



GLOBAL WELLNESS
SUMMIT

The **FUTURE** of **WELLNESS** 2023 TRENDS



GLOBAL WELLNESS TRENDS REPORT

The Future of Wellness 2023



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A Truly Global Forecast

This wellness trends report provides a truly global perspective on the meaningful shifts that will impact the international wellness economy in 2023 and beyond. Each marking on the map below represents a source location of the various research components comprising this year's in-depth report, such as company analysis, thought leader insights and facts from industry studies.



PREFACE

Global Wellness Trends Report: The Future of Wellness 2023

We're entering our fourth year of the pandemic: kids that started high school at its onset are graduating, and we've lost track of all the names of the virus variants. If in 2022 most of the world, dying to get out, decided that the pandemic was over, as we write, China is experiencing a terrible surge. It's been one long, difficult, confusing era, and another challenging year to predict wellness trends.

But because the world opened with *such* a bang in 2022—people rushing to return to life, to people, to travel, to real-world wellness experiences—instead of theorizing what a “post-pandemic” wellness consumer and market will look like, in 2023 we can base it on some actual observation and evidence. People have spent three years prognosticating about how this long, thoughtful pause would transform the very idea of “wellness,” and as this 2023 trends report shows, big changes are here and they're real.

Industry Momentum: If we guessed that wellness would be more important to people after the pandemic shocks, even we are surprised by the sector's momentum. Global surveys reveal that wellness is more of a top priority for people worldwide and that despite a tough economy, they're upping their spend. Whether in the medical

world, high-profile media, or the investment space, we see signs everywhere that wellness has a bigger, more serious place at the table—whether the huge conference on healthcare innovation, HLTH, adding a wellness track in 2022, or the Washington Post launching a whole editorial section on evidence-based wellness.

But what's even more extraordinary is just how profoundly consumers—and what they perceive to be “true wellness”—have changed. Cast your mind back to 2019, the highwater mark of a hyper-consumerist, product-flooded wellness market, with so many zany wellness trends-a-minute often sorely lacking evidence. People (given time to think these last few years) are now more reflective, they seek more science, they're less selfish (more concerned about each other and the planet) and want solutions that are meaningful and work. Our 2023 trends illustrate how the wellness market of 2019 suddenly feels archaic. I guess three is a lot in “wellness years” given what we've all been through.

Many trends this year don't feel like “trends,” they feel like movements. Several themes stand out:

New Values: A palpable shift in consumer values is felt across the trends. “Wellness Comes for the Loneliness Epidemic” shows how we're moving

from lonely, “solo” self-care and “digital wellness” to a powerful focus on in-real-life social connection and community—from the surge in social wellness clubs to the wellness world teaching us to communicate more deeply (i.e., we’re moving from buying to belonging, from GOOP to group). “From Global Smorgasbord to Hyper-Indigenous” details how a rising critique of wellness as a profound cultural appropriator is changing wellness travel, with a far bigger emphasis on Indigenous travel and going-to-the-cultural-source for wellness. In “Workplace Wellness Finally Starts to Mean Something” we see how fed-up employees, worsening mental health and remote work mean “workplace wellness” is (finally) moving from a false promise to a meaningful plan of action. And the “Having Faith in Business” trend shows how if it’s not surprising that there was a resurgence of faith over the pandemic, it *is* surprising that the business world is now embracing it, with more faith-friendly workplaces.

A Return to Wellness Roots—With a Difference:

Various trends illustrate how we’re embracing the deep original roots of wellness, but with a radical reimagining. Wellness has always been about the senses, but “Multisensory Integration” details how light, scent, temperature, touch and sound are now being blended to create a whole new age in “sensory wellness.” The “Blue, Hot and Wild” trend shows how “water wellness” is being reinvented, from a huge new era—with a modern reimagining—for hot springs to the rise of cross-country swimming. That trend also illustrates the unquenchable post-pandemic thirst for nature experiences.

Some Science Please: The trends reflect how science is now king. “From ‘Clean’ to Biotech Beauty” predicts that we will move past “clean

beauty”—and its muddy claims—to lab-tested, science-backed and scientist-created “biotech beauty.” With so much misinformation about diets, weight loss and metabolic health, Michael Roizen, MD, explores how transforming white fat into brown may be the metabolic health and obesity breakthrough. Marc Cohen, MD, takes us deep into the “Wild, Wild West of Biohacking,” where he helps us separate some wheat from chaff and understand the ethical and risk issues.

Wellness Impacts New Sectors: Wellness has rewritten industries from fashion to real estate, and several trends explore how it will now transform new segments; a wellness lens is powerfully changing urban design and infrastructure, opening new opportunities for hospitality brands embracing pro-level sports and making wellness a much bigger focus of government policy.

This is the only wellness trends report that is truly global. It’s based on the insights of hundreds of executives from wellness companies, economists, doctors, investors, academics and technologists from all over the world that gather each year at the Global Wellness Summit.

This year things are different: In addition to having leading journalists and trends analysts as authors, many of this year’s forecasts are written by top experts in that field: doctors, economists, executive leaders at major global corporations, and urban futurists—another sign that wellness has a bigger place at more tables.

The report is packed with new ideas and directions in wellness, and examples of the companies and organizations that are ahead of the curve.

We hope you’ll enjoy! And here’s to a year of momentum for wellness!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1. WELLNESS + GATHERING:

Wellness Comes for the Loneliness Epidemic

By Beth McGroarty

We “know” loneliness is skyrocketing, that it kills and that the #1 predictor of health and happiness is relationships. But somehow, the recent uber-capitalist wellness market has led with two things: a sea of keep-them-spending “me time” products and “digital wellness”—both lonely journeys of “self-care.” The pandemic has proven to be the breaking point. The biggest wellness trend is the development of new spaces and experiences that bring people together *in real life*—creatively and with intention—where social connection is the burning center of the concept.

Social wellness clubs with different vibes and price-points will surge, where group bonding comes first and the (sometimes dizzying menus of) wellness experiences serve as social icebreakers—from pioneer Remedy Place to social bathhouse Othership to Six Senses Place. With remote work, people need everyday places to be and belong—and younger gens, who are ditching booze and bars, seek healthier social spaces. With human “communication” having devolved into emojis, the wellness world is now teaching us how to connect and empathize more deeply. Peoplehood, the group conversation concept from SoulCycle’s founders, nixes the bikes to teach “relational fitness” through active listening. “Empatho-delics/actives” (that drive human openness) will rise: psilocybin, MDMA (in clinical trials), and ancient botanical “social elixirs,” such as kanna and kava.

Tackling loneliness is a huge trend beyond the wellness space. Startups are bringing connection to those who need it most, whether it’s the elderly or black men. New social apps/platforms are *actually* social, creating dinner parties for strangers or bonding apartment dwellers. More governments are fighting loneliness with new policies, and there’s even a new “social medicine.”

The future of wellness is a move from: lonely to social self-care, buying to belonging, URL to IRL, ego to empathy, Goop to group.



2. WELLNESS + TRAVEL:

From Global Smorgasbord to Hyper-Indigenous

By Elaine Glusac

Wellness and wellness tourism have long resembled Disney's "It's a Small World": buffets of global experiences typically divorced from place. Yoga, born in India, is ubiquitous worldwide; ayahuasca retreats have departed their Amazonian homelands; you can get a Hawaiian Lomi Lomi massage in Dubai.

But with a new critique of wellness as a profound cultural appropriator, a rising social justice movement, and greater emphasis on authenticity, travelers are now seeking much deeper cultural experiences and showing interest in going to the source of ancient healing and knowledge to learn how they care for the land and for themselves. Indigenous travel and going to the cultural source for wellness is our travel trend for 2023.

Community-led Indigenous travel offerings are surging—from the boreal forests of Canada to the Australian Outback—and speak deeply to travelers seeking inclusive, sustainable and regenerative travel experiences. The fast-mounting interest in original cultures includes Indigenous wellness practices, from purification ceremonies to food and nutrition.

Concurrently, culturally-rooted wellness experiences are booming globally and inspiring travelers to go to the original wellspring for authenticity. In Japan, traditional ryokans, or hot springs inns, are having an incredible renaissance as nature-based experiences that shift with the seasons. Resorts are exploring new menus of from-the-source wellness, whether traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine in the Middle East or Druidry in England. India, which gave the wellness world yoga, is poised to lure travelers back to the source with an upcoming center for traditional medicine partnered by the World Health Organization.



3. WELLNESS + WORKPLACE:

Workplace Wellness Finally Starts to Mean Something

By Skyler Hubler and Cecelia Girr

From protected time off to finally acknowledging women's health needs, employee wellness is getting a much-needed rethink. Employers have been casually tossing around the word "wellness" since the 1980s. But four decades later, we have little to show for it. Worldwide, 70% of knowledge workers have experienced burnout in the past year, and a recent global study found that 38% of workers hate their jobs so much that they wouldn't wish it on their worst enemy. Clearly, all those "workplace wellness" initiatives haven't been effective. But with the pandemic dramatically accelerating shifts in work models and the mental health crisis—and employees newly empowered—things are changing for the better.

In this trend, we explore how superficial wellness at work schemes are being replaced with more meaningful solutions. Better balance is being achieved through movements such as extended, company-wide vacations and the "right to disconnect" from emails after hours; employers making in-person time

count with memorable offsites and gatherings at wellness resorts and social wellness clubs (meetings held in ice baths are officially a thing); and topics once stigmatized, like menopause and infertility, gaining the attention of the world's biggest employers. Even psychedelics are entering the scene, with [Enthea](#) set to launch ketamine therapy as a workplace benefit across the US this year. The workplace wellness reform is well underway and it's set to change everything, from how we connect with coworkers to what we look for in a job.



4. WELLNESS + BEAUTY: From “Clean” to Biotech Beauty

By Jessica Smith

As the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic subsides, one thing has become clear: science is king. In the world of beauty, the shift towards data-backed products has never been more evident. We're seeing an about face from the conversation around “clean beauty” (with all its muddy claims) to a desire for science-backed products.

In this trend, we look at the evolution from greenwashing and false claims to today's new—and welcomed—medical, bio-positive and tech-forward product development and explore what the future might hold.

We see a movement that is fueled by beauty consumers who are demanding more: more education and transparency, like No7 Beauty Company's partnership with the British Beauty Council on the “Science of Skincare,” more results-driven beauty technologies (bringing the medi-spa home), more science in ingredient formulations (like S'eau Prima's new product that contains hypochlorous acid, a molecule found in white blood cells that activates the immune system's ability to heal itself), and biotech formulations that are far more effective than natural extracts.

The beauty and wellness industries have the opportunity to change the way consumers view synthetic ingredients by using science and technology to secure supply chains and pave the way for innovations.



5. WELLNESS + CITIES: Urban Infrastructure Just Might Save Cities

By Robbie Hammond and Omar Toro-Vaca

The role of the city has been reimagined countless times over the centuries (they've been trading posts, political and artistic centers, and, recently, concrete jungles of retail and offices). But the pandemic served as a wake-up call for just how unwell our cities are—sparking a new recognition of the inextricable relationship between the health of the cities and the health of city dwellers. Global cities are now at another historical inflection point where they are rebuilding themselves around the wellness needs of their citizens. “Urban wellness infrastructure” is no longer perceived as a luxury—it's a necessity.

This trend examines diverse, creative ways that an urban wellness infrastruc-

ture—the melding of capital improvements and business opportunities that holistically address social, mental and physical health—is being embraced all around the world as a solution for accelerating growth, fueling post-pandemic recovery and cultivating healthier, happier citizens.

There are so many powerful examples. Developed 20 years ago on an abandoned railway line in the heart of Manhattan, the Highline is a pioneering example of this trend—a wellness destination in its own right where people exercise, socialize and take in natural beauty in the heart of the city. The Highline has inspired over 60 such projects across America. The 11th Street Bridge Park in Washington, DC, a new public space project that connects neighborhoods and helps cross racial and economic divides, is an example of the new community-building urban wellness infrastructure.

In Singapore, the government is striving to become an “urban wellness haven,” creating a whole slate of programs and initiatives that showcase the city’s unique natural and wellness resources. In Monterrey, Mexico, a successful collaboration between private and public organizations, DistritoTec, is creating a thriving new community with wellness at its core—a model Mexico plans to replicate.

To remain vital in the next century, cities must become places not to survive but to thrive. That’s only possible with a new wellness infrastructure.

6. WELLNESS + WEIGHT:

The Skinny on Brown Fat and Eliminating Obesity

By Michael Roizen, MD



Harnessing the ability to live longer and “younger” is among the biggest trends in medicine and wellness today. Dr. Michael Roizen believes a crucial factor in the longevity quest is recognizing that not all fat is created equal, and transforming white/yellow fat into beige/brown fat has the potential to move the needle on one of the greatest health crises—obesity. The reason? Brown fat has increased mitochondrial density and burns lots of calories while white fat is metabolically inefficient and doesn’t use much energy. Yes, moving white fat to brown powers weight loss, but obesity is a serious disease that can be a key factor in heart disease, cancers, dementia and more.

This trend explores numerous studies and examples of how white cell/brown cell transformation could work, focusing on three areas: pluripotent cell transformation, cold therapy and drugs. For example, researchers have induced pluripotent stem cells and turned them into induced brown adipocytes by transducing a gene. Easier to understand is the (heavily trending) cold therapy where research shows that brown adipose tissue can be recruited, expanded and activated by exposure to cold environments (cryotherapy). This increases metabolic rate, although results are highly individual. Fasting is also proving to be effective and the number of drugs that encourage thermogenesis is increasing. Medical professionals recognize that it is harder to lose than to gain white fat, but the breakthrough on white to brown cell transformation will only increase as science teaches us more. It’s all part of a reality coming ever closer: living like 40, even when we reach the age of 90.



7. WELLNESS + GOVERNMENTS: The Case for Coming Together

By Thierry Malleret

Wellness policies have been years in the making, but in 2023 and beyond, they will evolve, multiply and strengthen. Governments “know” the crippling economic and societal costs that come when people don’t feel mentally and physically well. They “know” that unwellness shrinks the labor force while simultaneously hurting productivity—the worst possible combo for long-term economic growth. They “know” that preventative wellness saves public money because it always costs less than cure.

Now more governments are moving from knowing to *action*, pursuing diversified policies aimed at, pursuing policies—aimed at improving physical, mental, work, environmental, and even financial wellbeing—from healthy eating campaigns to funding regenerative agriculture and biodiversity protection. Portugal (and other countries) has taken aim at disintegrating work-life balance with new “right to disconnect” laws, banning employers from contacting workers after work hours. Japan launched a national project spanning a host of wellness objectives, with a focus on boosting the healthspan of its aging population. More than 85 countries have legislated against sugary beverages. The New York City’s mayor’s office just invested \$44 million to train 200,000 doctors and nurses on how to use preventative “lifestyle medicine.”

Wellness policies will become far more prominent on the political agendas of national, regional and local governments. We predict they will be: (1) more expansive, by encompassing adjacent policies that contribute to our planetary, societal and individual wellbeing; (2) more “muscular,” toughening regulations and fighting vested interests; and (3) more local, because the greatest policy-success stories happen when you empower communities at the local level.



8. WELLNESS + WATER: Blue, Hot and Wild

By Jane Kitchen

The pandemic spurred a hunger for in-nature experiences that shows no signs of abating. But when we talk about the nature surge, we usually remain on terra firma. In 2023, people will jump into the world’s wild waters for some “blue wellness”—with an unprecedented global surge in new-look hot springs destinations and wild and cross-country swimming going global.

At the steamy end of the temperature spectrum, hot springs are now poised to be the next big thing in wellness. There are an unprecedented number of new and in-the-pipeline global destinations and new life is being breathed into long-forgotten facilities—from Australia to the US (where about 50 new projects are underway). (Finally, we are all “becoming Europeans.”) A whole new social era in hot springs has arrived, where developers are combining live entertainment, watery wellness classes, restaurants and bars with

traditional soaking. At Peninsula Hot Springs in Australia, take in live bands from its hot springs amphitheaters and do some hot springs yoga; at Sky Lagoon in Reykjavik, you soak in the midnight sun while sipping prosecco from a swim-up bar; you'll soon be able to watch a baseball game while soaking in hot springs at Hokkaido's ESCON Field. This is social, affordable wellness and it's pulling in a younger, diverse crowd.

On the cold side of the trend, there is surging interest in wild, cold and cross-country swimming, once the domains of serious athletes. Wild swimming groups like the Bluetits Chill Swimmers offer inclusive group swims that foster connection, and more global resorts (the trend is moving beyond the UK) are offering guided wild swimming programs—whether the Hotel J in Sweden or New York's Mohonk Mountain House. Cross-country swimming is starting to take off, epic adventures where hiking and wild swimming are combined. People are even building wild swimming ponds instead of the old concrete swimming pools.

The future of wellness and nature immersion? Blue, hot, cold and wild.



9. WELLNESS + SPORTS:

New Business Models for Hospitality

By Lisa Starr

Savvy hospitality brands are responding to demands from wellness-focused clients looking beyond the basement gym, in search of pro-athlete-level equipment, fitness classes and wellness programming, whenever and wherever they travel. Some hotel brands are even creating facilities that cater to entire amateur or professional sports teams, expanding the function of the hotel and ensuring professional quality for the rest of us. We predict businesses that support this trend will become the go-to brands for future generations.

The ubiquity of the wellness-focused lifestyles of elite and professional athletes are fueling this trend and increasing demand for pro-level wellness at hotels and resorts. Social media and marketing campaigns make access to the wellness routines of celebrity athletes like Tom Brady and LeBron James widely available to the public—and feed our fascination with how these stars are able to do what they do. Hospitality brands like Kerzner International Holdings, owner of the Atlantis Resort and One&Only Resorts, are responding to the public preoccupation with sports with new concepts like the immersive global lifestyle brand SIRO, a “fitness and recovery hotel.” In addition, Zula Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som in Qatar, the Middle East's first full-immersion wellness resort, offers unique TAIM (traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine) treatments and hosted the German World Cup soccer team in 2022. The global sports market is predicted to hit \$20 billion by 2027, and we're going to see new, creative, profitable intersections between sports and wellness. Sports of all types are being seen as a strategy to attract and connect with wellness-oriented consumers—and this timely business trend shows no sign of stopping.



10. WELLNESS + SENSES: Multisensory Integration

By Ari Peralta

Advances in neuroscience and neuroaesthetics confirm that, when combined, the senses elevate our human experience. Nature is multisensory and it turns out, so are we. The senses have always been present in wellness. In fact, we subconsciously associate many wellness activities with one sense or another... spa is touch, wellness music is sound, chromotherapy is color, healthy food is taste and thermal is temperature. This siloed approach is quickly changing in remarkable ways.

Now brands are accessing multiple senses simultaneously to better support wellbeing outcomes, amplify wellness experience and influence behavioral change—think using multiple sensory cues in a harmonious way to deepen meditation. With a better grasp on evidence, wellness brands are using multisensory integration as an approach to deepen and amplify felt experiences. From wellness brands to spas to retailers, they are experimenting with playful combinations of light and sound, light and taste, etc., to build connection and more meaningful moments.

Some examples: In Saudi Arabia, the AIUla Wellness Festival has curated a 360-degree multisensory event allowing visitors to stimulate and elevate all five senses amidst ancient and stunning surroundings; while Six Senses has teamed with mycoocoon to create synesthetic dining experiences, enabling guests to “taste” color and sound, while, in the metaverse, digital sense is becoming a reality, adding scent and touch to sight and sound.



11. WELLNESS + BIOHACKING: The Wild, Wild West of Biohacking

By Marc Cohen, MD

Biohacking is the attempt to control biology and defy disease, decay and death so we can become superhuman. The idea is not new; our ancestors were masterful biohackers and developed low-tech hacks such as fasting, isolation, chanting, yoga, martial arts, body temperature manipulations and traditional medicines to increase their health and wellbeing. However, there is a new trend in biohacking featuring technology that is staggering. Super-technologies such as AI, brain-computer interfaces, sensorless-sensing, CRISPR, xenobotics, nanobotics, probiotics, morphochemicals, 3D-tissue-printing, cloud-computing and blockchain technologies allow us to manipulate molecules, modify genes, manage microbes, create living robots, regenerate body parts, seamlessly monitor and track health metrics, and manipulate our sensory inputs.

AI can perceive and do things that humans simply can't—and do them much cheaper and more consistently. AI will soon make medical care available to everyone on earth, while AI-powered biofeedback will control our temperature, pressure, color, sound, smell and electromagnetic inputs in real time to create augmented reality games that take us on personalized healing journeys.

Furthermore, nanobots, xenobots and regenerative technologies will let us re-grow tissues, limbs, or organs, or use living tissue for body adornment or new biological functions.

But this wild, wild west raises moral, legal and ethical issues. Just as lone computer hackers bypass security systems, biohackers conduct experiments on themselves and analyze, share and compare their data without ethical oversight, regulation or recourse to established authorities. Thus, the question: What do we want from life and can we hack our biology and consciousness to enhance our moral and ethical nature?



12. WELLNESS + FAITH: **Having Faith in Business**

By Brian Grim

It's not surprising that the pandemic led to a resurgence of faith. What is surprising is that the corporate world is embracing it. While diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in workplaces have focused on race, gender, sexual orientation, and marginalized populations, one aspect that's been strikingly left out of the conversation is now emerging: faith. As global workplaces become radically reshaped to address inclusivity, purpose and employee well-being, more companies are now tapping into the full identity of their employees by including religion as a full-fledged part of their DEI commitments—encouraging employees to form official (company-sponsored) groups around their faith, just as companies encourage women, people of color and LGBTQ+ groups to do.

It makes smart business sense. Religion is an important identifier for more than 84% of people in the world and religious populations are outgrowing nonreligious populations by 23 to 1. Inclusivity around faith has an eye-opening impact on recruiting, retention and revenues and is a powerful factor in employee health and resiliency.

More companies are making moves. Intel has established seven different faith/belief ERGs not only for major faiths, but for atheists, agnostics and small faiths such as Bahá'í—and they report significant business impact. Google, who until recently had a “no religion” policy, launched the Inter Belief Network (IBN), so employees could establish sub-chapters for faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.

Inclusive workplaces where all faiths are equally valued (including non-theists) enriches corporate culture, and it's a dramatically new aspect of workplace wellness.

GLOBAL WELLNESS SUMMIT

12 Wellness Trends for 2023



Toronto's Othership is a "social bathhouse" concept where group breathwork, sauna and ice bathing have created a fierce community. They just raised \$8 million for expansion and expect 20 North American locations within five years.

Wellness + Gathering:

Wellness Comes for the Loneliness Epidemic

By Beth McGroarty

INTRODUCTION

“Connection is the currency of wellness.”

