet and discretion as travellers experience social media fatigue and a desire to disconnect.

Consumers are prioritizing low-density environments, limited-access settings and experiences that don't feel crowded or overexposed. This is encouraging destinations and operators to design retreats where space, calm and thoughtful service are central to the guest experience.

The result is a new form of luxury defined not by opulence but by quiet, space and the ability to disconnect.

Resources:

- Amangiri Desert Retreat Experience https://www.aman.com/resorts/amangiri/experience

TREND 8: The Rise of AI-Designed Wellness Travel

Travellers are moving away from one-size wellness and toward journeys that feel made for them, where pacing, treatments, activities and cultural moments match their goals, interests and energy levels.

AI-enabled itinerary design and guest profiling are allowing destinations and wellness providers to create highly personalized travel experiences that evolve throughout a stay. For travellers, this reduces decision fatigue while improving the flow and relevance of their wellness journey.

This shift signals the beginning of a new era where technology helps create wellness experiences that feel deeply personal.

Resources:

- Mindtrip AI Itinerary Planning Platform https://www.mindtrip.ai/product

TREND 9: In Search of Deep Rest

Travellers are increasingly in search of sleep, and wellness travel is responding with sleep- and rhythm-led restoration where the destination itself becomes the intervention.

Dark skies, low noise, dawn/dusk programming and low-stimulus design are engineered to reset circadian timing and deliver measurable recovery. Think lighting, temperature, sound frequency and more.

Proof points include sleep-focused programming which has been trending for a long time with the addition of nature-integrated sleep environments, plus water/mineral bathing circuits that turn protected natural assets into signature wellbeing circuits. Incorporated into this travel trend are Blue Zone travel programs: travellers are choosing locations that embody Blue Zone rituals of life.

Resources:

- Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary https://kamalaya.com/sleep-enhancement-wellness-program/
- Blue Zone Travel https://www.bluezones.com/exploration/

TREND 10: Longevity Travel - Credibility Matters

Today's guests are highly informed, wellness claims are easy to research and hype is easy to spot. As a result, travellers are gravitating toward trusted, science-backed programs where they can immerse themselves for wellness stays, build habits that fit their biology and return home with a clear plan to continue. The market may be chasing "longevity," but the real demand signal is credibility and capability in one place: evidence-led protocols, the right clinical and recovery infrastructure, and an ongoing link to care beyond the stay through follow-ups, coaching and simple take home plans. The demand is less "anti-aging" and more health span: feeling stronger for longer.

Resources:

- SHA Wellness Clinic Medical Programs https://shawellness.com/en/

Workplace Wellbeing Initiative Trends

Initiative Chair: Jessica Grossmeier, Author, Speaker, Researcher, Jessica Grossmeier Consulting, United States
Initiative Vice-Chair: Ellenit Serrano, Advisor, Coach, Founder, Yoga Instructor, United States

2026 Workplace Wellbeing Trends: From Uncertainty to Readiness

How economic uncertainty, AI Acceleration, work intensification and demographic change are redesigning work

In 2026, workplace wellbeing is shaped by organizational readiness enabled through enterprise infrastructure. Converging structural forces—demographic shifts, technological acceleration, economic volatility and intensifying work demands—are redefining workforce health and wellbeing as a determinant of sustained performance. Leading organizations are transitioning from isolated wellbeing programs to systemic integration, embedding wellbeing into operating models, leadership capability, workflow design and performance management. Human capital metrics are incorporated into governance and financial strategy as measurable drivers of productivity and long-term value creation. Midlife transitions, extended career spans, financial strain, chronic disease and AI-driven uncertainty are treated not as individual challenges, but as structural workforce variables requiring coordinated design. The path forward is readiness—building resilient individuals, teams and systems that balance performance with recovery, protect mental health and sustain trust in a world defined by constant change.

> Explore the Workplace Wellbeing Initiative on the GWI Website

TREND 1: Embedding Workplace Wellbeing into Enterprise Infrastructure

In 2025, workplace wellbeing was established as a core business strategy. In 2026, organizations are shifting from standalone programs to enterprise-wide integration. Research from the McKinsey Health Institute shows that companies integrating wellbeing into leadership practices, performance management and organizational design report up to 20–25% higher productivity and measurable reductions in burnout-related costs.