—Dr. Jack Travis, a founder of the modern wellness movement and the first wellness center in California in the 1970s

Wellness comes for the loneliness epidemic

The future of wellness is engineering the “social” and in-real-life communities. It’s a trend taking many directions: from the surge in social wellness clubs, to startups getting creative about driving human connection for groups that need it most, to governments getting serious about loneliness policy, to the wellness world now teaching connection and communication skills (“relational fitness”), to a rising interest in empatho-actives

and -delics that can unlock human connection, and even to early signs of a more “socialized” medicine.

If we’ve long known that the “social” was the magic driver of the wellness market (it’s a well-worn cliché that people’s fitness classes are their “church”), what’s unfolding with “social wellness” now is of an entirely different order. Human connection is no longer some happy fallout from wellness experiences and places—it’s increasingly becoming the main point of them. We’ll see a surge in new spaces and concepts (wellness membership clubs, collectives and community models) that put social programming at the burning center of the concept, and are as or even more important than the wellness experiences themselves. The future: more exhaustion with digital wellness communities

(how did Silicon Valley hijack the concept of “connected”?) and a far more powerful focus on *intentionally* and *creatively* inventing new places, spaces, experiences and solutions that bring people together IN REAL LIFE in new ways.

In short, wellness is solving for the loneliness crisis.

Tackling the global loneliness crisis, and devising new solutions that address social isolation, will be a macro trend that extends far beyond the wellness space. We’ll see more people-connecting startups delivering friendship to those who need it most, more government policymakers making bolder loneliness-fighting moves, and even signs that the lonely experience of medicine will get more social.

This trend is about how the future of wellness is a movement from solo to social self-care (from commodities to communities), from a product market to a wellness social infrastructure (from buying to belonging, from GOOP to group), from “connected” digital wellness to real human connection (URL to IRL), from inward journeys to outward ones, from ego to empathy, from SoulCycle to more “soul circles.”

The loneliness crisis—moving from *knowing* to action:

We’ve become inured to the shocking global stats about loneliness, and to our own loneliness. We feel we *know* how the major sociocultural and technological shifts that have unfolded from the Industrial Revolution through our Digital Age have acted like a villainous conspiracy to destroy our human relationships and social capital: the capitalist obsession with individualism, work, money and status over the wellbeing of the group; the continuous shift from extended, to nuclear, to single-person families; record-low fertility rates; a world aging and urbanizing as never before; the relentless decline in people’s participation in community and church groups (in the US, church membership just fell below 50% for the first time); and, of course, the explosion in digital media, where we’re suddenly spending 11 hours a day (44 years of our life) in front of screens instead of faces.

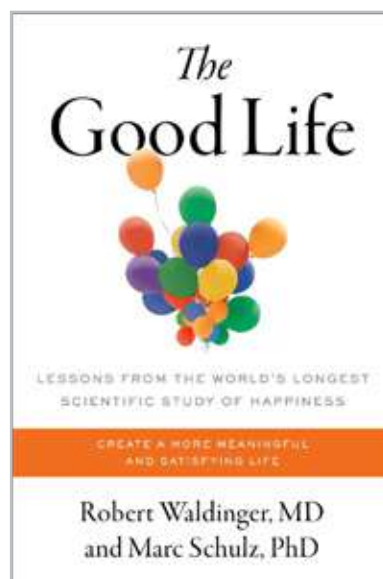
We *know* the stats on how loneliness is exploding

globally—from India to the UK. In the US, loneliness rates have more than doubled in the last 40 years, with 58% of adults and 79% of young adults reporting they’re now lonely. That’s worse than obesity or diabetes rates. Gallup recently found that 330 million adults around the world go at least two weeks without talking to any family or friends.

We *know* the stats on the many ways that loneliness kills and how social relationships (whether the most intimate or just talking to strangers) is the biggest indicator of health and happiness. Study after study reveals that loneliness is the invisible cause behind so many health conditions: from a 32% increased risk of stroke to doubling your likelihood to get Alzheimer’s, with new data even revealing that our relationships shape our brain and our microbiome. The longest study on mortality risk (from Harvard University) reveals that loneliness is a bigger killer than smoking, alcoholism and lack of exercise, while healthy relationships are bigger predictors of a long, happy life than social class, IQ or genes. The two academics behind the Harvard study have just released *The Good Life*, a new book that’s making headlines. The book concludes that when you look at the universe of studies the finding is clear: Good relationships are the most important factor for health and happiness. Period.

We *know* how the pandemic accelerated the

*The Good Life
concludes
that good
relationships
are the most
important factor
for health and
happiness.*





The first Six Senses Place urban wellness club will open in London in late 2023 or early 2024. Expect astoundingly comprehensive wellness, social and preventative medicine programming, in a jaw-dropping space. Photo, Six Senses Place London

loneliness crisis to triage levels. But this long, lonely pause seems to have galvanized the wellness (and wider) world to move from “knowing” to action: to finally address that the missing cornerstone of health and wellness (certainly as important as fitness or food) is social connection. As Cathy Feliciano-Chon, founder and managing partner of Hong-Kong-based CatchOn, a Finn Partners company, put it, “The ‘social piece,’ and dramatically different ‘social wellness’ models are transforming pretty much every sector—from urban design (see our 2023 trend) to work (see our 2023 trend) to travel and real estate.”

This trend will cover:

- The global surge in social wellness clubs and collectives, from the exclusive and pricey (the “SoHo-housification” of wellness) to the middle-class and affordable.
- Gyms and fitness studios becoming social/party spaces.
- A profusion of inclusive loneliness-fighting solutions, startups and communities getting creative about bringing human connection to those who need it most—whether the elderly, men, or black communities.
- How the new social platforms are actually “social,” focused on driving in-person connection; how friendship apps are the new dating apps.
- How more global governments are tackling loneliness at the policy level.
- How the wellness world is doing something new: teaching techniques and using therapies to drive deeper, more meaningful human relationships—from “active listening” group conversation models to empathy training.
- A rising interest in empatho-actives and empatho-delics that specifically work to open up human connection—from psilocybin and MDMA to legal botanicals such as kanna and kava.
- Signs that community and the “social” are now being injected into that most alienating experience, medicine: from platforms that match you with your “medical twin” to medical-wellness models that are social membership clubs.

(FURTHER) FUELING THE TREND

Remote work turned “third spaces” into “second spaces”—creating new desires for daily wellness-social spaces

The old paradigm: home was our “first space,” work our “second,” and the coffee shop or yoga class was our “third space.” But with workplaces/offices being eliminated or dialed back for most, people are desperate for that social “second space.” A [global survey](#) reveals that two-thirds of remote workers now feel lonely. Anna Bjurstam, wellness pioneer at Six Senses, argued in her Global Wellness Summit keynote “The Big Business of Private Membership Clubs” that we have a radically new life-work-social paradigm: If we used to live an 8-5-8 life (8AM-5PM at work, 5-8PM for social or the gym, the rest at home), now more of us live an 8-to-8 reality: an unstructured (often lonely) twelve hours, but one that does allow us to do work, the social and wellness when we want. So, all-day social spaces/clubs that provide wellness and workspace become a huge opportunity. She notes: “The fastest-growing workplace isn’t home or the office, but some third place—a hotel lobby or, increasingly, private spaces/clubs...Life has

changed, we’ve changed, our needs have changed, people are looking for new places to connect and disconnect, to be seen and to hide, to have space to work and belong.”

Younger gens are rejecting drinking, bars, and “toxic socializing”—and seek healthier alternatives

“Damp lifestyle,” “sober curious,” “mindful drinking,” are buzzing movements: each with millions of posts on TikTok and gracing so many 2023 wellness trend lists. Global studies—from [the US](#) to [the UK](#)—show that fewer people are drinking overall and that Gen Z is the most sober generation ever. Dr. Jonathan Leary, founder of the first “social wellness club” Remedy Place in New York City and Los Angeles (more below), explains the dramatic shift underway, where socializing is being reinvented as a less destructive experience. “More people, especially the young, are rejecting the historic toxicity of traditional socializing: getting wasted in bars, all the temptations, the meaningless connections—and seek healthier socializing at wellness spaces like ours.” With everything in Remedy Place designed to promote social connection (DJ and cinema nights, a tea

Everything in Remedy Place, the “first social wellness club,” is designed to promote social connection and make wellness something done together, not solo: friends and co-workers come in for communal ice bathing and sauna-lounging rather than happy hour. Photo, Remedy Place New York



SoulCycle founders Julie Rice and Elizabeth Cutler are now launching Peoplehood—a dramatically new wellness model zeroing in on community: Guided group conversations where each person gets a chance to “talk freely and listen deeply.” They dub Peoplehood “modern medicine for the loneliness epidemic.”



bar, etc.) and to make wellness something done together, he reports that people are flocking in for date nights and friend and co-worker hangs—doing some communal ice bathing and sauna-lounging in their private suites rather than hitting happy hour. “Businesses that solve for both your health and social life have a massive opportunity. I predict that ‘social self-care’ will be as big, if not bigger, than the fitness industry.”

A mindset shakeup in wellness, from selfish to social self-care, from consumer products to connection

You can feel a shift in the “wellness zeitgeist” since the pandemic: away from a self-involved model (all the endless “self-optimizing”) to a new awareness that social connection (not products) is the path to wellbeing. We learned hard pandemic lessons on how our wellness is inextricably bound up with the wellness of others. There’s now a vocal rejection of wellness as a hyper-consumerist industry whose modus operandi is to keep us isolated, atomized, spending and self-obsessed on a lonely journey of “self-care.” An insightful example of this mounting critique is Rina Raphael’s new book, *The Gospel of Wellness: Gyms, Gurus, Goop, and the False Promise of Self-Care*, which analyzes why and how the modern wellness market exploded, while arguing that the future is a bigger focus on the social and community over products and solo experiences. As she recently argued in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Social support is a pillar of mental health, yet it’s often overlooked within hyper-individualized,

commodified wellness. Pushing consumerism ensures people seek comfort at home, alone with their arsenal of spa goodies... [but] real self-care is not a solo endeavor...or a DIY activity.”

Consumer surveys reveal the shift from solo to social wellness: Mindbody recently found that 43% of people now view community as a very important part of wellness experiences, while YPulse recently revealed that two-thirds of millennials and Gen Z believe that “my social life affects my wellness as much as physical health.” And after years of “touchless” and digital wellness, consumers are zooming out of the lonely apps and “online communities”—from Peloton’s downward spiral; to meditation apps, Calm and Headspace downsizing; to Weight Watchers pivoting from digital to IRL meetings, because, as their CEO notes, people are now “coming for weight loss...but staying because of the belonging.”

Creating successful “social wellness” communities is hard and takes courage

There are many challenges when creating new social models in wellness. While experts agree that loneliness is our biggest health crisis, the traditional mental health world, religious organizations and the media are quick to sneer at social wellness communities. Their dismissals typically run: Get a life, your secular-spiritual wellness class isn’t as meaningful or authentic an experience as a real church. They criticize social wellness models as simply monetizing people’s hunger for connection. Fair enough, but think how *many* businesses actually



Othership, where people bond over hot and cold therapies (“peak experiences”), wants to get beyond the exclusive, pricey social wellness clubs by creating an accessible, affordable “house of transformation” brand.

revolve around this, including many churches.

Creating natural (not cringey and forced) social connection is also extremely hard: like capturing lightning in a bottle. As Anna Bjurstam notes, with a social wellness concept or club, “it’s all about the right vibe”: You have to know your audience and there’s no instruction manual. Many a wellness resort have built social lounge-pits and mud playpens that are as deserted as ghost towns. Wellness communities with passionate followings often push the envelope; they’re not squeamish and they use talented people to get individuals out of their comfort zone. Like [Taryn Toomey’s The Class](#) (New York City and Los Angeles), part cardio fitness, part meditation, but really a music-fueled storm of communal emotional release. Or SoulCycle, which, some 17 years ago, invented a new breed of tribal fitness that was technically a spin class, but became a runaway brand because it delivered an hour of motivational therapy and cathartic group bonding.

SoulCycle founders Julie Rice and Elizabeth Cutler are now launching [Peoplehood](#), a striking metaphor for—and example of—this trend of the social moving right to the heart of wellness. Peoplehood nixes the bikes and zeros in on community with an entirely new model: One-hour guided group conversations where each person gets a chance to “talk freely and listen deeply” (more below). These “Gathers” are led by trained guides who are gifted in the art of connection (and music and breathwork are blended in). Rice and Cutler call this new wellness concept “modern medicine

for the loneliness epidemic,” and they told us that Peoplehood “provides space and scaffolding for listening to ourselves and each other. It’s that simple.”

They also explained why it’s time for wellness concepts to focus more on the “soul” (human connection) than the “cycle” now: “When we started SoulCycle in 2006, it was a different time in the world, in the era of mental health and in the era of wellness. Social media hadn’t completely consumed our lives...the digital revolution hadn’t yet caused (such high) levels of loneliness, isolation and social disconnection, all of which have been so exacerbated by the global pandemic. [We started Peoplehood] because we now find ourselves in a world that needs connection and community more than ever.”

Despite the fact that Peoplehood hasn’t even launched (it does so next month at a space in NYC and online), some media are already calling it an [“emotional health cult”](#) or [“a new, flawed kind of church...with trendy branding.”](#) But Rice and Cutler told us: “Creating a new category always takes courage. Most people initially think you are crazy and just don’t get it. We always know we are onto something when we are creating something WE need. For us Peoplehood is a calling.”

There will be a plethora of new social models in wellness; some will nail it while some will flail. But we desperately need creative loneliness-fighting experiments in every direction (and we have a [severe lack of traditional mental health support and professionals globally](#)). It takes courage...and courage is needed.

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

Social Wellness Clubs—The Fast-Growing Genre in Wellness

New social wellness clubs have received much media coverage—and fittingly—as they represent a truly new wellness category that is fast changing the industry landscape. These spaces, often working on a membership/club model, are different in that they actively put social programming at the very center, as important as the wellness experiences on offer. Wellness once done solo is now often done together at these clubs/centers, and group wellness experiences are explicitly designed to break the “social ice.”

At the exclusive end, it means the “SoHo-housification” of wellness, where a pricey membership means rubbing shoulders (albeit, in an infrared sauna) with other movers-and-shakers. These stunning spaces typically unite a whole lot of “social infrastructure” (restaurants, bars, live music, events, workspace, etc.) with often mind-boggling menus of cutting-edge wellness, fitness and even medical programming. Their goal: to bring more of people’s social life—and “all” of wellness—under one spectacular roof. But the social wellness club/collective trend is also, thankfully, happening at the “middle class” and affordable levels.

Anna Bjurstam points out that the trend is being fueled by a wider shift in how people spend: “We now live in a subscription economy, which means a major, long-term shift from products to relationships, from ownership to outcomes, from buying to belonging.” Membership and “belonging” models are transforming wellness from a sporadic to an everyday affair.

Heimat by Waris Dirie, a social wellness/fitness club just opened in Paris, was created with the Somali-born model, actress and human rights activist. A brand about female empowerment, it exhibits contemporary African women artists with all sales proceeds donated to the “Waris Dirie Desert Flower Foundation.” Dirie is pictured here with her artwork “No Borders.”

The momentum in the social wellness club/collective space is pretty extraordinary and though we could never capture the global landscape, here are a few examples with different angles, “vibes” and price-points.

Remedy Place, “the first social wellness club” (a moniker backed up by its new trademark for the term), opened in LA in 2019 and recently in Manhattan’s Flatiron District. It was an instant hit with sports stars and celebs. The concept illustrates how these new spaces really mash up so much programming: social (from film nights to mocktail happy hours with DJs), modern wellness-tech (a hyperbaric oxygen chamber, cryotherapy, infrared saunas, IV drips), ancient approaches (TCM and acupuncture, breathwork, meditation) and alternative medicine (access to functional medicine doctors, chiropractors, naturopaths). It’s a big menu all focused on “social self-care...that offsets life’s stressors.”

What’s cool is how they recast once-solo wellness experiences (things happen alone in some hushed spa “box”) as group experiences: you socialize while getting that ice bath or lymphatic compression treatment. Founder Dr. Jonathan Leary reports that many members hang out every day, that their club rental business is huge (from their “Remedy After Hours” for super-VIPs to so many companies having team meetings there). The New York Times just reported on how more companies are conducting business at social wellness clubs and how cutting-edge treatments (like Remedy



Place's) are in, while the old "team yoga" is out. It's interesting that the majority of Remedy Place's members are men (unusual for a wellness business outside fitness), a lesson that focusing on recovery and biohacking really pulls in "the boys." They will add another location either in LA or NY (and at an international destination) in 2023; their next five locations are mapped out; and Dr. Leary sees 2-3 clubs opening each year in "every major city that makes sense." While memberships in NYC start at \$595 a month, the company has committed to some democratic access: They'll launch a free educational platform (video, podcasts, etc.) for the world, designed to be an "instruction manual for body and mind, with solutions that cost nothing."

Othership in Toronto exudes a very different vibe. A dreamy, "otherworldly," tribal social wellness space that is "building the future of emotional wellness through a social bathhouse experience"—where communal breathwork, sauna-bathing and guided ice baths are used to get people to "drop their guard" and give them what they're missing: "a chance to see and be seen." Their heady 2-hour gathering called "Evening Social," with group hot and cold experiences, music and performances, is aimed at "redefining what a night out could be" (and seems perpetually sold out). It's interesting

how ice baths are increasingly being used to break the "social ice." They've tripled their business projections in Toronto and will expand to NYC's Flatiron District in 2023. Monthly memberships run from \$33 to \$220, depending on the number of classes/experiences.

Fitness clubs are being reimagined as social wellness clubs, where working out, wellness, recovery and social programming all get equal play. At Saint Haven, coming to Melbourne, Australia, in March, "social connection is...the essential pillar" (with everything from co-working spaces to an "elixir bar",) but the vast space also offers fitness, yoga, meditation and breathwork, and recovery treatments (cryotherapy, infrared saunas, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, hot and cold pools, etc.). Cost: \$360/month. Diem, a "social club for fitness enthusiasts who value wellness and high-quality hangs," will soon open in Washington, DC.

Heimat is a new luxury gym/social-wellness-club concept from RSG Group. The first outpost in LA is a playground with deep fitness offerings, a rooftop pool, a sauna and spa—featuring social events, a bar, restaurant and co-working space. Memberships: \$350/month. In Paris, Heimat by Waris Dirie just opened, created with Somali-born

The specs for Six Senses Place, the brand's new urban wellness club concept, give new meaning to what "holistic" could mean in wellness, with 70+ programming tracks, offerings and amenities.

SIX SENSES PLACE

Belonging to Six Senses Place is an invitation for people to come as they are, play while they stay and leave comfortable with what is.

Our spaces help people grow, reflect and reconnect. Nurture a healthy gut microbiome, improve energy producing mitochondria and explore what it means to be mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally happy.



model, actress and human rights activist who fights against female genital mutilation. This brand is about “female empowerment” and “Proud Female Fitness.” It includes all the holistic fitness, wellness and social offerings, but with a social justice angle: The club exhibits contemporary African women artists with all proceeds from sales donated to the “[Waris Dirie Desert Flower Foundation](#)”. Heimat is reportedly eyeing locations in San Francisco, Dallas and Berlin.

[Gaia NoMaya](#) in Brooklyn imagines the “social wellness oasis” as a kind of spiritual wellness rave—and an affordable one. The 7,000-square-foot space uses sound meditation, breathwork, cacao ceremonies, ecstatic dance, a salt cave, yoga, gong training, live music and a healthy Colombian restaurant to connect people. Classes run around \$18 and on “Wellness Wednesdays” people pay what they can afford.

[Groundfloor](#), a membership club concept just opened in San Francisco, shows how since the pandemic, the old co-working spaces are being reimaged as spaces equally focused on social connection, wellness and work. The brand was invented to “cure social isolation” and to be inclusive: to “remove the historic barriers to private clubs.” This first space features a wellness studio, outdoor







gym, library and social lounge—and they host supper clubs, comedy shows and art classes, to “foster conversations that go deeper than ‘what’s your job?’” They have big investors like AirBnB and aim to “have a Groundfloor club in every neighborhood in the world.” Membership: \$200/month.

There are so many more examples. [Altea Active](#) is a massive, 89,000-square-foot social wellness club recently opened in Toronto. [Core Social Wellness Clubs](#) have opened four locations in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. [Sage + Sound](#) is a new wellness social center in NYC, offering everything from acupuncture to a café to a speaker series, plus daily classes from poetry to meditation. The outdoorsy social wellness club [The Wonderer](#), in Charleston, SC, goes deep on wellness and has a heavy social calendar (from live concerts to poolside movie nights). Membership [has been described](#) as like being on perma-vacation in Tulum.

Luxury wellness resort brands jump into wellness social clubs

So many [hotel brands are now opening members-only clubs](#). In the wellness travel space, major players are now opening urban wellness resorts and experimenting with social wellness membership clubs. The blended, bigger revenue model of

Six Senses Place will give new meaning to the term “holistic,” with 70-plus social + wellness offerings.

					
FEEL	HEAL	MOVE	CREATE	EAT	MEET
Modern bathhouse	Physical exam	Fitness center	Human centered design	Open kitchens	Community dining
Warm/cold/salt dip pool	Biomarker testing	Yoga studio	Lounge areas	Outdoor terrace	Art exhibitions
Infrared/regular sauna	Functional medicine	Dance studio	Meetings spaces	Rooftop bar	Expert panels
Steam room	Nutritional evaluation	Lap pool	Speaker series	Organic garden	Interactive workshops
Ice baths & cryotherapy	Biohacking	Flexible wellness spaces	Community programming	Juice bar	Lending library
Crystal bed	Exercise evaluation & tracking	Recovery lounge	Innovation incubator	Global cuisine	Eco events
Lounge area	Sleep evaluation	Compression boots	Workshops	Dietary customization	Volunteer opportunities
Sensory treatment rooms	Supplementation	Latest gym equipment	Mentorship	Cooking classes	Community programming
Energy medicine	Breath work	Cold hit machines	Productivity training	Local produce	Network connector
Vibroacoustics	Yoga & Pranayama	Wearables	Sustainable solutions	Clean food	Masters from all over the world
Geodesic dome	Longevity coaching	Personal training	Plastic free		
Red light	Wellness coaching	Pilates			
Loving kindness meditation	Personalized programs	Biohacking equipment			
Gratitude practices	IV's				



resort + residences + local wellness club at these urban properties is allowing brands to create clubs with astoundingly comprehensive wellness, social and preventative medicine programming—in jaw-dropping spaces.

Six Senses Place is the brand's new urban club concept “with a whole lot of wellness and belonging.” The specs give new meaning to what “holistic” might mean in wellness, with 70+ programming tracks, offerings and amenities (see image). There are personalized programs around food, movement, sleep and functional medicine (biomarker screening and longevity coaching); bathhouses, saunas, dance and yoga studios; and a huge slate of high-tech and ancient hacks from expert practitioners. It's all about the social: from the rooftop bar to cooking classes, art exhibits and expert talks, to community volunteering programs—with dedicated “network connectors” that knit club members together. It's the kind of place where you mingle with monks from Bhutan and then grab a kombucha vodka together at the bar. The first Six Senses Place opens in London in either Q4, 2023 or Q1, 2024—with several on its heels, including in Bangkok, Dubai, Austin and New York City. They expect around ten social wellness clubs within five years.

Aman is the resort brand that serves as the poster child for the prices-you-can't-grasp (or stomach) trend. Aman New York, site of their first wellness club, has received so much ink about its \$100,000 initial membership fees, that we won't belabor the details. Suffice it to say that the amenities are incredible: from its three-story spa and wellness center to full-blown functional medical practice to a glamorous, underground jazz club. Whether their club model is actually focused on “social wellness” is questionable: You aren't going to read about “driving human connection” or “the power of community” in their marketing copy. They sell the social/anti-social thrill of radical exclusivity: the wealthy knowing they belong to a place with the other wealthiest people in it. Look for more Aman wellness clubs in their properties coming to Miami Beach in 2024 and Beverly Hills in 2026.

The moves from resort brands aren't only urban:

Bamford Wellness Spa on Daylesford Farm in the Cotswolds will open The Club in March, a social wellness membership club with a pool, gym, saunas, ice baths, spin studio, meditation, Pilates, breathwork and cryotherapy—and a whole host of “farm” fitness and wellness experiences in nature. At the center is The Nest, the social hub with workspace and a farm-to-table restaurant.

In 2022, we've written about the growing WELLTH DIVIDE: how with the pandemic making the rich richer (and the rest of us less so), we're seeing more expensive wellness than ever before, including this rise in pricey social wellness clubs, often with mysterious member-vetting processes. Yes, the wealthy are lonely, some studies say even more so. But with the pandemic driving demands for a less elitist wellness market, will the super-exclusive “social wellness clubs” suffer image problems and consumer and media pushback? Social community models are fragile, often volatile, organisms: the once-successful social-wellness women's club, The Wing (proud of its feminism), had to close all locations in 2022, in part because of a scandal that it failed to address racist behavior from its members.

What inclusive or democratic “offsetting” moves will exclusive clubs need to do to prevent backlash? Who will survive and why? We predict that expensive models will rise, but more affordable ones will too. You don't need a \$100 million space to create a successful social wellness business: Simpler, more inclusive wellness visions and experiences often underpin more powerful, passionate communities. It's the vibe; it's the people; and it's often a bigger social purpose than just providing socializing.

Gyms and fitness studios go social

We all know that IRL fitness is roaring back and that app-based training is slowing, as people head out for connection. We know that what's trending in exercise—whether pickleball mania (36 million Americans alone are now playing!), the rise of padel, or the return of roller-skating and roller disco, is because they're social movements as much as physical movement.

More global gyms and fitness studios are now



Pickleball mania is trending (36 million Americans alone are now playing!), because it's social movement as much as physical movement.

getting intentional about being a social space, offering a “well” alternative for people who want nights out and a party vibe, but without the hangover—they’re hosting dance and workout nights with live DJs and so many social events. Berlin-based [John Reed Fitness](#) (30+ global locations from Paris to Dallas) has in-house DJs in all their clubs and comedy nights. Some studios serve cocktails, like London’s [Third Space](#) crazy-popular “Spin and Gin” nights. Dubai is now home to a “nightclub gym” called [Junk](#)—which is like a workout rave-concert held in a giant warehouse, with strobe lights, smoke machines and DJs broadcast on giant screens. LA-based beach fitness brand [DMN8](#) may have started as an outdoor workout brand, but it’s a social club now, with an ever-changing roster of events designed to make sure you “leave with 50 new friends.”

Inclusive social connection models are spawning—from startups solving for loneliness for those who need it most to the “circle” being the shape of 2023

There is so much creative, eclectic activity from startups and organizations working to make social wellness more inclusive. They’re driving connection

for groups that need it most—whether the elderly, men or black communities. By “connection” we don’t mean all the new digital wellness communities, but what’s more impactful: those that create face-to-face connection. Here are just a few examples.

If private social clubs have a long history of discrimination and racism, new clubs are fighting back. For instance, [The Gathering Spot](#) is a private membership club designed as a place of connectivity for the Black community. It offers members 20 inspiring events a month, 24-hour workspace, a private bar and restaurant, and even their own healthcare benefits. Their [CEO notes](#) that it’s “like a think tank and a country club, minus the elitism.” They have three locations: Atlanta, Washington, DC and LA—with plans to expand.

You could say that the “circle” will be the shape of 2023, as the guided group conversation, and sharing and listening models, are taking off. [Spoke Circles](#) in Brooklyn offers supportive, open group conversations (“circle gatherings”) led by psychologists, social workers and educators. “Women’s circles” are an ancient, and now fast-growing, model of connection, where women come together in a “sacred circle” (there’s a

spiritual vibe) to talk openly about what's on their minds, from grief to menopause. [WalkGoodLA](#), a wellness community about racial equity and healing, runs Black men's healing circles with a meditation practice.

[The Confess Project](#) brings social and mental health support to the barbershop, where black men and boys traditionally connect. The organization trains barbers (a free, year-long course) in active listening, validation, stigma reduction and communication, so they can get men to really open up, and they're trained to connect them with mental health resources if needed. The organization was just named one of [Fortune](#) magazine's top 10 innovators shaping the future of health.

Solving loneliness in the aging at enterprise scale

The global stats on loneliness in older populations are heartbreaking. For instance, [one study found](#) that more than a million elderly people in the UK go over a month without speaking to a single friend, neighbor or family member. More startups are addressing this loneliness at enterprise scale by creating paid services that connect older adults with younger ones (mutually beneficial as the two loneliest generations), who provide some simple companionship and support.

US-based [Papa](#) connects older adults with paid "Papa Pals" (they call them "grandkids-on-demand"), who provide companionship and help them with everything from errands to tech. They call their services "vital human connection delivered right to your door." Papa has changed the conversation on "age-tech" and the burning issue of isolation in the elderly, and has gone from being a little startup in 2018 to a unicorn (valued at \$1.4 billion) in 2021, when they extended services to all 50 states. They work with 100 different health plans and many employers, and in late 2022 released a study with Meridian (who provides government health programs) showing that a six-month program that connected Medicaid members with Papa Pals resulted in a 33% reduction in healthcare costs. That's incredible. Social connection is medicine.

[Goodfellows](#) just launched in India, a paid service that connects men and women over 70 with recent college grads for meaningful companionship—whether just watching a movie or taking a walk. India has unique needs here, as a country where 15 million elderly people live alone, because so many of their children move abroad. Its super-investor is Ratan Tata, the mega-industrialist who ran the \$128 billion Tata Group for decades, the perfect ambassador as an 84-year-old who lives alone. Goodfellows is in Mumbai and will move to other Indian cities soon.

The new social platforms are about driving in-person connection and friendship apps are the new dating apps

A growing wave of apps and tech platforms are solving for loneliness: focused on driving in-person meet-ups, sparking friendships, even forging relationships between neighbors. If the old social media was designed to keep you miserably, endlessly scrolling online, the new social platforms are about using tech to escape the FOMO: getting you offline, out of the house and meeting people.

Friendship apps are the new dating apps. After all, as a recent [Washington Post](#) article explained, we need to question the relentless cultural message that romantic relationships matter more than friendships, when studies show the latter has a more positive impact on our happiness. Global surveys coming out of the pandemic reveal how people are now interrogating their relationships, and which matter. For instance, the [New York Times](#) recently covered how Chinese people are now using dating apps to find friends, not a partner.

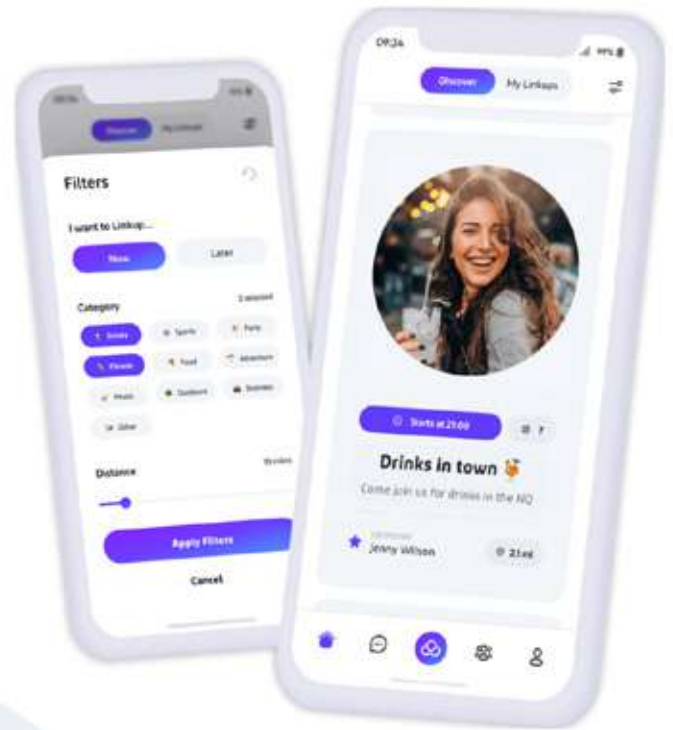
For years, startups have been trying to "solve for socializing," using tech like AI to match people up—whether Bumble's communities feature or Patook, attempting to matchmake potential friends. But the new people-connecting platforms feel more creative and authentic.

Just-launched [Linkup](#) in the UK wants to make it far easier for lonely people to socialize and make friends by enabling any kind of meeting in person, whether finding a workout partner or just going for a drink with someone nearby. They've recently

Meet new people, today.



Download Now



New apps are solving for loneliness. The UK's Linkup enables any kind of meet-up, from finding a workout partner to someone to go have a drink with. Photo, Linkup

raised VC from investors including the musical duo Krept & Konen and Callum Airey (Calfreezy on YouTube).

UK-based [The Joy Club](#) is a startup aimed at bringing older people together for social wellness. A \$6 monthly subscription fee gives members access to 50+ events a month: art classes, dance lessons, talks, musical events and fitness sessions, etc. They also get a private community area for hang-outs. They just raised \$1.6 million.

LA-based [222](#) is a new idea: it matches people to the “right strangers” for “curated real-life experiences.” They’re vocal that they’re “not a friend-making app” but a service that finds you the people “you’ll most get along with” to then send you to “the places you’ll love.” You answer a ton of questions about yourself, they develop a psychological profile and then match you with the best group of strangers. They curate the itinerary or restaurant spot for that group for the evening. You get notified when you’re chosen for a meet-up, which has a \$2.22 fee. Because events are public and with a group (and

meet-up venues are partners), it’s far safer than a dating app. They’ve recently raised \$1.45 million.

City apartment-dwelling is an often a lonely affair (a [new Gallup poll](#) found that more than one in five Americans never interact with their neighbors.) The fast-growing startup [OneRoof](#) wants to change that, with its NextDoor-style app that connects people in the same building, getting them to meet at happy hours, for a workout or walk, or for help with pets, etc. “Super Neighbors,” the people who act like glue in the building, drive its success, and the app [now has 40,000 active users](#) across 1,300 buildings in NYC and Miami, raising \$4.5 million. Cool.

A grassroots return to gathering—in every direction

We’ve talked a lot about businesses, but there is such a grassroots movement towards *more gathering* and *more in-person connection*—whether nostalgic returns to traditions or in new ways. It’s in the air; it’s everywhere.

The extended dinner party is trending, with the New York Times predictions for “how we will eat in 2023” including new approaches to communal eating (its “vibe of the year”). They also reported on how more young Americans are celebrating the Jewish Shabbat (even if they’re not Jewish), because people long to shut off their phones, share a meal, and hang out and talk. The LA startup Trybe that creates Shabbat experiences reports they’re now seeing 300 people per event. The pandemic spurred a return for old-fashioned letter-writing, as people seek more meaningful communication than a two-word text. Local walking clubs are surging. A big trend in home design is creating living-room-like spaces (firepits, couches, etc.) out on their front lawn or porch to lure the neighbors over. Bingo is hot.

The UK town of Frome is a shining global example of how local policy can tackle loneliness. Their NHS doctors employ “community connectors” to reach lonely people, including “talking benches” where these NHS employees can be found just for chats. The “Frome Model” has been so successful it’s being copied globally.



Last year we detailed how “farm living” was a rising wellness trend—and the farm as social hub is an interesting development. The New York Times recently reported on how boutique farms are the new social wellness clubs, hosting earth-to-table dinners, cooking classes, music performances, book readings, sunrise yoga and sound bath healing circles—with members reporting they gave up their SoHo House membership because this was a far better, healthier social experience. For the first time in 30 years, there are now waitlists for Israel’s kibbutzim, as people seek their powerful community and in-nature “agri-hood” way of living. We could go on. But it’s just a reminder that the social wellness trend is not sprung from pitch decks but awakened by new human needs.

Governments and loneliness—new commitments and more action needed

The pandemic served as a wake-up call for policymakers that loneliness is a public health issue with enormous costs. While it’s been rare for social isolation to be the focus of national policy (the UK, Japan, Australia, Denmark and Singapore have been most active), there is suddenly more policy conversation, more stated commitments, and *some* concrete action in *some* nations. Far more is needed.

The World Health Organization is now poised to create a dedicated top-level commission to address loneliness as a global policy focus, and they’ve stepped up efforts on how to scale interventions within their major project, the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030).

The UK may be the action star. They famously appointed the world’s first “Minister of Loneliness” back in 2018, and the NHS is the only major national healthcare system that has funded social prescribing (where clinicians refer patients to community and cultural activities/resources). They’ve long done some simple, impactful things, such as the Silverline Healthline, a 24-hour call center for older adults that serves up friendship and conversation. This 2022 overview of the UK government’s work on tackling loneliness shows the current scope of their projects. They continue to fund the National Academy of Social Prescribing

In the wellness space, there's no more striking example of the new focus on social connection and training in human communication than Peoplehood, which is about building "relational fitness" through guided group conversations.



(granting \$4.4 million more in late 2022)—and the NHS may get creative, with programs like “Green Social Prescribing,” which connect isolated people to social nature-based activities.

In 2021, Japan appointed their first Minister of Loneliness, in response to spiking suicide rates, so new policy measures are likely ahead. The government of Victoria, Australia also created a Minister of Loneliness in 2021. And in 2022, Australia’s national health leaders developed the National Strategy to Address Loneliness and Social Isolation, putting forth four key actions to start.

Denmark has long done creative things, such as the Ventilen organization, that brings 15- to 25-year-olds together for some simple socializing, whether playing games or seeing movies. As part of its 2022 budget, the Danish government put forth a proposal on how to end loneliness in the country, funding a modest \$1 million for a new loneliness alliance.

The “everything’s-about-the-individual” US, where loneliness costs an additional \$6.7 billion in Medicare spending annually and costs employers \$154 billion a year on stress-related absenteeism—has done precious little to tackle loneliness at the policy level. But high-level conversations are heating up. The US Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, is the most vocal global health leader on loneliness as a crippling health issue, and recently called for a loneliness moonshot that would require a total shift in societal and policy priorities. In 2022, researchers at Columbia University Mailman School

of Public Health made a strong call for the US public health system to take national action on the loneliness epidemic. The American Medical Association, the country’s top physician organization, recently voted to adopt new policies that finally recognized loneliness as a public health issue. It’s a miracle that the divided US Congress funded the new “988” mental health phone line (\$1 billion), where over 2 million calls and texts have poured in over the first 6 months—a step towards recognizing that the lonely need someone to talk to and mental health support.

Local solutions often work best, and experts call out what the English town of Frome has accomplished in tackling loneliness. The town’s NHS doctors employ “community connectors” who got smart to reach isolated people. They set up “talking benches” and “talking cafes” (with signs: “Sit here if you don’t mind someone stopping by to say hello”), where the NHS “connectors” are found just to chat. Taxi drivers are trained to give lonely people info on social services. The result: In the program’s first four years, emergency hospital admissions in Frome fell 14%, while they rose 29% in the rest of the UK. That’s huge, and the “Frome Model” has been so successful it’s spread to other towns globally, from Canada to Poland.

Governments are starting to throw a few million here and there on loneliness-fighting projects, and never have there been so many high-level policy commitments and manifestos. Let’s just hope for more “rock” and “less talk” in 2023.

The wellness world teaches human connection skills—from “active listening” to empathy training

Never have the world’s social, communication and empathy skills been so atrophied. In the last century-plus, we moved from faces, to phones, to email, to texting, to leaving a pathetic “sad” emoji when a friend suffers something awful. We talk to and see people less, and with “social” media our “conversations” have become radically less meaningful and sincere. We live in a world of outrageously divisive media and politics, where people scream over each other. While there aren’t enough global studies on the “state of empathy” (the ability to understand the feelings of another), one of them showed that it’s in precipitous decline: dropping 48% from 1979-2009. (Can you imagine where it’s at now?) Surveys show that the pandemic further broke our social skills: One 2022 poll revealed that 25% of people now feel anxious about socializing, with the biggest issue (for 29%) “not knowing what to say or how to interact.” We’ve forgotten how to talk and be friends.

While the world and the wellness world has paid precious little attention to helping people build their communication and empathy muscles, change is percolating. There is a new interest in “the science of connection,” such as the new bestseller *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make—and Keep—Friends*, which explores the research-backed, often counter-intuitive ways to “make friends in an era of distraction, burnout and chaos”: from the myth that friendships happen “organically” (they take complex work) to people needing to identify their attachment style—secure, anxious, or avoidant—because it’s the key to what’s working and failing in our friendships. It’s telling that the *New York Times* just did a piece on how to cultivate “freudenfreude” (schadenfreude’s antithesis, finding joy in another’s good fortune), explaining how the practice positively impacts mental health, and how academic psychologists have even created a program: Freudenfreude Enhancement Training (FET).

In the wellness space, there’s no more striking example of the new focus on training in human communication than Peoplehood, which is all

about building “relational fitness” through guided group conversations.

Founders Julie Rice and Elizabeth Cutler explained to us why the wellness space needs to provide more training that helps people better communicate and connect. “We spend upwards of 16 years in school ostensibly learning everything we need to know to be successful humans, yet we are never taught the skills we need to communicate, connect and build meaningful relationships. We somehow imagine our marriages will just ‘work out,’ our parental instincts will just ‘kick in,’ and our friends and colleagues will just ‘ask for’ what they need. The very thing that matters MOST in our lives, our relationships...we assume we’re just born with the skills to navigate. In the broader view of wellness, it doesn’t make sense to leave out such an important pillar of a person’s health and happiness.”

To create the format of a Peoplehood gathering, they say they spent three years talking to psychologists, scientists, researchers, authors, rabbis, priests and AA leaders, who all agree that the most important skill we can practice to strengthen relationships is one: active listening.

So how does a Peoplehood Gathering work? It’s a group conversation where everyone “gets a chance to talk freely and listen deeply,” led by trained guides. Note: these are not licensed therapists, this is a peer-to-peer experience. There are “higher listening” communication rules (which will also help things not fly off the rails): You don’t interrupt the person speaking, give advice or opinions, and if you want to express support you make certain silent gestures. It’s not “social” in the sense of back-and-forth banter. There are two types of “Gathers”: Peoplehood, where you come solo and meet new people, and Couplehood, where you explore “relational fitness” with your partner. Peoplehood opens in NYC (with a social café) and also online in February. Prices haven’t been announced.

Whether it will be successful is TBD, but it represents the first wellness business model entirely focused on social skills. We think training in connection and “radical empathy” will rise in wellness. There *is* a body of scientific evidence

There ultimately has to be greater acknowledgement that the DNA of psychedelics like psilocybin is its ability to unleash a sense of emotional openness with others.
Photo, Istock



(more needed) around human communication and the neuroscience of empathy. Studies show the impact of loving-kindness meditation (a Buddhist practice of developing kindness and warmth towards others) and the empathy-building power of reading literary fiction (what happened to the bibliotherapy discussions?) It's notable that loving-kindness meditation and gratitude practices are a key offering at the new Six Senses Place.

Wellness retreats are focusing on group psychological exploration and tribal emotional release

More wellness retreats are about getting people outside their comfort zone and beyond their ego-defended selves, where emotions and fears get bared in a cathartic, group psychological exploration (increasingly led by licensed therapists). Path of Love's genre-defying wellness retreats (held globally), created with psychotherapist Turiya Hanover, are a great example: They revolve around a kind of intense, unconventional group therapy, where music and dance and movement and more is used to unleash emotions, and where the week of healing is a heavily tribal affair. While the social emotional wellness retreat models vary wildly, they're a key trend in wellness travel.

Rising interest in empatho-actives and -delics that open up human connection—from psilocybin to MDMA to kanna

This trend now takes a different turn. *The Economist* named the expansion of psychedelic medicines into the public consciousness as one of its top trends for 2023, noting that “magic mushrooms are just the start.” They detail the flurry of milestones ahead for psychedelics and psychoactives this year: from psilocybin becoming a legal therapy in Oregon, to Alberta, Canada, legalizing psilocybin, MDMA, mescaline and ketamine in controlled settings, to California just putting the decriminalization of various plant-based psychedelics (from psilocybin to ayahuasca) on the next ballot. MDMA will complete a second US phase-3 trial for the treatment of PTSD, and if the findings confirm the first trial, it will be considered by the US Food and Drug Administration for approval. *The Economist* summarizes: 2023 will be an “exciting year” for an ever-expanding pharmacopeia of psychedelics and psychoactives, if we need to move cautiously.

With a growing desire in people for deeper human connection—and awareness that loneliness and disconnection is the root of cascading physical and mental health problems—we think there will be a rising interest in psilocybin for its power to make people feel more deeply connected (to others, to



With a rising interest in empatho-actives that work as natural “social elixirs,” Ka! Empathogenics’s active ingredient is the South African indigenous plant kanna, touted for making people more open to others. Photo, Ka! Empathogenics

the universe), as well as in different psychoactives that are also “empathogens”. These are either plant-based or lab-made substances that produce feelings of emotional openness, oneness and empathy. They include MDMA, currently illegal in all countries but with various trials running, and also mild, legal, plant-based “social elixirs” long used in ancient, indigenous cultures, such as South African kanna, or kava from the South Pacific.

As the psychedelic/psychoactive cupboard expands (and boy, will it ever!), the conversations about *which ones*, and for *what*, will get more specific, with their positive impact on human connection becoming a bigger topic. If the legalization pipeline is driven by evidence for their effectiveness for serious mental health conditions (psilocybin for severe depression, MDMA for PTSD), there ultimately has to be greater acknowledgement that the real DNA of psychedelics and various psychoactives is their ability to unleash a sense of emotional openness with others.