Regulatory and investor expectations are accelerating this transition. Psychosocial risk management frameworks such as ISO 45003 are increasingly referenced in corporate governance discussions, positioning psychological health as a management responsibility rather than a discretionary benefit. In parallel, sustainability reporting regulations such as the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) are embedding workforce wellbeing and human capital metrics into board-level accountability.

The scope of wellbeing is also expanding. Financial strain, digital overload and social fragmentation are emerging as measurable performance risks. PwC's 2025 Employee Financial Wellness Survey reports that financially stressed employees are significantly more likely to experience distraction and productivity loss. Gallup's 2025 *State of the Global Workplace* report continues to demonstrate a direct link between employee wellbeing, engagement and organizational performance outcomes worldwide.

The defining shift for 2026 is integration. Leading organizations are redesigning workflows, strengthening managerial capability in psychological safety and emotional intelligence, and embedding wellbeing metrics into governance and risk systems. What began as a compelling business case has become enterprise architecture—strengthening resilience, mitigating risk and shaping sustainable performance in an increasingly complex global economy.

Resources:

- McKinsey Health Institute. Thriving Workplaces: How Employers Can Improve Productivity and Change Lives. January 16, 2025.
- ISO. Occupational Health and Safety Management — Psychological Health and Safety at Work. ISO 45003:2021.
- European Commission. Corporate Sustainability Reporting. December 9, 2025.
- PWC. Employee Financial Wellness Survey. 2025.
- Gallup. State of the Global Workplace Report. 2025.

TREND 2: Healthy Longevity as Workforce Infrastructure

Longevity is no longer defined by lifespan alone, but as *healthspan*, meaning the years of life spent in good or great health and free from serious disease or disability. Advances in neuroscience and aging research show that while brain health, musculoskeletal strength, metabolic regulation and stress resilience are important for quality of life, they are also decisive factors in sustaining performance across longer careers.

Many countries have entered "super-aging" status, with more than 20% of their population over age 65, while statutory retirement ages continue to rise across OECD nations. Employers are increasingly relying on mid- and late-career workers to remain productive and engaged for longer than any previous generation. As a result, evidence suggests organizations are beginning to treat healthy longevity as a structural workforce issue. By 2027, 46% of global employers are projected to make employee wellbeing foundational to their human capital strategy. Investing in brain health, and the cognitive and interpersonal skills that support it, has been identified as a core economic imperative, with scaled interventions potentially averting 267 million disability-adjusted life years globally by 2050 and generating up to $6.2 trillion in cumulative GDP gains. Musculoskeletal disorders account for over $2 trillion in global economic

losses and are a leading driver of early retirement and work cessation among older employees, leading to many organizations adopting safety and prevention programs.

Increasingly, employers are moving beyond isolated wellness programs toward integrated approaches that maximize value and target shared physiological drivers to compound benefits across brain health, musculoskeletal resilience, metabolic function and emotional regulation. Organizations that embed healthy longevity into how work is designed, supported and culturally reinforced are better positioned to sustain productivity, leadership continuity and workforce participation across longer working lives.

Resources:

- Lavretsky H, et al. The Role of Brain Health and Resilience in Reshaping Trajectories of Late-Life Neuropsychiatric Disorders. Neuropsychopharmacology. 2026;
- World Economic Forum. Global Risks Report 2025. January 15, 2025.
- OECD. Pensions at a Glance 2025. November 27, 2025.
- Willis Towers Watson. Employers Build Momentum on Employee Wellbeing But There's Still a Way to Go. 2024 Wellbeing Diagnostic Survey. September 25, 2024.
- McKinsey Health Institute. The Human Advantage: Stronger Brains in the Age of AI. 2026.
- Qiu K, et al. The Global Macroeconomic Burden of Musculoskeletal Disorders. International Journal of Surgery. 2025; 111(11): 7857-7866.

TREND 3: Lifestyle Medicine as a Workplace Wellbeing Strategy

Lifestyle medicine (LM) is an evidence-based discipline using behavioral interventions to prevent, treat and reverse chronic disease. It is gaining recognition globally as a systems-level workplace wellbeing strategy. Non-communicable diseases account for most employee health and productivity costs worldwide, and employers are increasingly recognized as critical actors with the scale and reach needed to deploy population level interventions. The LM movement is supported globally by several reputable medical organizations, including the European Lifestyle Medicine Organization, the Australasian Society of Lifestyle Medicine and the Colégio Brasileiro de Medicina do Estilo de Vida. While these institutions operate in different regional contexts, they share a common LM framework.

Key implications for employers:

- Integrate LM into workplace health strategy at the systems level, embedding them in policy, benefits design and physical environments.
- Train health professionals and people leaders in LM principles to build capacity for lifestyle-based coaching and chronic disease prevention.
- Assess organizational environments to ensure they actively support healthy behaviors across all levels of the organization.
- Align LM strategy with community health goals, leveraging the employer role as an agent of change.
- Move beyond participation metrics and track meaningful health and productivity outcomes.

Within workplace wellbeing, LM represents an important convergence point between functional medicine, holistic health and employer-sponsored wellness. As demand for evidence-based wellbeing solutions grows, employers who adopt LM frameworks are positioned to differentiate in talent markets, reduce long-term healthcare expenditure and generate measurable impact at the community and population level.

Resources:

- Johnson S, et al. A Rationale and Framework for Activating Employers as Agents of Change in the Implementation of Lifestyle as Medicine. American Journal of Health Promotion. 2023;37(7): 997-1013.
- Frates B. The Evolution of Lifestyle Medicine Education: What, Why, How, Who, and What Now. American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine. 2026; 20(1): 39-41.

- Lippman D. Foundations of Lifestyle Medicine and Its Evolution. Mayo Clinic Proceedings: Innovations, Quality & Outcomes. 2024; 8(1):97-111
- McKinsey Health Institute. Thriving Workplaces: How Employers Can Improve Productivity and Change Lives. January 16, 2025.
- Hymel P, et al. Incorporating Lifestyle Medicine Into Occupational Medical Practice: ACOEM Guidance Statement. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. 2025; 67(1): e72-e84.

TREND 4: The Missing Chapter – Closing the Menopause Talent Gap

Menopause support in the workplace has moved from an overlooked life transition to a business priority. By 2030, more than 1.2 billion women will be menopausal or post-menopausal—many in their prime earning and leadership years. Over the past two decades, organizations have created policies and benefits to support women and family formation: maternity leave, fertility coverage, adoption benefits and inclusive family-building policies. Midlife remained the missing chapter, yet few organizations currently offer formal menopause policies, even as employee demand accelerates. McKinsey estimates that closing the global women's health gap could add $1 trillion annually by 2040, with menopause among the largest contributors.

Culturally, the conversation has reached a tipping point. Media, femtech and strengthened clinical guidance have rapidly normalized menopause at work. While the UK leads with binding legislation, Australia, the United States and EU nations are advancing policy frameworks and workplace guidance that embed menopause within occupational health and equality.

Leading organizations are responding across several interconnected areas:

- **Policy** – Establishing formal guidelines that recognize menopause symptoms as manageable health transitions requiring standardized organizational support.
- **Flexibility** – Allowing for adjusted start times, remote work options and unplanned time off during symptom flare-ups, without triggering absence management procedures or penalizing output.
- **Leadership** – Training managers to recognize symptoms, hold informed and empathetic conversations, and create team cultures where disclosure is met with support rather than stigma.
- **Environment** – Adapting workspaces with cooling options, ergonomic considerations and sensory adjustments that allow women to manage physical symptoms in real time.
- **Community** – Building peer networks and shared spaces, physical or digital, where women can normalize their experiences reducing the isolation and stigma.

Companies that act now will do more than expand benefits, they will secure leadership continuity, protect institutional knowledge and strengthen long-term workforce resilience.

Resources:

- Delanerolle G, et al. Menopause: A Global Health and Wellbeing Issue That Needs Urgent Attention. The Lancet. 2025; 13(2): E196-E198.
- D'Angelo S, et al. Impact of Menopausal Symptoms on Work. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2022; 20(1):295.
- McKinsey Health Institute. Closing the Women's Health Gap: A $1 Trillion Opportunity to Improve Lives and Economies. January 17, 2024.
- Pritchard J. 5 Ways Employers Can Get Ahead with Menopause Action Plans. Reward & Employee Benefits Association. January 13, 2026.
- The Menopause Society. Menopause and the Workplace: Consensus Recommendations from The Menopause Society. The Journal of The Menopause Society. 2024; 31(9): 741-749.
- UK Equality and Human Rights Commission. Menopause in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers. February 2024, Updated August 2025.