Unprecedented research on psychedelics (drugs that alter perceptions) is of course going on: all the rapid changes they cause in the brain, how they trigger serotonin receptors, and reconnect the neurons in the pre-frontal cortex that get atrophied in so many psychiatric conditions, like severe depression and anxiety. In the big picture,

the research is overwhelming that *the* key feature of a psychedelic experience is that they cause “ego death,” a profound blurring of the distinction between self and other (antithetical to cocaine, which causes “ego inflation”). That’s why so many studies on psychedelics see users reporting a vastly expanded “sense of union with others.” Studies indicate that psychedelics like psilocybin may have great potential for addressing loneliness, and may be an impactful treatment for severe social phobia and social anxiety disorder. So, as loneliness and disconnection become more important, the “why” of psychedelics expands.

MDMA (in “party” speak, ecstasy) is moving through FDA approvals for trials showing its eye-opening impact on PTSD. But this psychoactive has long been studied and used for its special ability to produce a sense of emotional openness, connection and empathy. It works on the emotional centers of the brain to induce feelings of warmth and love, while reducing people’s fear responses. Studies show that it is a key empathogen: boosting friendliness, closeness to others, talkativeness, etc. We forget that MDMA was quite recently legal, used as late as the 1980s by psychiatrists to help with relationships. It’s now getting more attention and research on how it could be a treatment in boosting relational health, with studies showing that it could even tackle the severe connection/communication problems that come with autism. Experts caution that while

it has “ecstatic” potential, the way it’s administered needs to be backed by strong research and policy guidelines. The FDA decision will be closely watched, with many ketamine clinics believing that MDMA will soon be part of their offerings.

Kanna: Wellness consumers favor natural solutions, so the legal botanical kanna, which gets dubbed “nature’s MDMA,” is starting to trend. It’s actually a far milder empatho-active (you “kanna” get high), derived from a South African plant that was used by indigenous people for healing, social and spiritual ceremonies for millennia. It’s touted for making people less socially anxious and more open to others, and the trends firm Stylus notes how it’s now getting woven into more edibles and supplements. Ka! Empathogenics is a first-of-its-kind kanna-powered “empathogenic supplement chew”; Bliss is an edible blending cannabis and kanna; Purelife sells “kanna-bliss” supplements; Galaxy Treats’ Delta-K gummies are kanna-packed; Party Bars wants you to vape kanna to unleash “your inner extrovert.”

Kava is also a mild empatho-active plant root long used in ancient and modern South Pacific cultures for its calming, social-lubricating effects. In the early 2000s, a number of countries (Germany, the US, Japan, etc.) banned it because of isolated reports that it may cause liver damage, but the reports were since discredited, and the bans have been lifted in pretty much every country. The stringent Cochrane Reviews found that kava root is an effective treatment for anxiety versus a placebo. Kava bars have been in global cities for years, but with the explosion in social mocktail bars and the rage for alcohol-replacing, botanical-packed “social elixirs,” they’re really taking off—from Australia to Florida. No longer hippie-ish but hip, the New York Post recently detailed the kava bar trend and the New York Times visited trendy Kava Social in Brooklyn. Kava is getting worked into more “social wellness cocktails,” whether Leilo’s kava seltzers or “Psychedelic Water,” which blew up on TikTok with Gen Z. Never mind that it has zero psychedelics in it. Sigh.

The research on psilocybin and MDMA’s potential impact on conditions such as social anxiety,

social phobia and autism will heat up. We can’t underestimate more people’s hunger for a larger cupboard of both strong and mild psychoactives, and psychedelics beyond cannabis and psilocybin. Will “smart shops,” which are devoted to lesser-known, legal psychedelic/psychoactive plants from around the globe become a new version of the cannabis dispensary—like Professor Seagull’s Smartshop recently opened in San Francisco? These smart shops have been common in Europe but will likely get a smartened-up wellness makeover.

We also can’t underestimate the force of young people seeking social spaces beyond bars, and their thirst for alternative “social elixirs” that loosen you up without the debilitating health effects of alcohol. (A Lancet study found that there was “no safe level of alcohol consumption.”) Scientists are innovating: Professor David Nutt of Imperial College London, one of the UK’s leading drug experts, has been working on a functional, alcohol-replacing ingredient that can recreate the social and mood effects of those first couple of cosmos—and has already launched Sentia. Think what opens up—in wellness, in the world—when booze and bars are out of (or less of) the equation: a wide, still mostly uncharted space for new social spaces and lounges—serving alt-social-elixirs.

A more “socialized” medicine?

No experience or institution may be as lonely as medicine: ten short minutes with a doctor and you’re on your own. So many studies show that chronic disease sufferers experience more loneliness. Decades of research concurs that the determinants of health are social and community-specific. To move the needle on poor health, (especially for marginalized populations), it’s about more than access to medicine: it’s about addressing everything, from the availability of healthy food, to social and mental health support, to decent housing. Change is brewing, with more signs and pronouncements that we’re entering a new era of more “social medicine,” with new concepts that remake the medical experience as something community-oriented, or even downright social.

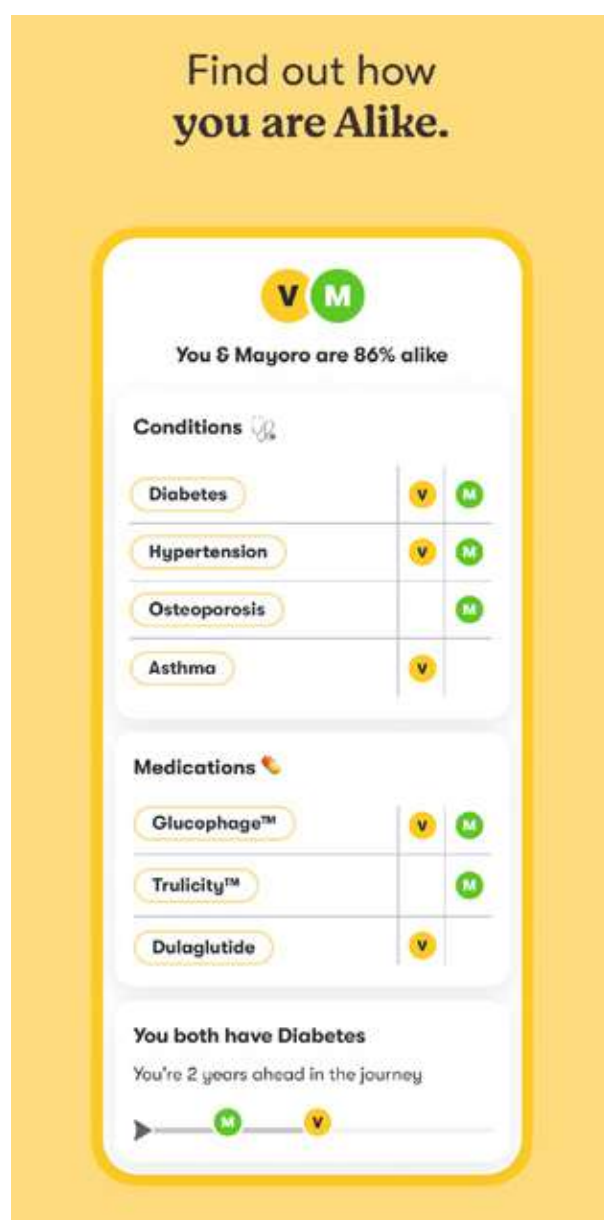
A huge topic globally in healthcare is the call for a transfer of power to community health workers and “community care”: creating a boots-on-the-ground workforce that can address the many complex patient needs beyond the strictly medical. (It was a hot topic at the [2022 HLTH conference](#).) [Diverse startups](#) like [CityBlock](#) are reimagining healthcare for the underserved (whether Medicaid recipients or minority populations) as radically more local and personal, because each patient’s “feelings and story matters.” Each patient gets a care team including primary care, but also a community health worker that spends time really talking to

them, so they can coordinate mental health and social support, safe housing, access to food, child- and pregnancy-care, by working closely with local agencies and resources. CityBlock is expanding across the US and was named by *Fortune* as one of their top-ten health innovators.

Living with chronic diseases (and really any medical condition) can be a lonely road. Doctors have no time. [Alike.Health](#), the brainchild of Israeli medical experts, is trying to change that with a “social medicine” model that helps patients make “meaningful, life-changing connections with people who share the same medical journey.” It uses crowdsourcing, AI and a complex machine learning platform to brilliantly match you to your closest “medical twin(s).” It factors in your conditions, comorbidities, procedures, treatments, symptoms and lab tests—and even “soft” data such as whether you exercise, how you sleep, what your intentions are—to then link you to people extremely “like” you. You talk with people who uniquely understand what you’re going through; you share info, tips and solutions. As Varda Shalev, MD, Alike.Health’s co-founder and chief medical officer, explained at the 2022 Global Wellness Summit, “The patient is *the* most unused resource in medicine...everyone has a medical problem, and people want to get help and give help...we are moving people from a doctor to a family...and people love it, they’re chatting in groups and individually (it’s an anonymous space) every day.” Alike.Health takes privacy to the extreme (it keeps not one bit of your Personal Identified information in its system), it’s free and is now available in the US, with plans to first expand to the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

The new psychedelic medicine clinics provide thought-provoking examples of how healthcare delivery can be reimagined as a kind of social

Living with medical conditions can be a lonely road. Alike.Health’s “social medicine” app helps patients make “life-changing connections with people who share the same medical journey.” Its complex machine learning platform brilliantly matches you to your closest “medical twins”—so you can travel the path together.



wellness club. More are breaking down the walls between healing modalities (psychedelic medicine treatments paired with wellness therapies)—while also breaking down the wall between patients in new social clinics. [Field Trip Health](#), ketamine clinics with nine locations in the US and Canada, [recently announced a “holistic membership program”](#) that reimagines ketamine therapy as a “one-year wellness journey,” where patients gather to also do meditation, nutrition classes, breathwork, somatic movement therapy, community talks and membership events.” [Nushama Psychedelic Wellness Clinic](#), as the [New York Times](#) put it, “treads the line between healthcare and a spa day”: they offer “group ketamine journeys” and plan to integrate breathwork and yoga classes. [Red Light Holland](#), a Canadian psilocybin brand, has [stated](#) that they envision a wellness-social model for the coming psychedelic wave, where people would go to social microdosing cafés and also do meditation and yoga. Whether you embrace psychedelics or not, these are suggestive models, because medical “journeys”—whether cancer treatment, stroke recovery/therapy, or pregnancy and fertility treatment—are lonely models. What would it look like to bring together medical treatment and wellness in an unabashedly social/group environment? We think more experimentation is ahead.

Community-based healthcare, platforms that connect patients with the exact same conditions, medical treatment delivered at social wellness clubs...all dramatically different models suggesting that the future of medicine will be less lonely.

THE FUTURE

For the last two decades we’ve had an uber-capitalist wellness industry that got us lost in a sea of products (all the supplements, gadgets and feel-good potions)—and that promoted wellness as a (lonely) “journey” of self-care, pampering “me time,” and stressful self-optimization. We’ve had two decades of “digital wellness” asking us to swap our IRL fitness class for a futuristic home mirror, a time when a sea of apps promising to cure our stress, isolation and insomnia often just meant some celeb singing lullabies into our EarPods at night.

This trend—the rise of a new social, human-connecting, community-building, loneliness-fighting wellness—is very much a return to the original modern vision of wellness. We began this report with a quote from Dr. Jack Travis, founder of the modern wellness movement (and the first wellness center in Mill Valley, California in 1975): “*Connection is the currency of wellness.*” It’s interesting to revisit Dr. Travis’s original 12-pillar paradigm of total wellbeing: 1) love and self-responsibility; 2) breathing; 3) sensing; 4) eating; 5) moving; 6) feeling; 7) thinking; 8) playing and working; 9) communicating; 10) intimacy; 11) finding meaning; and 12) transcending. The last two decades of wellness have been good at the food, movement, sensing, (and ok, breathing) pillars, but failed to tackle the pillars of love, feeling, thinking, playing, communicating and intimacy. This trend argues that the wellness world will now tackle these buried pillars of wellness in earnest. We’ll continue to see more wellness models that lead with social connection, “group belonging,” and experiences that teach us to communicate more meaningfully and open up emotionally. Connection has always been the DNA of wellness (the secret draw of a yoga class or retreat), but we somehow got lost. While this trend can be seen as a return to original wellness principles, it’s different, because the people-connecting, community-building moves will now happen with a new *intentionality*. It wasn’t as lonely in 1975.

The loneliness crisis is so profound that it now needs to be relentlessly fought across every sector, in every aspect of human life. Beyond the new social models in wellness, we covered everything from how a wave of startups is bringing human connection to the loneliest groups (whether the elderly or black men) to how governments are waking up to the need for loneliness-fighting policy. Much more is going on. We didn’t dive into the powerful movement to reverse our “anti-social” built environment (our neighborhoods, cities and housing)—but a new “social design” is now rewriting everything. We’re seeing a radical reimagining of cities so they spark spontaneous connection and support all kinds of gathering and new co-living, multigenerational housing models

that are expressly taking direct aim at loneliness by doing everything to bring young and old together (also helping solve the caregiving crisis). This can be seen in the Kallimos Communities in the US, or in Singapore's \$2.4 billion investment in three-generation housing developments that knit the young and old together in very creative ways. We didn't dive into how the hot topic in workplace wellness is creating some serious social connection inside and outside work, including workplaces being reimagined as wildly social spaces. This trend is unapologetically Luddite, questioning most—not all—of digital wellness' role in fighting loneliness, as we need real faces and real connection. But of course more loneliness-fighting tech is ahead: from the many robots offering "companionship" and support to the elderly to new wearables that don't track your steps, but your loneliness.

Everything has to be rethought through the lens of driving more human connection. All wellness businesses—whether in fitness, travel, beauty, wellness real estate—need to get creative about connecting people, getting them to meet and talk and bond.

There are forces that will conspire against the new bricks-and-mortar social wellness communities, collectives and clubs. The investment market rewards tech and apps and products that can scale and monetize big (that keep us "well lonely"). It's harder to scale social wellness clubs or a group conversation concept like Peoplehood, or a platform like 222, that arranges unique dinners for groups of strangers: They require real estate and human resources.

There's also the inhibiting psychological force of fear and squeamishness in both people and businesses. People have gotten numb to loneliness, they've lost their connection skills, they're more socially anxious, they may think they'll die of embarrassment in a class that asks them to be vulnerable, share their feelings, and open up to others. (Showing vulnerability is one of the lynchpins of the "science of connection.") Many wellness businesses may feel scared or uncomfortable trying to "get more social."

Everything in wellness has to be rethought through the lens of "more human connection." Businesses AND people must work as hard at the "social" as they do at fitness or healthy eating.



Fighting loneliness and reclaiming connection needs to be imagined as an all-out fight against these forces: against a “wellness capitalism” that wants to keep people isolated and just buying stuff. (And we must caution here against super-exclusive social wellness clubs that are playgrounds for the rich; if they don’t work towards more inclusivity they will ultimately be seen as institutions of “social disconnection.”) We need to fight against a tech world that wants to envelop us in evermore immersive metaverse; fight against our kneejerk discomfort in connecting with new people. We need to grasp that we must work as hard at the “social” as we do at fitness or healthy eating—and it’s even better for your health. We all have to embrace some cringe. (It’s interesting that our trend author, Skyler Hubler at Backslash, just named “cringe” a top trend: “Forget about being cool. In 2023, we’re letting it all hang out.”)

People’s hunger for real-life social wellness places and spaces is not just “revenge gathering” after a long pandemic. Loneliness, unfortunately, is no temporary trend. All the forces driving it—an increasingly single, “kinless,” aging, urban, remote work, digitally-engulfed world—are only expected to accelerate.

We’ve tried to paint the picture in many ways. Many ways are to come.

The future of wellness is social. It’s about connection. Again. Finally.



*Wellness travelers are changing course, and going to the source of ancient healing and learning, like the Nimiipuu people in north-central Idaho, and experiencing how to care for the land and for themselves.
Photo, Nez Percé Tourism*

Wellness + Travel:

From Global Smorgasbord to Hyper-Indigenous

By Elaine Glusac

INTRODUCTION

Wellness and wellness tourism have long resembled Disney's "It's a Small World," buffets of global experiences typically divorced from place. With a new critique of wellness as a profound cultural appropriator and greater emphasis on authenticity, Indigenous travel and going-to-the-cultural-source for wellness is on the rise.

Yoga, born in India, is now ubiquitous. Traditional Chinese medicine can be found from Beijing to Washington, DC And ayahuasca retreats have departed their Amazonian homelands. Modern wellness is built on such cultural appropriation, but in the wake of the pandemic and social justice movements, wellness travelers are changing course, seeking knowledge at the source.

FUELING THE TREND

After Covid lockdowns forced many to reevaluate their lives, travel transformed from generic bucket-list checking to engaging in personal pursuits such as delving deeply into hobbies or seeking sources of inspiration—from K-pop to Nordic cuisine or Andean textiles—in real life. At the same time, the social justice movement exposed the lack of diverse representation across governments and industries. Responding to these forces, travelers seeking deeper cultural experiences are showing interest in going to the source of ancient healing and learning from original people how to care for the land and for themselves.



Eco-tourists relish natural settings like the Mossman Gorge, located in the World Heritage listed Daintree Rainforest. Photo, Tourism Tropical North Queensland

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

The rise of Indigenous travel

On the global health rebound, Indigenous travel has been boosted both by increasing interest in nature and its original caregivers, and by traditional communities seizing opportunities to correct history and restore their cultures.

“Interest has never been higher,” said Keith Henry, the chief executive officer of the [Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada](#), which counts 1,900 Indigenous-owned travel businesses nationally. He cites the pandemic for heightening environmental awareness and educating the public to traditional practices in land management. Last year, for example, the Canadian government [earmarked](#) 340 million Canadian dollars to support Indigenous stewardship of protected lands. “There’s been an undeniable shift in understanding places and local Indigenous cultures as part of these lands.”

Today’s community-led Indigenous travel offerings appeal to travelers seeking inclusive, sustainable and regenerative travel experiences. “We talk about cultural revitalization and sustainability,” said Henry. Compared to sales analytics, “it’s a completely different set of metrics, contributing to the health and wellbeing of the community.”

This spring, group tour operator [Trafalgar Travel](#) will inaugurate its first tribal lands tour of South and North Dakota in partnership with local tribes. Business is booming at [Nez Perce Tourism](#) in Lewiston, Idaho, which offers jet boat tours, white water rafting and other adventures with Native American guides. “We are ensuring the true history is told and healing our people, who can be proud of who they are again by knowing their history,” said owner Stacia Morfin, a member of the Nimiipuu tribe.



Aboriginal tourism is thriving in Australia, where tourists can explore stargazing through storytelling or enjoy experiences with Indigenous-owned businesses. Photo, Australia Strait experience

Aboriginal tourism is a central platform of tourism campaigns in Australia, where Traditional Owners are successfully waging a Land Back movement. Last year, the government handed back nearly 9 million acres in North Queensland to the Gudang Yadhaykenu, Atambaya and Angkamuthi peoples who now control all the national parks of Cape York. In the Northern Territory, about half of vast Kakadu National Park was returned to its Traditional Owners. On the nearly 50,000 acres of northwest Queensland that was returned to the Gangalidda and Garawa people in November, new tours explore stargazing through Aboriginal storytelling. The Indigenous Women of the Great Barrier Reef, a ranger group that uses modern conservation technologies and ancient knowledge, recently won the million-pound Earthshot prize from the charitable Royal Foundation founded by England's Prince William.

"There are an estimated 476 million Indigenous people in about 5,000 Indigenous groups spread out all over the world," said Sara King, general manager of purpose for Intrepid Travel, a global tour operator and the industry's largest B Corporation, which plans to offer more than 100 indigenous experiences this year. "Travel can be a richer experi-

ence by being able to learn from these people, on their land and on their terms."

King added that travelers are more interested in "genuine and unique experiences that create connections and spark new ways of thinking and being" after the pandemic, and that these tours sustain Indigenous-owned businesses. New offerings include a hiking tour of Utah national parks led by a Native American guide and introductions to bush medicines of the Luritja and Pertame people in Australia's Uluru area.

Governmental tourism organizations amplifying Native voices include New Zealand, which promotes the Maori concept of "manaakitanga," or showing respect, while highlighting experiences with over 100 tribes in the country. This spring, Visit California will launch its Visit Native California campaign online, identifying travel opportunities among California's 109 federally-recognized tribes and tribal communities, such as dugout redwood canoe tours on the Klamath River with Yurok guides. The Alaska Travel Industry Association recently published its first Alaska Native Culture Guide that covers how travelers can engage with its First Peoples.

International exposure is credited for revitalizing the Native language in Alaska. Indigenous leaders note that land acknowledgements and codes of conduct are important to communities that are open to travelers. Photo, Alaska Cuktural Tours





Traditional “ryokans,” or hot springs inns, are booming in Japan. Surrounded by nature, guests recharge by relaxing in warm pools and eating local, seasonal cuisine. Photos, Azumi Setoda

“We see multiple levels of benefits by sharing our values and culture with out-of-state visitors for our Alaskan community,” said Russell Dick, chief executive officer of [Huna Totem Corporation](#), which built a sustainable cruise port at [Icy Strait Point](#) on Alaska’s popular Inside Passage and runs tour programming. “We’ve seen considerable growth in cultural aptitude,” he added, crediting international exposure for revitalizing the Native language and for providing opportunities for youth to travel abroad.

Interest in original cultures includes Indigenous wellness practices, from purification ceremonies to food and nutrition. Building on his research into “Blue Zones,” or regions home to the healthiest communities worldwide, author Dan Buettner recently released [The Blue Zones American Kitchen](#), focusing on plant-based traditions including those of Indigenous people. The [James Beard Awards](#) celebrated [Owamni](#), a Native American restaurant

in Minneapolis from “Sioux Chef” Sean Sherman as 2022’s best new restaurant.

Writing in [Eating Well](#), the chef, author and Native food historian Lois Ellen Frank hailed this period in culinary history as “New Native Cuisine,” noting “we are witnessing a reclamation, revitalization and re-indigenization of ancestral Native American foods and foodways.”

Not every Indigenous group welcomes the attention of travelers. Leaders say land acknowledgements and codes of conduct are first steps in bolstering communities that are open to travelers.

Cultural authenticity

Culturally-rooted wellness experiences globally are also inspiring travelers to go to the source for authenticity.

[Black Tomato](#), a luxury travel agency, defines the

trend as “origin” travel, which “offers a chance to dig deeper and look closer at our increasingly commoditized world.” According to Hilton hotel’s 2023 [trends report](#), travelers are seeking engaging and purposeful experiences, with nearly half reporting seeking immersion into local cultures.