TREND 5: The Age of Uncertainty – Increased Pace of Change and Work Intensification Impacts Mental Health

In 2026, workforce wellbeing is under real pressure. Economic volatility, geopolitical conflict, technological shifts and climate disruption are creating what feels like an era of heightened uncertainty. At the same time, rapid AI adoption, strict return-to-office mandates and relentless organizational changes have left many workers feeling disengaged, anxious and replaceable as change moves faster than anyone can reasonably keep up.

Work intensification—the sense that expectations, speed and mental load keep rising even as technology promises relief—is at the core of this trend. Many employees are working the same or longer hours, juggling heavier cognitive demands and feeling they must always be "on." The result? Work increasingly feels chaotic and fragmented, with less recovery time and growing burnout.

Research shows that reactive cost-cutting, rigid cultures and overfocus on productivity deepen stress and erode trust. But there's progress too. Forward-thinking employers are shifting gears, focusing on everyday wellbeing challenges like financial strain, caregiving, AI adaptation and energy management. They're training managers to support mental health, offering flexible schedules, building climate-preparedness plans, helping teams build psychological safety and navigating political polarization with empathy.

The path forward is readiness: building systems that balance performance with recovery while protecting mental health amid constant flux. That means rethinking work design, strengthening leadership capability and culture, and creating communities of belonging. Ultimately, addressing mental health holistically means making every worker feel like they matter, fueling organizational, team and personal resilience.

Resources:

- Weir K. Workers Are Facing an Age of Uncertainty. Monitor on Psychology. 2026; 57(1): 76.
- Gallup. State of the Global Workplace 2025.
- Ranganathan A and Ye XM. AI Doesn't Reduce Work—It Intensifies It. Harvard Business Review. February 9, 2026.
- Microsoft. 2025: The Year the Frontier Firm is Born. Work Trend Index Annual Report. April 23, 2025.
- McRae ER and Lowmaster K. 9 Future of Work Trends for 2026. Gartner. January 8, 2026.
- Lyra Health. 2026 Workforce Mental Health Trends Forecast.
- GWI. The Future of Wellness: 2026 Trends

TREND 6: Addressing AI-Driven Workforce Anxiety As A Growing Psychosocial Risk

As AI accelerates into every sector and geography, it is directly impacting the global workforce influencing employee mental health, engagement and retention. The scale is significant. A global survey of 37,000 workers found AI-driven change is now the number one workforce concern, with 40% worried about long-term job security. Global talent data shows concern has risen from 28% in 2024 to 40% in 2026, and 62% of employees believe leaders underestimate AI's emotional and psychological impact.

Research suggests the concerns extend beyond displacement. A 2025 peer-reviewed study identified two drivers of AI-related technostress: techno-insecurity (fear of skill replacement) and techno-overload (feeling overwhelmed by AI demands), both are correlated with anxiety and depression. Additional global analysis reinforces why: roughly 40% expect to reduce headcount where AI can automate tasks, and over half of business leaders anticipate AI will displace more jobs than it creates. This trend is not about the technology itself, but about how AI is being implemented, governed and communicated within organizations. Without transparent strategy, equitable reskilling pathways and psychological safeguards, AI adoption can amplify (or drive) workforce distress.

Leading organizations are demonstrating a more responsible and positive path. IBM has redesigned roles around AI rather than eliminating them, tripling entry-level hiring so employees work alongside AI instead of competing with it. Qualcomm is accompanying the use of AI tools with employee training, office hours support and case development workshops to better equip and engage workers.

Forward-looking employers are treating AI deployment as both a technology strategy and a workplace wellbeing issue, embedding psychological impact assessments into governance, communicating clearly about role evolution and managing workforce transition with care. AI is reshaping work and the workforce. The defining question is whether your organization will manage that shift in ways that protect employee trust, capability and mental health.

Resources:

- Adecco Group. 2025 Global Workforce of the Future report.
- Mercer. Global Talent Trends 2026
- Litan D-E. Mental Health in the Era of Artificial Intelligence. Frontiers of Psychology. 2025;16:1600013.
- World Economic Forum. Jobs and Skills Transformation. Jan 23, 2026.
- Pew Research Center. US Workers Are More Worried Than Hopeful About Future AI Use in the Workplace. February 25, 2025.
- Thubron R. IBM Says It Will Triple Entry-Level Hiring for Roles "We're Being Told AI Can Do" Techspot. February 16, 2026.
- Writer Team. Five Companies Bringing IT and Business Together for AI Success. Writer's Room. April 2025.

TREND 7: Financial Health as Strategic Infrastructure – Rethinking Employer Wellbeing Investment

Global employers are at an inflection point in workforce wellbeing strategy. While mental health provision has expanded significantly, financial stress continues to be linked to psychological strain, productivity loss and long-term health risk. A 2023 PwC report indicates 60% of employees are stressed about their finances, and financial stress impacts multiple dimensions of wellbeing, including mental health, sleep and self-esteem. Even among employees earning $100,000 or more per year, nearly half (47%) are stressed about their finances. Longitudinal evidence strengthens the causal case: a 2024 JAMA study found early-phase pandemic income or job loss was associated with psychological distress up to 29 months later.

Workplace impact is measurable. A review of 136 studies found financial stress interferes with workplace outcomes by lowering employee health, commitment and performance. It also increases work-family conflict and deviant work behaviors. Among employees who are distracted at work because of finances, 56% spend three hours or more per week dealing with or thinking about personal financial issues while at work. A 2025 study of 280,323 adults found financial strain and food insecurity were the strongest social determinants of accelerated cardiac aging.

Despite this evidence, financial health is often managed as a peripheral benefits responsibility. Leading employers address financial wellness more holistically. For example, PayPal created a comprehensive initiative to improve employees' financial health, which included reducing healthcare costs, granting stock awards to all employees regardless of level or tenure, raising wages where appropriate and providing access to personal financial education. Short-term results linked the initiative to higher levels of employee-reported financial wellness, higher employee engagement rates, stronger employee commitment and lower turnover.

Employers seeking sustainable wellbeing impact may need to treat financial health not as a program, but as strategic infrastructure requiring dedicated expertise and integrated design.

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Yoga Therapy Initiative Trends

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Initiative Vice-Chair: Leah Nduati, CEO, Certified Yoga Instructor, Founder of Yoga Experiences Africa
In 2026, yoga is undergoing a significant evolution. Once largely framed as a global fitness practice, it is increasingly recognized as a science-based system of self-regulation and preventive health. Researchers across neuroscience, behavioral medicine and epigenetics are investigating how yogic practices influence biological systems including the nervous system, inflammatory pathways and emotional regulation.

At the same time, new technologies and global wellness trends are reshaping how yoga is practiced, taught and delivered. Artificial intelligence, biometric monitoring and digital platforms are introducing new forms of personalization, while healthcare systems are exploring yoga's role in addressing chronic conditions such as stress disorders, addiction and metabolic disease.

The following trends explore how the science of yoga is emerging as a bridge between ancient practice and modern research, shaping the future of integrative health and human wellbeing.

TREND 1: The Genomic Renaissance of Yoga

Advances in molecular biology are reshaping how researchers understand the physiological effects of yoga. New studies in epigenetics and transcriptomics suggest that yoga practices may influence gene expression related to inflammation, stress and cellular aging.

A 2025 systematic review analyzing randomized controlled trials found that yoga interventions can modulate genes associated with immune regulation and inflammatory responses. Researchers observed changes in biological pathways linked to stress reduction and metabolic regulation, supporting the idea that lifestyle practices such as yoga can influence gene activity rather than altering DNA itself.

> Explore the Yoga Therapy Initiative on the GWI Website

This emerging research contributes to what some scientists describe as a genomic renaissance in mind–body medicine, where behavioral practices are evaluated for their capacity to affect molecular pathways underlying chronic disease.

Beyond laboratory findings, this trend also reflects growing interest in precision lifestyle medicine. Instead of one-size-fits-all classes, yoga therapists and clinicians are increasingly exploring personalized protocols designed to address specific health concerns such as inflammation, stress disorders and metabolic dysfunction.

While the field remains early, genomic research is expanding scientific understanding of yoga as a system-level intervention. Rather than acting on a single organ or symptom, yoga appears to influence interconnected biological systems including immunity, metabolism and neuroendocrine signaling.

As research continues, genomic approaches may help clarify how ancient practices can contribute to modern preventive health strategies.

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TREND 2: Neurowellness and Nervous System Regulation

A growing body of research highlights the role of yoga in regulating the autonomic nervous system, particularly through breath control, meditation and mindful movement. This has contributed to the rise of neurowellness, a wellness framework focused on restoring balance between the body's stress response and recovery systems.

Modern lifestyles expose individuals to chronic stress, which can lead to persistent activation of the sympathetic "fight-or-flight" response. Yoga practices, including slow pranayama, relaxation techniques and meditation, have been shown to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, helping the body shift toward states of rest and recovery.