In Japan, “ryokans,” or hot springs inns traditionally used for therapeutic purposes or “toji,” are booming. According to the [Japan Ryokan and Hotel Association](#), toji involves recuperating and recharging by staying in an inn surrounded by nature, relaxing in warm pools and eating local, seasonal cuisine known as “washoku.”

[Hyatt Hotels](#) recently announced a partnership with [Kiraku](#), known for revitalizing traditional buildings in Japan, to build a new brand of ryokans called [ATONA](#), coming in 2025. It is the latest in the race to update and expand ryokans. The new Azumi ryokan brand from Adrian Zecha, founder of Aman Resorts, has its first location [Azumi Setoda](#) in the Setouchi region of western Japan.

“Ryokans tick almost all the boxes that matter

to today’s wellness traveler,” says Cathy Chon, a managing partner with Finn Partners and the founder of Hong Kong-based CatchOn, a marketing and communications division specializing in travel, wellness and design. “Many have natural hot springs baths in their premises, or are in close proximity to a public one. Their ‘kaiseki’ tradition celebrates seasonality, which means you’re eating very thoughtful and healthy meals. They are often located in the midst of nature with an atmosphere ideal for meditation, mindfulness and forest bathing. And lastly, they are the quintessence of ‘omotenashi,’ which describes the Japanese way of caring for guests.”

In Qatar, the new [Zulal Wellness Resort](#) practices traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine, a holistic path to wellness using traditional healing practices such as detoxifying “hijama,” or cupping, and herbal remedies alongside lifestyle guidance in nutrition, movement and rest. Reflecting the Qatari emphasis on family, wellness rituals and activities are age-based, beginning in infancy.

In Europe, practitioners are channeling ancient

FORESTIS, a mountain retreat in Italy’s Dolomite Mountains where Celts once thrived, offers Wyda yoga, a Celtic movement therapy focusing on breathing and holding long poses in the forest. Photo, FORESTIS





Adjacent to the Daintree National Park, Cassowary Falls offers bespoke rainforest experiences and adventure tours. Photo, Tourism Tropical, North Queensland, Australia



Celtic spirituality rooted in nature. [FORESTIS](#), a mountain retreat in Italy's Dolomite Mountains where Celts once thrived, offers [Wyda yoga](#), a Celtic movement therapy that focuses on breathing and holding long poses in the forest. The Coach House Spa at the English country-house hotel [Beaverbrook](#) dabbles in Druidry, named for the learned class of ancient Celts whose nature-based practices revolved around the seasons and events like the solstices. [Celtic Druids Deep Healing in Nature](#) experiences teach herbal remedies and communing with trees.

Restricted to domestic tourism during the pandemic, many in Asia turned to traditional temple stays. "The younger generation is rediscovering the merits of steeping in tea ceremonies, meditating all day, growing vegetables or hanging out with monks," said Cathy Chon, noting that participating [temples in Korea](#) have grown from about 30 to 130 in the past decade.

The home of yoga, which has proliferated worldwide, India aims to bring devotees back for healing. Last year, the World Health Organization and the government of India announced a \$250-million [center for traditional medicine](#) to be built in Jamnagar for the study and advancement of ancient practices such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine and herbal treatments, alongside modern medicine. WHO estimates 80% of the world's population use traditional medicine.



The skyrocketing interest in Indigenous travel includes wellness practices, from purification ceremonies to native foods. Photo, Nez Perce Tourism

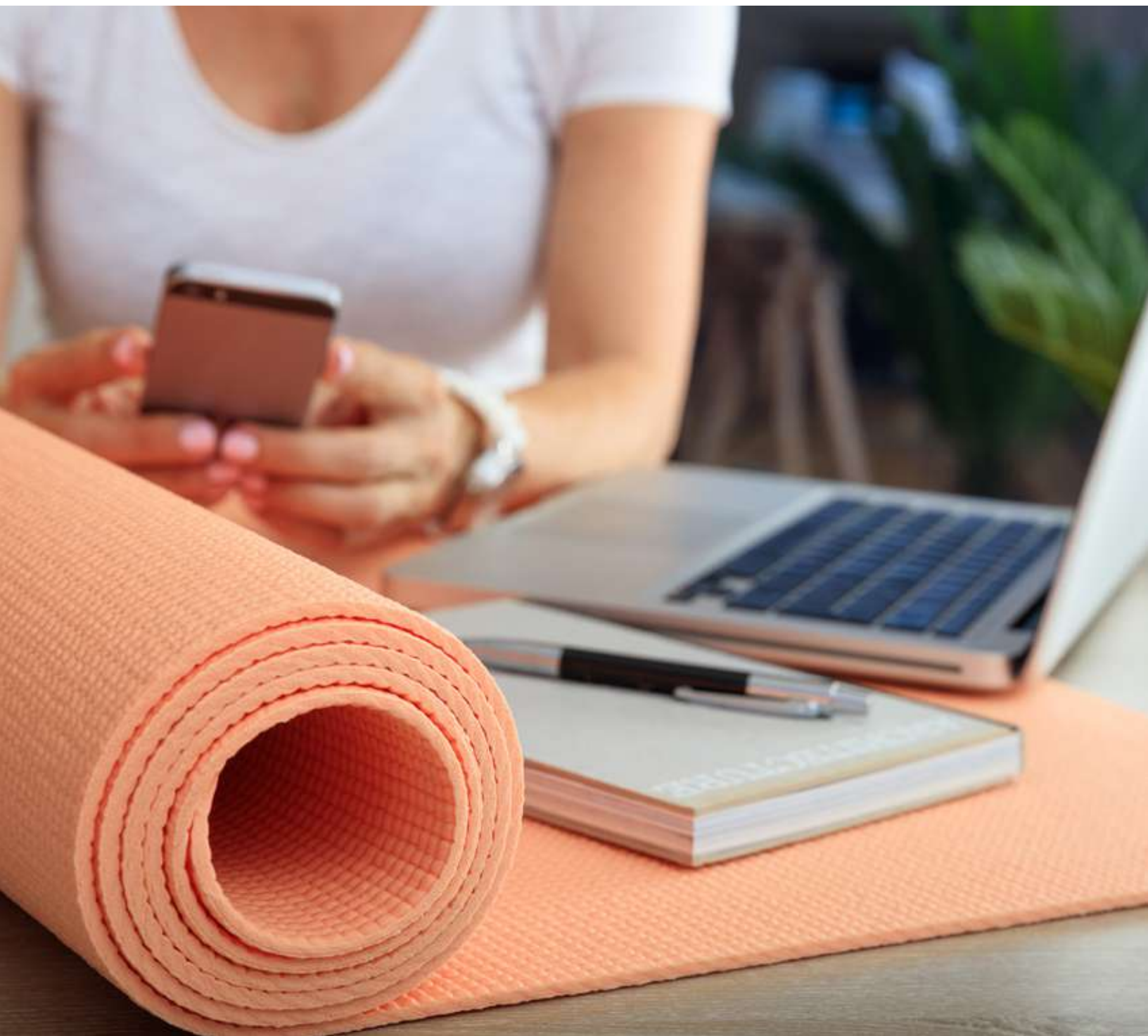
THE FUTURE

Authenticity has long been the holy grail for travelers who have often settled for less. But the growing power and cultural and political weight of Indigenous people has reinvented places that travelers once thought they knew. This change is happening at a time when travelers are keen to be a part of the regenerative tourism movement. Travel knits the world together while celebrating our differences, which will continue to be a source of fascination for the culturally curious.



Photos, top: Walkabout Cultural Adventures - Tourism Tropical North Queensland; Bottom: Australia Rainforestation Nature Park





Employees' worsening mental health and remote work models are demanding a new approach to workplace wellness. And employers are heeding the call. Photo, iStock

Wellness + Workplace:

Workplace Wellness Finally Starts to Mean Something

By Skyler Hubler and Cecelia Girr

INTRODUCTION

Does the word “wellness” applied to the workplace make you roll your eyes? We wouldn’t be surprised if it did.

Since the 1980s, employers have been casually tossing around the word “wellness” with little to show for it. Giving you a day off? Wellness. A pop-up yoga class that interferes with your 2pm meeting? That should do it.

The truth of the matter is, work and wellness haven’t ever really gone hand in hand. Hustle culture praised us for pushing our limits and punished us for logging off after a mere eight hours. Unfair pay, discrimination, and workplace harassment have long highlighted just how broken our systems are. And let’s not forget about layoffs. Where is wellness when businesses have to let people go during a global pandemic?

Ultimately, a company’s version of “wellness” has always been at odds with that of its workers. But

times are changing. Fed up employees, worsening mental health, and remote work models are demanding a new approach. And employers are heeding the call with everything from improved vacation policies to gender-specific benefits. Workplace wellness is (finally) going from a false promise to a meaningful plan of action.

FUELING THE TREND

- Overwork continues to be on the rise, with 70% of knowledge workers around the world having experienced burnout in the last year.¹
- Remote work is here to stay for the foreseeable future, which is only intensifying work-life blur.
- A growing number of companies (Tesla, Exxon, Shein, etc.) are coming under fire as employees speak out against toxic workplaces. One firm is even guiding people through the process of sharing their workplace horror stories with the media.



Seventy percent of knowledge workers worldwide report burnout at work. Photo, Shutterstock

- Labor shortages are shifting the power balance in favor of employees, meaning employers have to work extra hard to attract talent.
- Wellness and mental health initiatives are among the top job requirements for Gen Z—who will account for 30% of the workforce by 2030.²

1. Unsubscribing From The Work-To-Live Mentality

If you've been paying attention to the news recently, you know that workers are fed up and ready to put life first. We first saw signs of this in early 2021 with "The Great Resignation"—sparking fear in employers everywhere. But were people actually leaving the workforce altogether? Most signs point to no.

The *real* "Great Resignation" has been happening on a more subversive, cultural front. Rather than actually dropping out of the workforce, younger generations have been resigning from work by mentally checking out and setting boundaries like never before. In China, youth are no longer just "lying flat" (doing the bare minimum required to get by), they're now "letting it rot" (giving up completely). "I have been taught since childhood to be diligent and never give up. But I discovered

in adulthood that this is extremely exhausting. Why can't we slow down? Why do we always have to fight to get ahead?" asks 28-year-old Yan Jie. This same sentiment is being reflected in one of the biggest buzzwords of 2022, Quiet Quitting, whereby Gen Z is protecting their mental health by refusing to go above and beyond at work.

Underneath all of this, a growing anti-work movement is brewing. The r/antiwork subreddit, whose motto is "unemployment for all, not just for the rich," has 2.4 million members and counting. A recent global study found that 38% of workers hate their jobs so much that they wouldn't wish it on their worst enemy.³ And sabbaticals have tripled in the past four years—largely due to pandemic doom motivating people to make the most of their life.⁴ Perhaps most notable is the fact that unlike before, people are no longer treating this time off as something to be ashamed of. Instead, they're proudly displaying work gaps on their LinkedIn profile thanks to the platform's new Career Breaks feature.

2. Saying Goodbye To Superficial "Solutions"

With workers making it clear that their mental health comes first, superficial wellness "solutions" will no longer cut it. While nap boxes in the office might sound like a nice idea, for instance, they're really just a band-aid for the fact that people are

burnt out and unable to get enough sleep at home. Other not-so-effective attempts include rebranding sick days as “wellness days,” having employees wear badges that signal their level of burnout, and combating Zoom fatigue with VR hangouts—all of which circle the issue while completely failing to address the root of the problem.

As the bar for workplace wellness rises, employers are being forced to up their game. Looking forward, we ask: what does it *really* mean to support health and wellness in the workplace? Especially when that workplace becomes our living room?

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

1. New Structures Are Replacing Work-Life Blur With Boundaries

Well, for starters, it means restructuring work as a whole to create a healthier balance. Enter the four-day workweek. While not a new concept, support for the four-day workweek skyrocketed in 2022. The UK started a six-month pilot program hailed as the biggest of its kind; Spain launched its own pilot in December; and Belgian employees won the right to decide whether they want to work four or five days a week. Results continue to be overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority of companies from the latest global study saying they would not go back to a five-day work week.⁵



Proposed vertical “nap boxes” in Japan are also seen as examples of superficial solutions for employee fatigue. Photo, Itoki Corp. and Koyoju Gohan KK (Japan)



Employees see superficial wellness “solutions” like “burnout badges” as band-aids that fail to address the root of the problem. Photo, Onken Burnout Badges (Japan)

Beyond work itself, employers are also rethinking PTO policies to ensure that people actually come back rejuvenated. According to a recent poll from Fishbowl by Glassdoor, 54% of professionals say they can’t fully unplug from work when they take paid time off.⁶ Part of the problem is that the pings and dings don’t stop when you’re away. And even if you do turn off work notifications, you can’t necessarily turn off the stress of falling behind and coming back to a mountain of tasks to catch up on. Recognizing the struggle, more employers are now beginning to offer company-wide time off in hopes that everyone will be able to enjoy a collective reset. Last year, for example, PwC gave its 60,000 US employees two annual week-long breaks in addition to their vacation time. Similarly, Spotify shut down all its offices for a paid “wellness week” in November—encouraging teams to recharge and focus on their wellbeing. An even more novel



Employers are rethinking paid time off and wellness policies, offering more meaningful perks than ping-pong tables. Salesforce's lease of Trailblazer Ranch allows employees to gather and meet in person. Photo, Trailblazer Ranch

experiment is being run by Indian tech company Dream 11, which forces employees to pay a fee of 1 lakh (\$1,200) if they disturb their co-workers who are on leave.

Thirdly, better balance is also being achieved through new worker protections. Last year, 65,000 government workers in Belgium earned the “right to disconnect,” meaning they can no longer be required to respond to work-related emails or phone calls after work hours. Belgium’s move follows the lead of other European countries like Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Ireland—signaling a much larger push for boundaries. Meanwhile, the Netherlands is turning its attention to remote work. Last July the Dutch parliament approved legislation to make work-from-home a legal right, making the Netherlands one of the first countries to promote remote work flexibility by law.

From flex-scheduling, to protected PTO, to government-backed boundaries, flashy wellness perks are slowly but surely being replaced with solutions that make a worker’s day-to-day life more manageable. Because ultimately, employees

deserve much more than a one-off wellness day. They deserve jobs that don’t strain their mental health in the first place.

2. Wellness Benefits Are Moving Beyond The Office

Offsites to Remember

With in-office perks like ping-pong tables, massage chairs, and free snacks galore now off the table, companies are being forced to attract talent with newer, more meaningful wellness offerings. But that doesn’t mean they’ve given up on in-person gatherings altogether. It just means there’s more pressure to make offsite events count. Software giant Salesforce is rising to the occasion with a multiyear lease of Trailblazer Ranch, a high-end 75-acre work-and-wellness center where employees will gather to bond with one another and connect with the Salesforce mission. “We’ve hired thousands of employees who have never met in person,” notes Co-CEO Marc Benioff. “Trailblazer Ranch will give us and our stakeholders a way to forge deeper relationships and experience our culture in a whole new way.”

As offsites become the new return-to-office, wellness destinations will have a huge opportunity to rethink their offerings accordingly. And these days, the less expected the better. A growing number of companies are already disrupting norms by opening corporate accounts at social wellness clubs like Remedy Place, where colleagues can hold meetings in ice baths and infrared saunas. And the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa is luring in work groups with a new full moon meditation series. Looking forward, expect fewer stuffy conference rooms, and more out-of-the-box experiences that can't be replicated online.

Gender-Specific Benefits

Another major area of progress is wellness benefits geared toward specific genders. For women, this is largely coming to life through a rise in reproductive health benefits. We saw employers rally in support of women when the US Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion in June, with several major companies including Starbucks, Amazon, Meta, Microsoft, and more reaffirming their commitment to covering travel expenses for employees who could no longer get access to reproductive care in their state.

At the same time, fertility benefits are finally being recognized as an essential—a long overdue

shift considering one in six couples worldwide are affected by infertility⁷ and 68% of employees would switch jobs for better fertility benefits.⁸ One employer leading by example is Canadian management solutions firm iQmetrix. In addition to offering workers \$25,000 of lifetime coverage for fertility treatments, iQmetrix is doubling down with holistic support in the form of flexible hours to accommodate treatments, emotional care, and time off as needed. The progress isn't limited to white collar companies, either. Walmart, the largest private employer in the US, recently partnered with fertility startup Kindbody to offer family-planning benefits such as coverage for IVF, surrogacy, and adoption.

And of course, we can't forget about menopause. A historically overlooked and unmentioned condition, menopause is rightfully gaining the attention of businesses across the globe. Perhaps it's because worldwide menopause-related productivity losses top \$150 billion a year.⁹ Or, maybe it's because a quarter of women are more likely to retire early due to menopause.¹⁰ But regardless of the reason, it's a refreshing departure from the silence and stigma of years past. Carrot Fertility rolled out menopause services on its platform earlier last year; a growing number of European employers, including Bank of Ireland, have begun introducing paid menopause policies; and some of Australia's largest unions

Some companies are opening accounts at social wellness clubs like Remedy Place for meetings in ice baths and infrared saunas. Photo, Remedy Place





Fertility benefits are also being recognized as an essential. Walmart partners with fertility startup Kindbody to offer family planning benefits such as coverage for IVF, surrogacy and adoption. Photo, Kindbody

are pushing for menopause leave to become a nationwide standard.

While women's health appeared to be the focus of employers in 2022 (and for good reason), expect more support for men and people in transition in the years ahead as well. Men are less likely to participate in employer-sponsored wellness programs¹¹ and are also more resistant to seeking mental health support¹²—meaning a more focused approach will be needed to drive their engagement. Trans and gender-nonconforming employees will see greater resources, too, with inclusive healthcare now recognized as an essential tool to attract diverse talent.

Psychedelic Perks

The final and most forward-looking development is the start of psychedelic therapy as a workplace benefit. Enthea, the first provider of insurance plans for psychedelic healthcare, recently raised \$2 million to launch its services into 40 markets across the US this year. Enthea's plans currently

cover ketamine therapy, and will expand to include MDMA and psilocybin-assisted therapies as they become FDA-approved in the coming years.

Another company, Field Trip Health, is eyeing mass layoffs as an opportunity to expose more people to the benefits of psychedelic treatment. In November, Field Trip announced that it would provide a free month of ketamine therapy for those who were laid off from Twitter, Meta, Stripe, and more. File that under news we didn't see coming.

THE FUTURE

With all of the above, it's clear that workplace wellness means more than it ever has before. But there's still a ways to go. Looking even further into the future, we believe the next era of work is one of reform. One where company investments in wellness aren't seen as a sacrifice, but as a win-win for both workers and businesses. And where workplaces go from wellness-wannabees to actual forces for change.

More specifically, we predict that:

- Titles like chief wellness officer and chief heart officer will be deemed meaningless unless backed by concrete plans and proof of improved worker wellbeing.
- Companies will have no choice but to address the realities of workload as more studies confirm the astronomical costs of employee burnout.
- We'll move away from one-size-fit-all benefits towards more customizable solutions. For instance, what if every employee was allotted a certain number of wellness points to spend as they wish?
- Inclusivity will become recognized as a key component of wellness. Think office designs for the neurodiverse and even more benefits specific to race, gender, and religion.

Perhaps the most radical way of thinking about workplace wellness is this: What would it take to create an environment where people leave work every day feeling even better than when they arrived? Though ambitious, it's a future we would all do well to strive for.

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- 8 Win Fertility, "Don't lose your top talent: boost employee retention by offering family-building benefits"
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The clean beauty narrative and the demand for transparency are transforming the beauty industry.
Photo, LYMA

Wellness + Beauty:

From “Clean” to Biotech Beauty

By Jessica Smith

INTRODUCTION

As the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic begins to subside, one thing has become clear: science is king. And in the world of beauty, this shift towards data-backed products has never been more evident. With the ongoing debate around “clean” beauty muddying the waters for consumers, the search for science-based solutions has never been more pressing.

Over the past decade, the beauty industry has undergone a transformation driven by the clean beauty narrative and the increasing demand for transparency. Consumers have become more aware of the ingredients, effectiveness, and overall impact of beauty products on their wellbeing, leading to a shift towards radical openness and responsible practices in the industry. The emergence of the “age of the expert,” a phrase coined by The Future Laboratory, is leading to a focus on efficacy, research, and evidence-led information in the beauty and wellness sectors. From clean beauty to

biotech beauty, this trend is about the evolution from greenwashing and false claims to medical, bio-positive and tech-forward methods.

“Misinformation and greenwashing have led to a demand for expertise and driven the ‘healthification’ of the beauty industry,” says Olivia Houghton, creative foresight editor at The Future Laboratory. She also notes that, “during the pandemic, we were pushed closer to science, data and experts. We faced daily briefings, became familiar with government advisors, and were fed data regularly. As a result, we were exposed to this new world of science and thus became more forgiving of it.”

The beauty and wellness industry has an opportunity to change how consumers view synthetic ingredients by using science and technology to secure supply chains and pave the way for innovations. In order to succeed in this rapidly evolving market, it is essential for companies to place a high importance on science, expertise, and earning the trust of their customers.

FUELLING THE TREND

Trust in science

The post-pandemic focus on health and wellness has prompted consumers to scrutinize the science behind beauty products and seek out those backed by research and clinical studies. As a result, consumers are becoming more aware of the potential impact of ingredients on their skin and overall health. Experts, including doctors and scientists, are increasingly seen as trusted sources. In fact, a study conducted by [Gallup World Poll](#) found that 45% of respondents had “a lot” of trust in doctors, and 43% had “a lot” of trust in scientists.

Synthetic versus natural debate

The clean beauty narrative has misled consumers with buzzwords, but there’s a shift towards lab-based, science-backed products that are safe and sustainable. Consumers are showing more interest in clinical brands, which account for 34% of skincare category sales in the United States according to [NPD Group](#).

Dr. Maryam Zamani, oculoplastic surgeon, facial aesthetics doctor, and founder of [MZ Skin](#) says that the industry “scares consumers into thinking that chemicals are bad. Most of the products available to purchase in the EU and USA go through a stringent series of tests to determine that they are safe to buy and use. I tend on the side of a high safety profile and efficacy of ingredients and treatments rather than what is trendy.”

To address the concerns of younger generations about skincare, Dr. Barbara Sturm has launched a Microbiotic Collection. Photo, Dr. Barbara Sturm Skincare



Beauty fluency

The proliferation of misinformation in the beauty industry, coupled with consumers’ growing trust in science has spawned a new breed of highly educated and informed individuals. This trend is being observed by [Net a Porter](#), an online luxury fashion retailer who found that consumers are searching for specific ingredients that can target their needs. According to the brand, searches for beauty ingredients have increased by almost 700% since 2020.

A-list backlash

The market for beauty products has been flooded with celebrity-endorsed brands, leading to frustration among [industry insiders](#) and science-forward brands like [Deciem](#). Many have expressed concerns that these celebrity-backed brands, which are often overpriced and heavily marketed, are taking up valuable space in the market and detracting from the credibility of true experts in the field.

Cost of living

The current economic climate is driving consumers to seek value in their beauty purchases and are demanding products that can demonstrate their worth through proof of their claims. According to Andrew McDougall, Mintel’s Director of Beauty and Personal Care Research, “brands will need to justify the value of their products, which comes back to substantiation and validation of claims.”

Conscious consumption

There has been a drive in the industry towards monitoring the environmental, social and governance impact of cosmetics, skincare and haircare ingredients. According to [Shopify](#), 63% of consumers are more likely to recommend a product if they believe it is less harmful to the environment. As a result, the demand for planetary-conscious beauty products is rising.

Pre-ageing over anti-ageing

After the pandemic, ageing is considered a privilege, and there is a global drive to live healthier lives. As

a result, there is a shift from anti-aging to pre-aging driven by consumer priorities towards long-term, preventative beauty and wellness rituals. A recent study from [Euromonitor International](#) indicates that more than 50% of consumers define *beauty* as “looking healthy.”

Accelerating technologies

Advancing technology is driving the acceleration of biotechnology in the beauty industry, with costs for gene sequencing dropping significantly. Jasmina Aganovic, CEO of Arcaea, a biotechnology-driven beauty company, states that DNA sequencing once required machines as huge as a room and cost a couple of million dollars, but now, as technology progresses, costs have come down significantly and can range between \$10,000 to \$50,000. Aganovic notes that this is because DNA sequencing is cheaper and fermentation technologies are improving.

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

Into this landscape, beauty and wellness brands are highlighting their expertise, efficacy, and use of biotech in order to demonstrate their capabilities and earn consumer trust.

Industry-wide education

Amid growing concerns about the legitimacy of claims and scientific credibility in the beauty space, there is a rise in beauty brands that are educating and training their consumers. [The No7 Beauty Company](#) has partnered with the British Beauty Council on a “Science of Skincare” education program designed to upskill social media creators. The UK-based program consists of six modules, created by ed tech firm Learning with Experts and backed by beauty experts and dermatologists, including beauty expert Alison Young, journalist Alice Hart-Davis, skincare expert Diya Ayodele and dermatologist and content creator Dr. Aamna Adel.

To address the concerns of younger generations about skincare, Dr. Barbara Sturm has launched a [Microbiotic Collection](#). In addition, the brand plans to educate young beauty consumers through



Biotechnology-driven Arcaea bridges biology with DNA sequencing, bioinformatics and more to create sophisticated beauty technologies. Photo, Arcaea

its online skin school and college ambassador program and curated product range. Meanwhile, UK solid skincare start-up [SBTRCT](#) is also focused on education in the beauty industry. The company is providing training materials and seminars to retail staff and offering free webinars to explain the concept of microbiome-friendly products. Benjamin Grace, the founder of SBTRCT, believes that “education is crucial for simplifying sustainable beauty messages and that collaboration among brands can help ensure consistent messages are communicated,” as he recently explained on [Cosmetics Business](#).

Medi-beauty technology

Brands that once started in the health and wellness space are evolving for the beauty consumer with tools and technologies that blend the two. For example, the [TheraFace PRO](#), which coins itself as the “ultimate device for facial health”, uses percussive therapy to reduce facial tension and relax facial muscles, as well as skin cleansing and rejuvenating light therapy.

Similarly, the [LYMA](#) skincare laser represents a significant advancement in the field of aesthetic



A new generation of science-based brands use a more evidence-based approach to beauty. Photo, Kind of Biome

medicine. Initially developed for use in medical settings, the technology utilizes low-level laser therapy (LLLT) to effectively target a wide range of skin concerns, including wrinkles, pigmentation, and scars. The ability to access this clinic-grade power at home represents a major development in the field, providing consumers with a convenient and cost-effective alternative to traditional in-clinic treatments.

Founder Lucy Goff explains that the technology has been used for decades to treat a host of medical issues as diverse as rebuilding cartilage and healing tendons.

Made for today's consumers who are results-driven, Goff notes that "historically, the beauty industry was all about selling ideals and over-promising. Today's consumers want transparency and to understand how formulas work; they want to get the inside track on the science."

Alt-pharma substances

The rise of science is impacting ingredient formulations, with brands creating products inspired by alternative pharmaceutical-grade substances.

One example is American skincare brand S'eau Prima's Foundational Face Mist, which contains hypochlorous acid, a molecule found in white blood cells that activates the immune system's ability to heal itself and is used in topical treatments for wounds. It can improve its moisture barrier and provide soothing, protective effects

against external stressors when applied to the skin. According to Spate, a consumer trends platform, "hypochlorous acid" receives over 3,000 monthly searches, with a 23% increase since last year.

Other emerging brands also using hypochlorous acid in their product formulations are Tower 28 Beauty's SOS Intensive Rescue Serum, Briotech's Topical skin spray and Twenty/Twenty Beauty's Easy On The Eyes Daily Hygiene Facial Spray.

Bio-based formulas

The beauty industry is increasingly turning to biotechnology to create more sustainable and effective products. Briotech beauty products are made using fermentation and cell culture techniques, which can produce ingredients or finished products with higher concentrations of bioactives. This means they can be up to 100 times more effective than natural extracts.

Leading the way, companies such as Biossance, C16 Biosciences, Evolved By Nature, BIOEFFECT, Codex and One Ocean Beauty are pioneering the integration of natural ingredients with advanced science to create innovative solutions.

For example, Codex Beauty replaces previously harvested ingredients like comfrey and calendula with biotech-manufactured equivalents. Evolved By Nature's Activated Silk 33B technology uses peptides from renewably sourced silk for skin care, textiles, and medical materials. C16 Biosciences is also tackling environmental issues by fermenting a sustainable alternative to palm oil in a lab setting rather than relying on the deforestation caused by palm oil farming.

THE FUTURE

By the 2030s, biome-kind beauty will end the natural versus science debate, the link between health and beauty will continue to converge, and biotechnology will have countless applications making it a new tool for expressive biology.

Biome-kind beauty

As consumers become more aware of the environmental impact of naturally derived cosmetics



The beauty industry is increasingly turning to biotechnology. Codex Beauty replaces natural ingredients with biotech-manufactured equivalents. Photo, Codex

and the industry gains a clearer understanding of the science of beauty, the definition of “clean” is likely to change. David Koo Hjalmarsson, CEO and founder of [Kind to Biome](#), believes we will see more beauty products made with the skin microbiome in mind.

The microbiome has been a popular topic in the beauty, food, and beverage industries for the past decade, with many brands launching microbiome-inspired products. However, Hjalmarsson notes that “previous innovations in this area were often based on ‘hero ingredients’ like pre-, pro-, and post-biotics, and were more focused on marketing than on the science behind them.” He says we are “seeing a new generation of science-based brands developing skin microbiome-focused products using a more evidence-based approach.” Hjalmarsson explains that “skin-natural ingredients are more natural to the skin than nature-derived ingredients,” and he predicts that this will drive the “adoption of biotechnology and end the debate between natural and synthetic ingredients.” Hjalmarsson also notes that current forecasts for the skin microbiome market, “expected to reach \$2 billion by 2029, are underestimated.” Instead, he believes that “the market will be worth around

\$15 billion by 2029, as more brands adopt a skin microbiome-focused approach to product development.”

Skin-health connection

As the trend of prioritizing science in beauty continues to grow, the connection between skin health and overall physical health is becoming more apparent. Dr. Maryam Zamani, an oculoplastic surgeon, facial aesthetics doctor and founder of [MZ Skin](#), states that “our skin reflects our physical and emotional health and is greatly influenced by lifestyle choices such as diet, exercise, stress management, and sleep.”

This is further supported by research such as a 2019 pilot study from the [University of California San Francisco](#), which found that regularly moisturizing the skin, the body’s largest organ, can help to prevent age-related conditions such as Alzheimer’s, heart disease, and diabetes.

Additionally, [research](#) in topical probiotics suggests that beauty products may have the potential to be used in conjunction with traditional medicine to support treatment. Dr. Kaycee Reyes, a dermatologist with a master’s degree in



Tech-forward brand One Skin believes that it is possible to reprogram skin cells to a younger state without resorting to plastic surgery. Photos, One Skin

preventive medicine from Germany, is interested in incorporating microbiome research into her practice at Luminisce. According to Reyes, “it is not just about the aesthetic and the outside; diseases are coming from within.”

The end of ageing

In the future, beauty brands will aim to address the underlying cause of ageing rather than just its symptoms.

Researchers at the [Babraham Institute](#) have successfully restored the skin cells of a 53-year-old woman to match the profile of a 30-year-old. Professor Wolf Reik of the Babraham Institute stated, “the long-term goal is to extend health span rather than lifespan, allowing people to age in a healthier way.”

[One Skin](#), a tech-forward brand, is taking a molecular approach to skin longevity and believes that it is possible to reprogram skin cells to a younger state without resorting to plastic surgery.

Cosmetics and fragrances could also contain ingredients that address some visible signs of ageing, such as nonenal scent, which is a naturally occurring compound found in increasing levels in the body with age and has been linked to skin damage and thinning. A [recent study](#) from cosmetics giant Shiseido has found that “masking nonenal, another age-related malodour, could control skin cell damage and thinning”, and researchers are exploring the use of fragrances to suppress this compound.

Expressive biology

In the future, biology will be used as a means of self-expression. Jasmina Aganovic, CEO of Arcaea biotechnology-driven beauty company, believes that harnessing the ability of microbes to adapt, self-replicate, and repair could make this possible.

Arcaea is working to create a new foundation for the beauty industry that views biology as a tool for self-expression. The company will use DNA sequencing, biological engineering, and fermentation technology to grow new ingredients and product experiences. In addition, by culturing sustainable ingredients, Aganovic hopes to create a new supply chain for the beauty industry that does not rely on petrochemicals or the depletion of natural resources.

Aganovic and her team are also exploring how proteins can alter the shape of hair. For example, imagine shampoos that create waves, curls or straight hair as washed and sunscreens that can make skin more resistant to UVA and UVB rays using sun-protective molecules and microbes.

Meanwhile, at French fragrance house [Givaudan](#), scientists are using biotech to recreate scents that are too precious to be used in commercial perfumes. Senior perfumer Stephen Nilsen explains that as biotech improves, it will be possible to synthesize and mass produce these complex molecules affordably and sustainably.

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Wellness Festival Singapore Mornings in the Woods is a forest bathing journey located at Jewel Changi Airport in Singapore. The experience reflects the growing demand for wellness tourism. Photo, Shutterstock

Wellness + Cities:

Urban Infrastructure Just Might Save Cities

By Robbie Hammond and Omar Toro-Vaca

INTRODUCTION

Cities across the globe are at an inflection point.

The challenges arise from all sides: The widespread decline in people's health and the overall decrease in healthcare quality have exacerbated an economic crisis that is most sharply seen in cities. However, some cities and businesses have discovered a solution: building wellness into the very infrastructure of urban centers.

We define "urban wellness infrastructure" as the melding of capital improvements and business opportunities with programs that address social, mental, and physical health. To succeed, cities need to create wellbeing on a scale greater than individuals can typically access themselves. Successful economies are now reorienting toward urban wellness infrastructure, building a more resilient and more vibrant vision of what a city can be.

Healthy communities make prosperous cities. Research increasingly shows the strong relationship between

the health of a population and the strength of the economy. This has put the importance of building an accessible urban wellness infrastructure front and center in order to accelerate cities' post-pandemic recovery, and develop healthier, happier city dwellers.

FUELING THE TREND

Rapid growth in the global wellness sector:

The global wellness economy was valued at \$4.4 trillion in 2020, according to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI). Although as detailed in the 2021 GWI research report "The Global Wellness Economy: Looking Beyond COVID," many sectors experienced a dip due to the pandemic, there is no denying the rapid growth of the global wellness economy over the past decades. Upward trends abound across all sectors of the wellness economy. The yoga industry is currently valued at over \$88 billion worldwide and it's projected to grow up to a \$215 billion by 2025. A growing awareness around

meditation practices, combined with a surge in mindfulness mobile applications integrating technology to attract broader audiences, has resulted in an estimated mindfulness meditation application global market value of \$533.2 million in 2022. And employees have begun to expect their workplaces not only to accommodate wellness practices but to support them: The 2022 MetLife Employee Benefits Survey found that a majority of workers—55%—considered employer health and wellness programs to be a non-negotiable part of any benefits package. There is great demand here, and businesses can capitalize by building to meet it.

Wellness expands from luxury to mass market.

Not long ago, wellness largely served a high-income clientele: Spas, yoga studios, and even the broad category of fitness were popularly considered to be rarified experiences. No more. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects decadal growth of 12% for health educators and community health workers, 19% for fitness trainers, and 20% for massage therapists—rates far outpacing most other professions, and a strong indication of the popularization of these services. At the same time, mobile apps have popularized practices like mindfulness (Calm and Headspace), walking meditation (Apple Fitness+), and even talk therapy (BetterHelp).

Wellness as a measurable essential.

Along with this transition from niche to mass market, wellness metrics are also increasingly mentioned by sociologists and policy leaders as a measure of societal health, together with literacy, mortality rates, and GDP. Reflecting the growing seriousness of the field, over the past decade major researchers have developed new, analytical approaches to wellness: Consider such Gallup's now-famous World Happiness Report (launched only a decade ago) or, on a more granular level, Trust for Public Land's ParkScore Index, which measures American public spaces against key metrics.

Growing awareness of wellness among urbanists.

As we detail below, city planners and other

urbanists are increasingly considering wellness as a key element of city life. Look no further than the American Planning Association, which now advocates and embraces a broad view of wellbeing that encompasses wellness principles like community, belonging, and resilience.

The long tail of COVID:

The pandemic reshaped everything about our world, from office life to shopping to transportation. But our inner worlds were affected as well: The World Health Organization reports alarming and persistent spikes in rates of anxiety and depression worldwide following the pandemic. Traditional medical care will not be enough in this new world—preventative wellness approaches provide a compelling alternative.

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

Wellness at the Scale of Infrastructure

Building wellness infrastructure means thinking about wellbeing on a very large scale, something many urbanists have not done since the end of the public bath house era. But now our vision must go far beyond traditional wellness facilities. With a broader focus, a vision of wellness spills out of the spa and into the streets. If your accessible wellness center cannot be reached by public transit, is it really accessible? If your parks and public spaces are made unsafe by crime, do they really serve a wellness purpose?

This principle goes beyond public projects. Smart commercial real estate developers are aware that wellness is good business. Indeed, wellness must be part of the DNA for any enterprise serving the public, from shopping centers to hotels to museums.

Marc Holliday, chairman and CEO of SL Green, NYC's largest commercial owner, agrees. "Coming off the pandemic, people are much more aware of their health, and they want to see that extended to their everyday experiences. That has huge implications for real estate, and that's why hospitality, commercial real estate, and offices are all incorporating new wellness features. The



Developers of 22 Bishopsgate, London's tallest officeblock, said wellness enabled people to be engaged, relaxed and efficient at the building. Photo, Bishopsgate

bottom line: If you have public-facing real estate, engineering ways to integrate healthy lifestyle and wellness into your offerings must become an integral part of your strategy.”

Sir Stuart Lipton, one of the UK's most successful and visionary developers, invested in wellness for what is now London's newest and tallest office block, located at [22 Bishopsgate](#), in the heart of the city. “Following consumer research, wellness is the preeminent requirement to enable people to be more engaged, relaxed and efficient at the building” Sir Stuart explained about the new office tower. “The goal is to allow personnel to feel better when they leave the building than when they arrive by way of a range of amenities. This strategy produces health and wellbeing, and the building has leased quickly with tenant appreciation of the design.”

Given that places to shop or work were among the spaces most susceptible to disruption to the pandemic, we see increasing opportunities to focus on the spaces between home and work, within residential neighborhoods and on the way to the urban core as critical to reimagining the way cities serve people.

Design Alone Does Not Lead to Wellness: The High Line and the 11th Street Bridge Park

Urban planning has traditionally been defined by a design-first approach that, by only looking at the built environment, has often led to blind spots regarding many entrenched socio-economic problems. Over 20 years ago when the High Line was first conceptualized, innovative design was usually reserved for cultural institutions and private buildings. The idea of the [High Line](#) was to bring great architecture and landscape to public spaces. Wellness was always part of the vision of creating a new place to walk, relax, exercise, and experience beauty. However, as the High Line matured, architecture and landscaping alone were not meeting the needs of the communities the park was originally designed to serve. Friends of the High Line, the nonprofit group that operates the park, responded by implementing a teen job program, as well as introducing free public programming including cultural events, art, meditation and yoga—all of which planted the seeds of ongoing community investments.

To learn and share some of the lessons of these first decades, the High Line's creators formed the [High Line Network](#), which has helped fuel more than 60



Washington DC's 11th Street Bridge will become an elevated park that incorporates wellness into civic assets. Photo, 11th Street Bridge Park

adaptive reuse projects across the Americas from La Mexicana Park in Mexico City to Destination Crenshaw in Los Angeles and the 606 in Chicago.

The 11th Street Bridge Park in Washington DC is a prime example of a new public space project that has learned from some of the High Line's mistakes. The project is designed by the masterful team of OMA and OLIN, but the most important thing about the project is not the design, it is the equitable development plan that underpins it. The fresh, new way of thinking about infrastructure exemplifies a more holistic planning approach that incorporates wellness into civic assets. The bridge piers, which would have otherwise been demolished, will be transformed into an elevated park that will cross the Anacostia River and provide community amenities and better connect lower-income neighborhoods on the east of the river.

"As we emerge into a post COVID-19 world, civic spaces like the 11th Street Bridge Park will be places of mourning, healing, celebration, and service to our community. The Bridge Park will be an anchor for residents to rebuild social capital, improve public health and sustain equitable and inclusive economic growth," notes Scott Kratz, director of the 11th Street Bridge Park, a collaboration between Washington DC's Department of Transportation and the neighborhood nonprofit Building Bridges Across the River.

The bridge is a living metaphor for the need to tackle racial and economic divisions and redress

historic disinvestment in communities of color. The project has prioritized community engagement through each step of the process, setting forward investments spanning from public programming in the form of festivals and arts events, and extending to economic development efforts ranging from small business assistance to the establishment of a community land trust. To date over \$86 million has been secured to support these strategies, nearly matching the cost of building the actual park.

On the opposite coast of the United States, a recent project in San Francisco embodied how zoning itself could similarly advance wellness values. Developers sought approvals to build two adjacent and interconnected office buildings in the Mission Bay District, one of the most coveted urban areas in the region. But the city code called for more commitment to community, calling for something far more profound than a simple commercial real estate play. The underlying zoning called for three community-facing amenities: an urban park, community-serving retail, and a ground-level daycare with dedicated outdoor play space, all of which were incorporated into the project. Through zoning, planners are already leading toward urban wellness, embedding communities into the infrastructure needed to support people as they live and work in the same neighborhood.

In our view, an urban wellness infrastructure should go even further to recognize and engage communities, and to help address health issues

unmet by traditional infrastructure. Brenda Lee Richardson, an environmental justice and community engagement expert in Washington, who calls herself an eco-feminist, sees an urban wellness infrastructure as “envisioning an urban oasis in the heart of a disfavored community.” However, she caveats that “the pursuit of peace and happiness is not on the horizon for those of us who live east of the [Anacostia] River until our mental health and physical health issues are adequately addressed and seen as a priority.”

How can urban wellness infrastructure meet these needs?

Building Wellness into Urban Growth Strategies

Leading the way in the planning of an urban wellness infrastructure, Singapore is making strides to create new programs and build wellness-oriented physical resources. In 2022, GWI identified one of the trends now driving critical urban planning decisions in the nation-state: post-pandemic wellness tourism is projected to reach US\$1.3 trillion by 2025.

“Singapore is well positioned to capture [the growing demand for wellness tourism], as a leading urban wellness haven that prioritizes holistic wellbeing and offers accessible ‘must-do’ experiences to rejuvenate locals and visitors. With more travelers prioritizing wellness, we have developed strategies and initiatives to realize our ambition to be an urban wellness haven,” explains Ong Ling Lee, executive director for Sports & Wellness at [Singapore Tourism Board](#).

Building on the country’s reputation as a city in nature, she expands, “We will also leverage Singapore’s existing strengths—accessibility, technology, multi-cultural heritage, and reputation as a strong business hub. For the immediate term, our plan is to cater to secondary wellness and corporate travelers who are already in Singapore for other purposes and looking to enjoy wellness experiences as part of their itinerary while we curate and develop wellness anchors for the longer term.”

Last year, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) organized the [Wellness Festival Singapore](#), the first

New York City's Highline includes space for wellness activities and has inspired 60+ land reuse projects across the Americas. Photo, iStock





Therme Group urban wellness destinations attract up to 12,000 people on a holiday and are the closest modern experience to the ancient Roman baths. Photo, Therme Group

nationwide effort to promote holistic wellbeing. In collaboration with Enterprise Singapore, Health Promotion Board, National Arts Council, Sentosa Development Corporation, and Sport Singapore, STB's vision was to kickstart consumer interest and participation by curating accessible wellness programs. The goal was to ignite a movement where wellness becomes a way of life in Singapore. The festival's 10-day line-up of over 130 wellness activities and experiences featured three pillars of different audience profiles: fitness, emotional and mental wellness, and lifestyle.

With more travelers prioritizing wellness, the development of wellness attractions and innovative experiences across the island is part of Singapore's strategy to establish the country as an urban wellness haven, making wellness offerings accessible as tourists enjoy the destination. But attracting wellness tourism is just part of the strategy. Locals also need to embrace a wellness lifestyle for Singapore to become a true leader in this sector.

Meeting Staggering Demand at Scale: Therme

Therme Group, a global leader integrating wellbeing with water-based recreation at scale, is the kind of urban wellness infrastructure that operates 365 days a year and serves tourists and locals alike. Therme Group urban wellness destinations are in Romania and Germany, with new sites planned for the United States, Canada, the UK, and South Korea. Attracting up to 12,000 people on a peak holiday—unlike most hospitality-driven offerings such as spas—Therme Group facilities are the closest modern-day amenity to the ancient Roman baths.

The light-filled, temperature-controlled spaces of Therme Group facilities feature vast indoor and outdoor landscapes, thermal baths, saunas, nutritious food and beverage choices, and an array of relaxation and recreation options supported by state-of-the-art green tech systems. Moreover, these facilities operate at scale. (Therme Bucharest is 30,000 square meters/322,000 square feet, while Therme Erding is 140,000 square meters/1.5 million square feet.) Therme does not design or price its unique offerings as a luxury experience but

as an accessible one, engineered to make wellness a part of almost any city dweller's life.