Recent clinical research demonstrates measurable physiological changes associated with yoga practice. For example, studies examining heart-rate variability which is a key marker of nervous system regulation, have found improvements following structured yoga interventions, indicating enhanced autonomic balance.

These findings are helping position yoga as a behavioral tool for nervous system training, rather than simply a physical exercise. Healthcare programs increasingly integrate yoga into stress management programs, trauma-informed care and workplace wellbeing initiatives.

The growing emphasis on neurowellness reflects a broader shift in wellness culture. Instead of focusing solely on productivity or peak performance, many individuals are prioritizing emotional regulation, resilience and long-term nervous system health.

Yoga's combination of pranayama, asana and meditation places it at the center of this emerging field.

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TREND 3: Pranayama and the Globalization of Yogic Breathing

Breath regulation has become one of the fastest-growing practices in global wellness. Across digital platforms, therapy programs and corporate wellbeing initiatives, breathwork is increasingly promoted as a tool for stress reduction, emotional regulation and cognitive performance.

Many of these techniques originate in pranayama, the yogic discipline of controlled breathing. In classical yoga philosophy, pranayama is not simply a relaxation technique, but part of a broader framework for cultivating concentration, energy regulation and mental clarity.

Scientific interest in breath practices has expanded significantly in recent years. Research suggests that slow breathing patterns, often around six breaths per minute, can improve autonomic regulation, increase heart-rate variability and reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress-related disorders.

As breath-based practices become mainstream, a key conversation emerging in wellness and academic communities concerns cultural translation. While rebranding pranayama as breathwork may increase accessibility, some scholars emphasize the importance of acknowledging the cultural and philosophical origins of these techniques.

The future of breath practice may lie in integrating scientific validation with cultural context. As research continues to explore the physiological mechanisms behind breathing practices, yoga traditions provide a deep knowledge base that informs how these techniques are practiced safely and effectively.

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TREND 4: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of the Yoga Teacher

Technology is rapidly transforming the delivery of yoga instruction. After the surge of virtual classes during the early 2020s, the next stage of innovation involves AI-driven personalization.

Using biometric data from wearable devices—including heart-rate variability, sleep patterns and movement tracking—digital platforms can generate individualized yoga sequences tailored to a practitioner's physiological state. These tools promise greater accessibility and precision, potentially helping individuals design practices that support stress management, recovery and performance.

However, this technological evolution also raises important questions about the role of the teacher. Yoga has traditionally been transmitted through direct mentorship and experiential learning, where teachers adapt practices based on observation, dialogue and intuition.

The Yoga Therapy Renaissance underscores that yoga therapy is fundamentally a personalized, relational process grounded in assessment and human interaction.

While artificial intelligence may improve accessibility and provide useful data, many experts believe the future of yoga will involve a hybrid model. Technology may support practice through measurement and feedback, but human teachers remain essential for providing emotional attunement, safety and therapeutic guidance.

As the wellness industry embraces technological innovation, preserving the human dimension of yoga may prove essential to maintaining the depth and integrity of the practice.

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TREND 5: Yoga in Addiction Recovery and Behavioral Health

Addiction and behavioral health disorders represent some of the most urgent challenges facing global healthcare systems. In response, treatment programs are increasingly integrating holistic approaches that address both physiological and psychological dimensions of recovery.

Yoga has emerged as a valuable complementary therapy within these programs. Since the late twentieth century, rehabilitation centers have incorporated yoga practices to help patients manage stress, regulate emotions and rebuild awareness of the body.

The Yoga Therapy Renaissance highlights how yoga therapy can support individuals dealing with conditions such as addiction, anxiety and depression by helping them develop healthier behavioral patterns and coping strategies.

Recent studies suggest that yoga may help reduce cravings, improve mood regulation and support recovery by stabilizing the nervous system. These practices encourage participants to reconnect with internal bodily signals—an ability known as interoceptive awareness, which is often disrupted in addiction and trauma.

Importantly, yoga therapy is not intended to replace medical treatment. Instead, it functions as a complementary practice that supports broader treatment plans and empowers individuals to participate actively in their healing process.

As healthcare systems continue to adopt integrative models, yoga therapy may become an increasingly common component of multidisciplinary recovery programs aimed at addressing both the physical and psychological dimensions of addiction.

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