As much as offering a getaway day spa and resort, Therme is an urban resource, a vital new gathering place for cities seeking to build a culture of wellness. Knitting Therme into a dense urban area by embedding it in mixed-use developments in some of the world's most dynamic cities opens new opportunities for extending commercial wellbeing offerings to a broad customer base. Furthermore, through partnerships and programs that expand its impact, Therme creates social benefits in the surrounding communities it serves.

Stelian Iacob, senior VP and COO of Therme commented: "One of the most productive investments cities can make to ensure long-term health and wellbeing is to expand opportunities for people to live productive, fulfilling lives. By reimagining the urban environment, successful cities will prioritize wellbeing as a driver of sustainable growth. Forward-thinking cities worldwide are beginning to prioritize wellbeing as a foundation for building resilient communities. Only by scaling to the level of infrastructure will we be able to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible spaces that reliably generate wellbeing and help people thrive in several key

dimensions: cognitive, emotional, physical, moral, and social. Therme is building a transformative social infrastructure for the future of urban living that will shift the understanding of wellbeing from a 'nice to have' luxury to the foundation of democratic communities."

A Grassroots Approach to Addressing Food Scarcity: The Well at Oxon Run

In Washington, DC, communities on the east bank of the Anacostia River, such as Historic Anacostia and Barry Farm live in striking contrast to those across the water. Communities on the east side might be considered food deserts while their neighbors enjoy access to fresh food and regularly delight in world-class culinary offerings.

Unfortunately, unequal access to food—and to the cultural richness that comes from celebrating culinary traditions—is common in too many American cities. However, in the District, Jaren Hill Lockridge, director of the [Well at Oxon Run](#), is using her background in government, paired with pandemic-fueled necessity, to create community around urban agriculture and food distribution, key components of [DC Greens'](#) mission of advancing health equity by building a just and resilient food system.

The Well at Oxon Run pairs government resources with public need to create community around urban agriculture and food distribution. Photos, The Well at Oxon Run





At DistritoTec, in Monterrey, Mexico, a private organization worked with business and government to promote broad public wellness goals. The community, which was once car-dependent, is now a walkable environment. Photo, DistritoTec

“Being able to define wellness on my own terms [...] is really giving me a level of freedom that is somewhat unprecedented,” says Lockridge regarding the way she has embraced wellness leadership in her community. “It’s changing the narrative in my head, and in changing the narrative in my head, it’s changing the conversation that I have with myself, which is then changing the conversation that I have outwardly with other people, as well. And it’s giving me a different level of autonomy and groundedness in myself.”

For Lockridge, this personal growth journey goes hand in hand with empowering others “by planting seeds in a different way.” She explains, “we found seeds. We found space. We found land. We found an opportunity to define wellness for ourselves.”

Such grassroots efforts to put public land to work for a common purpose—in the case of the Well at Oxon Run, a purpose that combines nutrition, cultural heritage, and productive labor—offers a model for how both physical and social components come together to build a thriving community space, a critical component of an urban wellness

infrastructure.

Public-Private Partnerships to Drive Development: DistritoTec

The world’s most successful cities benefit from dense networks of public, community-based, private-sector and non-profit organizations. From parks conservancies to business improvement districts to community health centers, strategically deployed public-private partnerships have demonstrated an ability to provide public services at the speed and quality of private enterprise. Leveraging such partnerships is key to unlocking wellness infrastructure at scale.

Monterrey, Mexico’s DistritoTec is a prime example of how a private organization can work with business and government partners to promote broad public wellness goals. Led by Tecnológico de Monterrey, Latin America’s leading private university, DistritoTec re-envisioned the neighborhood surrounding the university campus from the ground up. With the goal of driving safety, walkability, and reversing population decline,

Tecnológico de Monterrey gathered a team of staff and faculty and dedicated \$200 million to drive the effort. Having signaled their willingness to invest in their community, the Monterrey City Council and local businesses were eager to join the university, and contributed in kind to infrastructure upgrades, zoning changes for density, 24-hour cultural and recreational programming. Perhaps most impactfully, DistritoTec transitioned the formerly car-dependent community into a walkable environment defined by pocket parks, art installations, and parkways.

“The DistritoTec team looked at all aspects of the urban experience from transit to commerce to community health services,” said Alejandro Echeverri, a globally recognized urbanist, city planner, and member of the Tecnológico de Monterrey Faculty of Excellence. “And in building a world-class community, a community that draws people to study, work, and live, we found that wellness played a foundational role. Our partnership created a public sphere where people could safely walk, play, and relax—a public sphere where accessing wellness is as easy as stepping outside of your house.”

By partnering to design for wellness, DistritoTec drove crime down and density up—and has created a model that is now being repeated across Mexico, including around the university’s Mexico City campus.

DistritoTec is a public space where accessing wellness is extremely easy. The model is being recreated across the country.
Photo, DistritoTec

THE FUTURE

The role of the city has been reimagined countless times over the centuries. Cities have served as trading posts, centers of political power, artistic and innovation engines, destinations for religious discovery and educational development, and much more. But to remain vital in the next century, cities must rebuild themselves around the wellness needs of their citizens. The city must become a place not to survive but to thrive. That’s not possible without wellness infrastructure.

Wellness infrastructure will not grow organically. It must be intentionally cultivated by political, community, and business leaders who are willing to do the hard work of grassroots planning, interdisciplinary thinking, partnership building, and designing urban-scale systems. But as our world continues to urbanize, the success of the city is the success of our species. And with our renewed recognition of the inextricable relationship between the health of the cities and the health of city dwellers, urban wellness infrastructure is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity.





Battling obesity is different than weight loss. Obesity is a serious disease that can be responsible for heart disease, cancer, dementia and more. Photo, iStock

Wellness + Weight:

The Skinny on Brown Fat and Eliminating Obesity

By Michael Roizen, MD

INTRODUCTION

Say the word “fat” and you may think of the bodily kind—what happens when you torpedo too many tacos or cozy up on the couch too often. Or you may think of the nutritional kinds—saturated, unsaturated, and all of the foods that contain them.

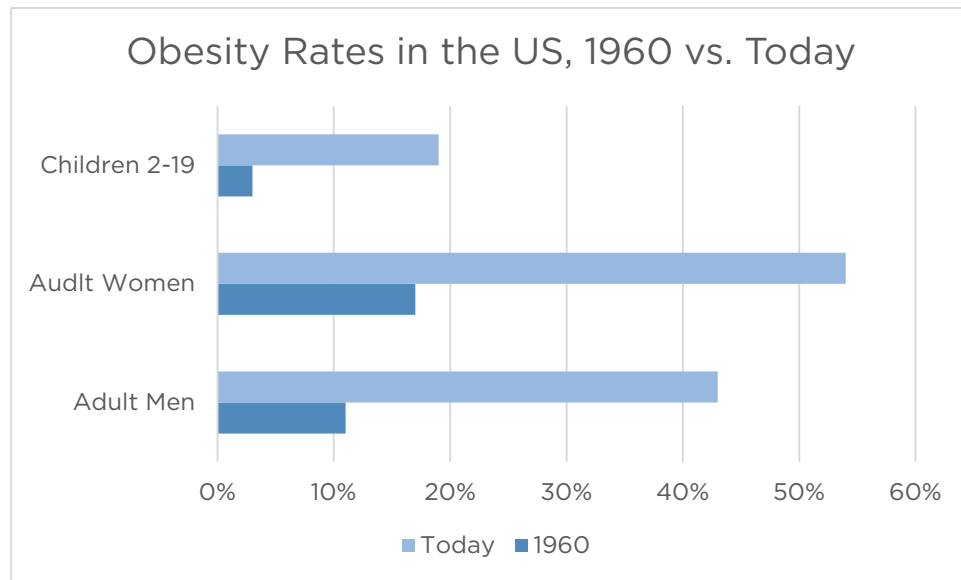
In any case, the word often triggers strong emotions, because of the societal and medical struggle associated with being overweight or obese. But like many words, “fat” doesn’t just have to be a word that you associate with a quadruple-decker cheeseburger. In fact, “fat”—a very specific kind—may be one of the keys that can help us live longer and live “younger.”

Brown fat (no, that’s not fat that comes when you eat too much milk chocolate) is one of the primary areas being explored as a path to increased longevity and youthfulness.

Live Younger: The Biggest Trend in Health and Medicine

Perhaps the ultimate health question is this: How can you live longer without experiencing the symptoms of “old age”? That is, can you live long—without disability or frailty, without losing our knees, our eyes, our minds, our hearts, and our everything else? Can we stay young for a long, long time?

In 1998, at the launch of *RealAge: Are You as Young as You Can Be?*, we predicted that 60 could be the new 40. That prediction proved correct. You can slow your rate of aging more than 20 years by age 75. The breakthrough: Your lifestyle decisions (nutrition, fitness, sleep, stress management, and more) serve as the joystick that controls your rate of aging. Do more things good for your body and you’ll live younger. Do more things bad for your body and you’ll age faster than a loaf of bread past its sell-by date.



In the US in 1960, only 11% of adult men were obese. Today, it's 43%. Among adult women, the obesity rate rose from 17% to 54%. And among children ages 2 through 19, it's up from 3% to 19%.

In 2030, thanks to the combination of lifestyle choices and medical breakthroughs, your longevity potential increases exponentially: 90 will be the new 40, with at least an 80% probability. This is the premise of *The Great Age Reboot*.

You may be asking, what does this longevity look like? What should you do to prepare? After all, who wants to live longer if it just means living “older”?

Nobody.

In this new scenario, old age wouldn't be, well, old. You will get to live “younger” and longer. Why? We expect at least one of the 14 Great Age Reboot Areas of Aging Mechanism Research (listed in the book and our app but too long to include but one here) will go from “potential” to “reality.” And the breakthrough will become an accepted part of how you live—and what allows you to function as a 40-year-old at the calendar age of 90. While it's impossible to predict which ones will ultimately win out in the race for youthfulness, we have our guesses.

One of them is the transformation of white/yellow fat into beige/brown fat. And that has the potential to get rid of one of the greatest agers of all: obesity.

The Obesity Issue of Today

You undoubtedly know of the trend to obesity and its metabolic consequences: In the US in 1960, only 11% of adult men were obese. Today, it's 43%. Among adult women, the obesity rate rose from 17% to 54%. And among children ages 2 through 19, it's up from 3% to 19%.

In addition, the inflammation of this increased amount of visceral, or belly, fat causes all kinds of problems:

- exacerbates depression, stress, fatigue, and osteoarthritis;
- reduces the ability of the body to repair itself when damaged;
- increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease;
- is a major cause of six cancers, including breast and colon.

Unless you're a sumo champ or an offensive lineman (and even then, it can get you!), it's safe to assume that fat in your viscera (belly) is bad.

But the wellness-longevity industry is leading a fight against this trend. No, I am not referring to GLP-1 plus medications that seem to need be taken forever like semaglutide (Ozempic) and tirzepatide (Monjaro), which are still major breakthroughs. I'm talking about induced tissue reprogramming and other means to eliminate obesity by activating brown fat from white fat.

Here's how it works:

Before efficient central heating, humans utilized internal thermoregulatory mechanisms to generate warmth in cooler nighttime and seasonal temperatures. These mechanisms include brown/beige fat cells that burn stored fat to raise body temperature and remove excess food energy.

That worked back before we had easy access to high-energy, hyperpalatable, calorically dense foods. Calorically dense food had been limited to harvest times when genome-based preferences for sweet-tasting foods encouraged pre-winter feasting and fat accumulation. Due to food preparation and limited storage capabilities, eating usually happened in discrete meals during daylight hours.

Humans experienced occasional prolonged periods of enforced calorie restriction. If extended for too long, starvation degrades health and may even cause death. Sublethal starvation, however, activates metabolic pathways that enable

beneficial genetic maintenance and repair systems.

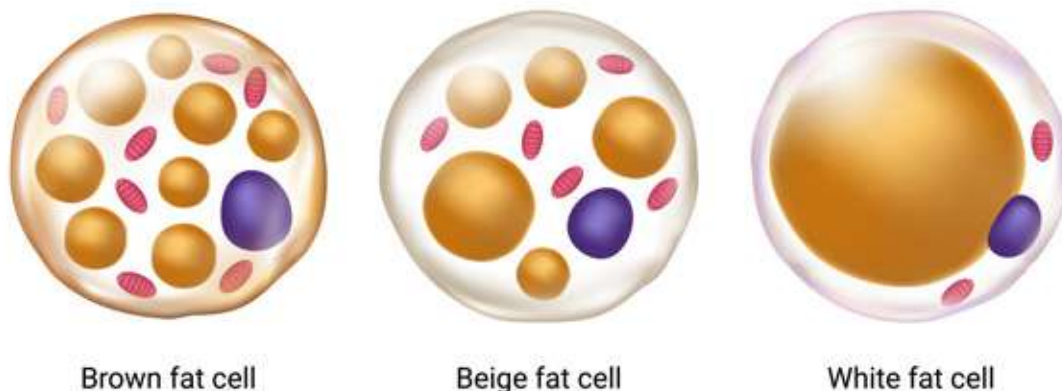
Because much of the world now regularly consumes inexpensive high-calorie foods, we have unprecedented obesity. Now, some obesity initially was good. Fat is a way that we store energy in case we need it. The problem is that our storage tanks in 2023, as opposed to those we had before 1950, are stretched beyond reason.

But not all fat is created equal. Most people picture white fat—the white-yellow kind under the skin. But you're also born with brown fat (which, unsurprisingly, looks brown). Brown fat—found in the neck and shoulders of newborns—has an increased density of mitochondria (that's what makes it brown) and is metabolically efficient in that it burns lots of calories, which serves the purpose of keeping you warm (important for newborns).

We lose brown fat as we age. By age six, you have less than 5% of the brown fat you were born with; the fat we gain over time is almost all white fat. White fat is metabolically inefficient, which means it's relatively inactive and doesn't use much energy. In addition, it is hard to burn off and it accumulates, causing those other health problems like inflammation we refer to above.

So the bottom line: If we have more brown fat, we can burn off the damaging white fat.

There is a difference between brown and white fat cells. White fat is gained over time and is metabolically inefficient, meaning it's relatively inactive and doesn't use much energy. In addition, it is hard to burn off and it accumulates, causing those other health problems like inflammation we refer to above. Photo, Istock





Stanford University neurologist Andrew Huberman, shown speaking at the 2021 Global Wellness Summit in Boston, formulated guidelines for using cold exposure to increase metabolic rate. A goal is to increase brown cell activation. Photo, Global Wellness Summit

So How Will We Do It?

This is where the “breakthrough” part comes in. We know the potential of brown fat, but the questions are: How do we get it, how do we activate it, how do we get it to work to eliminate the white fat so we can live younger and healthier? Some options:

Pluripotent Cell Transformation: Pluripotent fat cells can turn into white adipose tissue (WAT) and/or brown adipose tissue (BAT). BAT uses fat and sugar to produce heat, while white adipose tissue produces metabolic problems including type 2 diabetes, insulin resistance, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and dementia. BAT cells are relatively abundant in infants, who cannot shiver and must utilize uncoupling thermogenesis to control body temperature. Adults tend to lose BAT as they age.

It was assumed that reduced thermogenesis was inevitable due to age-related loss of BAT cells.

But in 2015, researchers induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) and turned them into induced brown adipocytes (iBAs) by transducing a gene, using a virus vector. The resultant cells produced proteins typically found in BAT. The iBAs also showed remarkably high levels of oxygen consumption, characteristic of BAT thermogenesis, and obesity reduction. So if researchers can take white fat, regress it to a more pluripotent fat, flip a few epigenetic switches and—voilà!—turn it into brown fat, then they could inject the brown fat into the original owner. Those with more brown fat would be expected to get thin and lose metabolic dysfunctions, including diabetes and body-wide inflammatory diseases. This has now been done in three animal species (personal reports) and we understand is moving into human trials.

Cold Therapy: Brown adipose tissue can be recruited, expanded, and activated by exposure to cold (cryotherapy). Though there is no accepted cold exposure protocol to activate brown fat, Susanna Søberg developed recommendations for increasing BAT mass activation with the least discomfort. As presented in *Winter Swimming: The Nordic Way Towards a Healthier and Happier Life*, she concludes:

- A minimum of 11 minutes per week of water exposure below 60 degrees Fahrenheit produces browning and activates thermogenesis and its benefits.
- Those 11 minutes can be separated into different sessions.
- Allowing the body to warm naturally after a cold session is preferable to using a sauna or hot water.

Stanford University neurologist Andrew Huberman formulated guidelines for using deliberate cold exposure to increase metabolic rate. In Huberman’s published lectures, he emphasizes that the conditions needed to provoke brown fat activation are highly individual and may change over time, even within a single day, due to circadian rhythms. He describes effective cold exposure as an uncomfortable state of cold that causes one to feel a strong urge to end the experience but can be continued safely.



Immersing in cold water up to the neck, with feet and hands submerged, is said to be the most effective way to increase brown cell activation. Results are highly individual. Photo, iStock

He suggests the following in order of effectiveness:

1. “Cold water immersion up to the neck with feet and hands submerged” is the most effective, due to water’s heat transfer properties. (Craig Heller, the Stanford University sleep and temperature researcher, suggests that slow movement of the limbs should occur in cold baths to prevent formation of a thermal barrier of warmer water around the body.) ([“Dr. Craig Heller: Using Temperature for Performance, Brain & Body Health”, Huberman Lab Podcast, Episode 40.](#))
2. Cold showers. Taking cold showers long enough to lower core body temperature will provoke noradrenaline release, which is known to activate UCP1, BAT thermogenesis, and browning. Experiencing elevated heart rate increases in response to cold is a sign of sufficient cold. ([“Using Deliberate Cold Exposure for Health and Performance”, Huberman Lab Podcast, Episode 66.](#))
3. Exposure to colder outdoor temperatures with minimal clothing.

These techniques are effective when they result in a state of shivering or near shivering. However, cold water can be hazardous, especially for those unaccustomed to lower temperatures. Expect to hyperventilate when first experiencing cold water immersion and acclimate with very short intervals at first and then slowly increase, and only after your physician/practitioner agrees.

Other Methods: The most effective cryotherapies involve significant discomfort and time. For this reason, efforts are being made to identify alternatives for activating brown/brite fat cells.

Fasting: Fasting increases BAT, WAT browning, and thermogenesis. The primary reason is “competition between energy conservation to survive long periods of fasting and the metabolic need of NST (non-shivering thermogenesis) to maintain body temperature.” (Reinisch et al., “Regulation of thermogenic adipocytes during fasting and cold”, *Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology*, 2020.) This suggests that longer extended fasting (EF) or fasting mimicking diet (FMD)—windows of calorie restriction—increases thermogenesis in humans, but we could not find studies that



Trend author Michael Roizen, MD, speaks at the 2021 Global Wellness Summit held in Boston, MA, US. Roizen predicts that by 2030 age 90 will be the new 40. Photo, Global Wellness Summit

provide direct evidence. However, the metabolic benefits of EF and FMD are well-documented and healthy metabolic and mitochondrial function are associated with higher levels of thermogenesis. (Source: *GAR Co Reboot Review and Recap 005-001 Extended Fasting and FMD* and *GAR Co Reboot Review and Recap 001-004 Intermittent Fasting to Make a Substantial Difference to Healthy Longevity: Disability Rates and/or Your Brain's Functioning with Age.*)

Drugs: The list of drugs and food components that encourage thermogenesis through BAT activation or WAT browning has been growing since it was discovered in 1984 that WAT undergoes browning.

Nedergaard et al. reported in 2014 that over 50 different treatments have induced browning. (*"The Browning of White Adipose Tissue: Some Burning Issues"*, *Cell Metabolism*, 2014.) Many of the compounds are available only to researchers. Even approved drugs are impractical due to the prescription requirement and significant side effects.

Food Ingredients: A wide range of food ingredients and supplements improve thermogenesis and assist in weight loss. Many of the following ingredients and supplements have effects that may be due to their ability to brown WAT: capsaicin, creatine, cinnamon, and trehalose.

THE FUTURE

This is a rapidly developing field and an area of substantial research to decrease rate of aging or to reboot to a younger person—we will update this recommendation on our web site (GreatAgeReboot.com) in this area as soon as significant new data are available.

The set point theory indicates it is tougher to lose than to gain white fat, so we may need to repeatedly do white-to-brown fat yearly or even monthly transformations.

The hope is that this breakthrough, and other similar ones, will extend healthy lifespans for many people, as long as they make other lifestyle choices to be healthier.

While science will show incredible advances when it comes to extending and improving life, the fact is that we can't rely on everyone else to do the work. Over the following decades, you may have dozens of decisions about how to care for your body, but that decision-making should start now. That is self-

engineering.

Over 180 choices now exist with enough data to discuss with a practitioner whether they affect your rate of aging, and that number doesn't even include a review of over 50 supplements or small molecule pills that have been suggested to us (18 of which you can consider with your practitioner with randomized controlled trials that show benefits greater than risks). Many of these choices we discuss in the book and all of them are covered in the accompanying app (RebootYourAge), built to help you implement the plan to be 40 at age 90 and to keep up with the science as it changes.

The real question is: Will you prepare to be younger longer, and how will you change today? We believe that in all probability, the Great Age Reboot means that no matter what your current age in the next 10 years, you can live longer and healthier. Your "old" years will feel young.



Wellness is about preventing ill health while (more expensive) healthcare is about treating and curing ill health. From a public policy perspective, wellness must be favored globally. Photo, iStock

Wellness + Governments:

The Case for Coming Together

By Thierry Malleret

INTRODUCTION

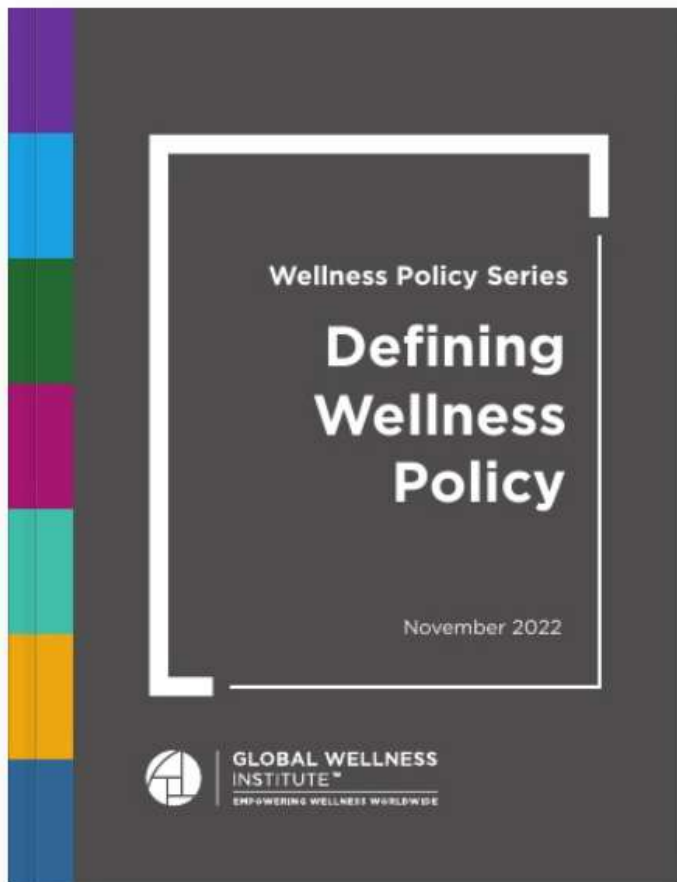
The Global Wellness Institute (GWI), in its recently published [research report](#), makes a compelling and forceful case in favor of wellness policies. It should come as no surprise that the GWI with its reputation as a trend-setter and spotter wants to see wellness (or wellbeing) embedded in policymaking. Wellness policies have been years in the making, but they will evolve, multiply and strengthen - a defining trend of 2023 and beyond.

Two fundamental reasons make this direction of travel inevitable: (1) unwellness shrinks the size of the labor force while at the same time causing declining productivity—the worst possible combination for long-term growth, and (2) wellness saves public money because prevention is less expensive than cure. The combination of the two constitutes an economic call to arms for more wellness policies.

Shrinking labor force and declining productivity fuel the trend

Wellbeing can be summarily defined as how people feel. If they feel unwell, they'll do poorly—for themselves, the economy and society at large. If, in contrast, they feel well, the opposite will be true: with positive effects for the individual, GDP and the community. In other words: no healthy economy can develop without a healthy population that feels mentally and physically well—the two are inextricably intertwined.

To understand this fundamental point, we need look no further than the UK, an example currently provoking abundant discussion. At the end of 2022, the proportion of the British working age population reporting long-term sickness stood at around 7 million (or one in 6 people) while in 2010 this figure stood at just above 5 million: This represents an increase of 40% in two decades. The pandemic has made these numbers worse, but the rising trend predates it, reflecting a long-term



A free download of the Global Wellness Institute's "Defining Public Policy" research is available at <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/industry-research/2022-defining-wellness-policy/>. Image, Global Wellness Institute

increase in mental health and cardiovascular issues (partly caused by physical inactivity and bad food habits). More than a decade of flat or sometimes declining real incomes, with the concomitant economic and financial insecurity, is a key driver of this sorry trend. As the economic environment becomes more uncertain and deteriorates, pressures on mental health, and subsequently, physical health will worsen too. In terms of how wellness and the economy relate to each other, this is the crux of the issue: Many countries around the world are now realizing that there are severe economic and societal costs associated with ill health and unwellness. From an economic standpoint, they translate into a shrinkage of the labor force and in a rise in both absenteeism and presenteeism, resulting in poor productivity.

The bottom-line: As a country's long-term growth potential depends on a rise in labor supply plus a rise in productivity, the increase in unwellness negatively impacts the two engines of future economic growth by reducing both the size of the labor market and its productivity. The obvious remedy? Implement what is needed to bring about a widespread improvement in "feeling well." In such a context, the argument for wellness policies is ever more compelling and the imperative increasingly urgent.

2. Wellness and public money

In the simplest possible terms, wellness is about preventing ill health while healthcare is about treating and curing ill health. No surprise that the latter costs more than the former! From a public policy perspective, this means that wellness must be favored—whenever possible—over healthcare. If wellness prevents falling ill in the first place, it equates to a "gigantic" money-saving mechanism at a time when money for public health is severely constrained by fiscal tightening.

The fact that, in many countries, health costs are simply out of kilter with the "returns" they are supposed to yield underpins this rationale. The US is the unenviable poster boy of this situation. In 2019, it spent USD 3.6 trillion on health care (about \$11,000 per person), a figure significantly higher than in any other developed economy, for an outcome considered sub-par ("on average") that still leaves almost 30 million Americans uninsured. Why US health care spending is so high in per capita terms is directly correlated to the underlying cost of health care procedures that keep going up and constitute the largest spending item. The result: Year after year, health care absorbs more of employers' costs and families' income, while also costing both the federal and states' budgets more. The situation may sound extreme in the US, but the increase in health costs is a global problem that can only be addressed sustainably by doing the maximum to ensure that people don't fall ill in the first place. The bottom line: Countries must reconsider the way they do welfare and healthcare, and wellness policies must be at the heart of this rethink.

Identifying and disentangling wellness policies

Pursuing a wellness policy (“a set of cross-cutting actions that encourage healthy lifestyles and create supportive environments for human health and well-being”) is like aspiring to wellness² itself: a broad and multi-faceted endeavor that encompasses many facets of well-being, from physical and mental to societal and environmental (and possibly financial as well). This makes it hard to tell where wellness policies begin and where they end; and to disentangle what differentiates them from other types of policies (like environmental or health policies). To a certain extent, it could be legitimate to claim that any policy that advances any or several of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals is a wellness policy because it favors “healthy lives and promotes wellbeing for all, at all ages.”³

A few examples illustrate well just how “pervasive” and ubiquitous wellness policies are:

- In November 2021, Portugal introduced a law stipulating that “the employer must respect the privacy of the worker” by banning phone calls, messages, or emails outside regular working hours. This “right to disconnect” policy had already been implemented in other European nations, and then emulated or considered in other countries (like the Philippines) or states (like Ontario in Canada).
- In 2018, Japan (the world’s fastest ageing country) launched a national project that embraced a multitude of wellness objectives, with a focus on improving the healthspan of its elderly population by improving long-term care worker pay, expanding education for mid-career employment and laying the groundwork for raising employment levels of the elderly. The cabinet then made it a lifespan wellness policy framework named the “One Hundred Year Life” policy. In a world that is ageing fast, such policies are now becoming the norm in many countries (with, naturally, infinite variations in terms of ambitions and scope).
- Since 2004, France has put in place what some other countries would regard as stringent soda policies to limit the risks of obesity and diabetes, particularly among the young. It started with a law banning vending machines from schools and has evolved throughout the years, like in 2017 with another law that prevented restaurants to offer free refills of sodas and other sugary drinks. Soda taxes are now commonplace worldwide - more than 85 countries having legislated against sugar-sweetened beverages (meaning that roughly 100 haven’t yet).
- In the seven years between 2013 and 2020, China succeeded in reducing the number of harmful particulates it emits in the air by 40% and has since implemented new laws and regulations to further limit air pollution. Eighteen months ago, the government prohibited new coal-fired power plants and shut down some old plants in the most polluted regions, including city clusters of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei and the Pearl and Yangtze Deltas. The Chinese example is just one among many: As 97% of the world’s population currently lives in places where air quality is worse than the WHO guidelines, policies destined to reduce air pollution (and improve global life expectancy in the process) are part of the standard policy arsenal of almost every high- and middle-income country on earth.
- In 2022, the British Government issued a “call for evidence” to create a new, 10-year cross-government “Mental health and wellbeing plan”, thus pursuing and strengthening a policy initiated in 1999 destined to allocate more resources to the treatment of mental illness and to favor mental wellbeing. As mental illness and unwellness rises around the world, more and more countries deal with it from a legislative standpoint, by actively promoting mental wellbeing policies (like the Positive Education Model of Luxembourg that aims to actively support mental wellbeing, increase life satisfaction, and tackle problems like suicide, depression, substance abuse, and eating disorders).

There is no doubt that each of these disparate

policies qualifies as a wellness policy, whether it concerns the work-life balance (right to disconnect), the quality of healthspan, the limitation of sugary drinks, air pollution and mental wellbeing. All of these promote more “healthy lifestyles” and create “supportive environments for human health and wellbeing”—the very definition of a wellness policy.

Three wellness policy trends

In the coming years, wellness policies will become more apparent on the political agenda of national, regional, and local governments. They'll be more (1) expansive, (2) “muscular” and (3) local.

- **More expansive**—The palette of specific wellness policies on offer will expand, encompassing adjacent policies that contribute to our planetary, societal, and individual wellbeing. As mentioned above, improving the environment by protecting biodiversity or reducing pollution constitutes a wellbeing policy in the same manner that promoting physical activity or healthy eating
- **More “muscular”**—Because of the economic necessity to be “well,” wellness policies will become more forceful and more pervasive. This won't be easy, as the sugar tax demonstrates. Proponents of the “muscular” approach see it as the only possible way to increase individual physical wellbeing (i.e.,

does. Some policymakers and pundits will go further and will argue that putting into place a social safety net, or implementing a minimum wage, amount to a wellness policy since they reduce economic insecurity (a wellbeing “killer”). In the process, wellbeing policies will fall victim to the increasing polarization that besets our societies. Wellbeing-washing will proliferate, as will wellbeing-bashing in some quarters. However, as technology keeps progressing at a remarkable pace, new tech applications and AI-driven algorithms will measure with (relative) accuracy the way in which specific wellness policies contribute to economic and social welfare, as well as to subjective wellbeing.

Thierry Malleret, economist, and co-founder and principal author of the Monthly Barometer, an analytical and predictive newsletter on macro issues for high-level decision makers, speaking at the Global Wellness Summit. He also writes The Monthly Barometer-Wellness Edition for the GWI. Photo, Global Wellness Summit



to save lives) and to rein in ever-increasing health expenditures; but watch the outcry over the ban of sodas being sold in schools and the threat this poses to the vested interests of the companies concerned who respond “in-kind” by spending millions on lobbying efforts to influence legislators. Not all political regimes can do what China did in 2020, when it decided that minors are no longer allowed to play online video games on weekdays to improve mental wellbeing. Wellness policies will vary (being country- and culture- dependent), but there is little doubt that they’ll become more forceful. Resistance from lobbies will be fierce, but the intractability of environmental and health issues and their related costs suggests that wellness policies will ultimately prevail—by being “tough”.

- **More local**—Wellness-policy success stories will happen at the local level. Only in this way will specific policies be able to focus on strengthening and empowering communities, giving rise in turn to increased decentralization and more localized economic clout. Consider two recent examples. In Córdoba (Argentina’s second largest city), the mayor has just launched a program to improve nutrition in schools aiming to boost both health and the local economy. Nearly half of Argentina’s schoolchildren consume sugary drinks at least twice a day, so the municipality will regulate state and private school environments to reduce the consumption of sugary drinks in favor of water. This will start with the installation of new water dispensers for 15,000 schoolchildren with the aim of getting final approval from local legislators to turn these initiatives into lasting public policies. In NYC, Mayor Adams’ office is joining forces with the American College of Lifestyle in a \$44 million partnership to fund training for 200,000 doctors, nurses, and other health workers on how to use “lifestyle medicine” in their practices. Since the purpose of “lifestyle medicine is to focus on boosting physical and mental health through nutrition, stress management and other areas,” the idea

of such policies is that prevention will treat the root cause of chronic disease in the US and especially health disparities in lifestyle-related chronic diseases, thus diminishing health costs and improving general welfare and quality of life. Local wellness policies are better placed to succeed because only they can demonstrate that there is an economic payoff at the community level, thus both empowering people and delivering tangible benefits.

We picked these two examples, but there are now “zillions,” all over the world, whether it’s about physical activity, mental wellbeing, healthy eating, regenerative agriculture, biodiversity protection, financially sustaining communities, or anything else that qualifies as “creating supportive environments for human health and wellbeing.” Each in its own way contributes to the big wellness policy picture by proposing creative, scalable solutions with the potential to become models for other communities, cities, regions and even countries, seeking to improve the wellbeing of their populations.

Wellness policies are going full steam ahead and gaining momentum!

ENDNOTES

1 https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/GWI_Wellness-Policy_102122-FINAL.pdf

2 Defined by GWI as “the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.” <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/>

3 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



Interest in wild swimming, cold water and cross-country swimming is exploding. Plus, a new era in hot springs is being ushered in. Photo, Penninsula Hot Springs in Melbourne, Australia

Wellness + Water:

Blue, Hot and Wild

By Jane Kitchen

INTRODUCTION

The freedom and connection to life that the natural world provides—along with demonstrated health benefits of fresh air and often exercise—are an obvious evolution in the wellness industry as we all reevaluate our priorities and our place in the world, particularly after the pandemic years. A growing body of evidence around “blue wellness”—or the way that water has benefits for our wellbeing—has emerged in popular culture. Most notably, perhaps, is the best-selling book by marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols *Blue Mind*, which explores how being near, in, on or under water can make us happier, healthier and more connected. “There’s something about water that draws and fascinates us,” says Nichols in the first chapter of *Blue Mind*. “No wonder: it’s the most omnipresent substance on Earth and, along with air, the primary ingredient for supporting life as we know it.”

In the wellness space, we’re watching several trends come together under the umbrella of soaking, dipping or swimming in natural water as a “blueprint” for a natural, wilder experience.

Wild, cold water and cross-country swimming

First, we’re seeing an explosion of interest in wild swimming and cold water swimming. Recent research into the benefits of cold water immersion has gained traction and people are searching for natural remedies for anxiety, depression and sleep disorders, all of which have exploded in the years since the pandemic began. Open water swimming and winter ocean- or lake-dipping in chilly water—once the domain of serious athletes—is now an activity that appeals to a wide range of ages and abilities, as people hear about, and experience for themselves, the mental health benefits that cold water can bring.

We’ve also noted the growing trend of cross-country swimming, where hiking and swimming are combined, and lakes, rivers or estuaries are considered not an obstacle, but a part of the course and the challenge. In the hospitality field, some of the most innovative resorts are dipping their toes into the field of wild swimming by offering guided swims in local waterfalls, lakes or rivers.

A new era of hot springs

We also see enormous growth on the other end of the temperature spectrum, as a new era in hot springs is ushered in, with owners and developers combining entertainment and cultural activities with hot springs soaking. Hot springs are social, natural, and quite often, affordable—three things that are driving the movement forward—and we see them poised to be the next big thing in wellness, attracting a younger and more diverse crowd and fueling the movement for affordable wellness. In fact, the Global Wellness Institute researchers predict that pent-up demand will fuel annual growth rates of 18% for thermal and mineral springs through 2025.

Whether it's hot springs or cold water, a combination of factors is driving this trend, many of which can be tied back to the Covid years: an increased desire to connect with nature; a search for natural remedies for mental and physical ailments; a pursuit of authentic, local experiences; and a desire to connect with others as we lead increasingly isolated lives, working from home and socializing online.

FUELING THE TREND

- Increased desire from consumers for connection with nature, and a pursuit of authentic, local experiences
- The rise of spas as places of socialization, and a need to combat isolation and loneliness
- Pursuit of authentic, local experiences
- Increased rates of anxiety, depression and sleep disturbance rates worldwide since Covid, and a desire to explore non-pharmaceutical options
- The Wim Hof effect: increased consumer knowledge of cold water benefits as well as new research into the benefits (both mental and physical) of cold water immersion
- New offerings: hot springs facilities have taken the experience from a quiet, passive soak to a more interactive, cultural experience. At the same time, facilities have

better communicated the health benefits of thermal water, so consumers are better educated about the wellness aspects

- Wellness for all: available to the mass market for free (wild swimming) or low cost (hot springs)
- Pandemic necessity: When swimming pools closed during Covid, many turned to lakes, rivers, ponds and the sea for exercise, and discovered the pleasure of wild swimming. As things reopened, the open outdoor spaces of hot springs helped guests feel safe while still being social
- Social media: photos of jumping in a cold sea with a woolly hat or basking in a hot springs are easily likeable; the hashtag #wildswimming has 641,000 posts on Instagram
- Celebrities appeal: Rob Delaney and Helena Christensen tout the benefits of wild swimming, while Ed Sheeran and the Beckhams are installing wild swimming ponds at their homes

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

Wild Swimming

As noted in the introduction, we're seeing a marked uptick in people interested in wild swimming, often in a year-round capacity that includes chilly dips in cold seas or lakes. Wellness celebrities like Wim Hof—who appeared at the 2017 Global Wellness Summit in Florida—have brought the benefits of cold water immersion to a wider audience. In addition, new scientific research has shown the impact of isolation on mental health, and months (or years) of lockdown during the pandemic meant that many swimming pools were closed. All of these have motivated more and more people to explore the wild places on their doorsteps to swim. The [Outdoor Swimming Society](#), founded in 2006, started with just 300 members; by 2021, membership ballooned to over 175,000 in 25 countries. The organization provides platforms for members to connect with each other, including social media groups and [wildswim.com](#), a free crowdsourced worldwide swim map. It also

provides a network for local wild swimming group administrators, and gives advice on different open water environments, cold water safety and more.

In the UK, statistics show that searches for all sorts of outdoor swimming are up. Google searches for cold water swimming rose more than 700% from 2018 to 2021, while searches for wild swimming grew 145% (see charts below courtesy of *Outdoor Swimmer* magazine).

Growth in Google search terms, UK, 2018-2021

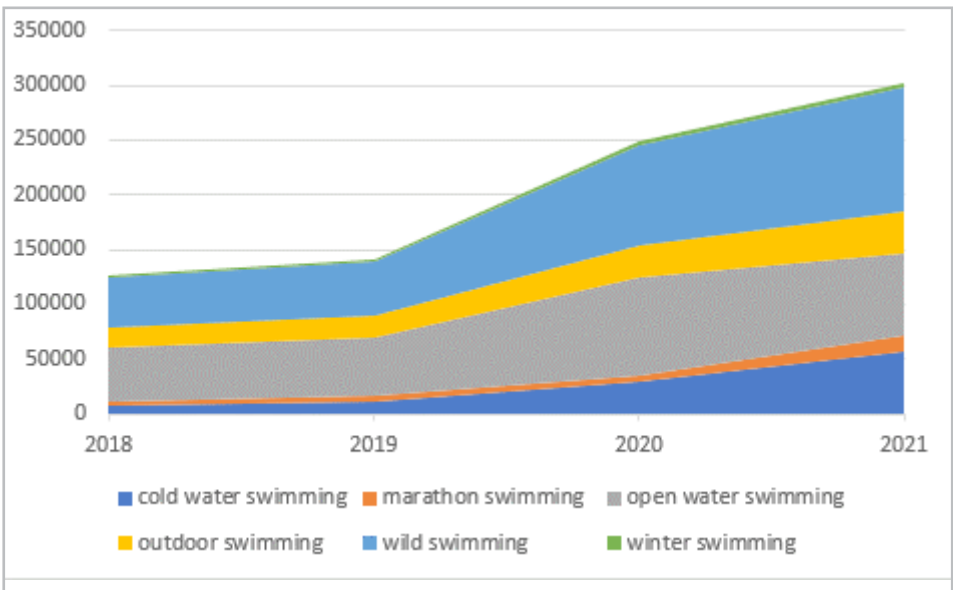
UNITED KINGDOM	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cold water swimming	7040	10990	30170	56400
Marathon swimming	4930	6200	4210	15010
Open water swimming	48000	52600	89500	75200
Outdoor swimming	18040	19100	29080	38400
Wild swimming	46100	49600	92400	113300
Winter swimming	2030	2250	3570	4380

“Our sense is that the growth in open-water swimming is global, but there are some interesting things happening in the UK that we don’t think are yet being replicated elsewhere,” says Simon Griffiths, founder and publisher of *Outdoor Swimmer* magazine. “In particular, there is a big growth in interest in winter swimming in the UK, and in using outdoor swimming to support wellbeing and mental health.”

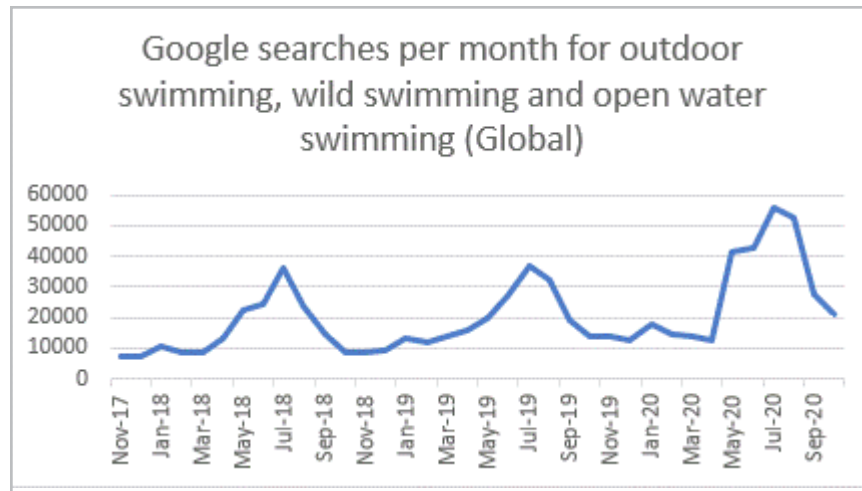
Outdoor Swimmer’s 2022 Trends in Outdoor Swimming report shows that female participation is on the rise, and two thirds of female outdoor swimmers say it is “hugely important” to their general sense of wellbeing. Among swimmers living with a long-term mental health condition, 55% say outdoor swimming brings them a lot of benefits, and a further 33% say it’s a game changer and they would struggle without it.

In places like the UK, where swimming in the sea even in summer is nippy, people have a long history of swimming in ponds and lakes. *The ponds at Hampstead Heath* in London have been used for swimming for more than 100 years, and are still divided into ladies’, men’s and mixed swimming ponds. *The Ponds*, a 2019 documentary from the BBC, saw filmmakers spend a year with some of the regulars who swim almost every day at the pond,

Growth in Google search terms, UK, 2018-2021



The most recent statistics for global searches for outdoor swimming, wild swimming and open water swimming show a doubling from 2018 to 2020, with a peak in July of 2020.



even (or especially) in the winter. “It becomes a kind of therapy,” said Patrick McLennan, one of the film’s directors. “One of our characters says that once you get through one winter, you feel superhuman, and I think that’s an experience that most swimmers here would attest to.”

Indeed, new research shows that cold water swimming may be an effective treatment for depression, perhaps because the shock of cold water trains the body to respond to the stress associated with anxiety and depression. Swimming in cold water has also been shown to be good for pain relief and inflammation, and to reduce the stress hormone cortisol and increase the “happiness hormones” serotonin and endorphin, stimulate blood flow, and boost energy.

Self-proclaimed “aquaholic” Eleanor Etherington swims most days in the cold sea on the South Devon coast in England. “For me, it’s a case of quieting my mind and being fully present in the moment,” she says. “When you’re submerging yourself into single-digit water, every thought and every nerve in your body is alert to the now, and it brings about an intense state of calm.”

Countless wild swimming groups have sprung up to offer inclusive, supportive group swims, including the hilariously named [Bluetits Chill](#)

[Swimmers](#), which has more than 100,000 members around the world, including the UK, US, Canada, Cyprus, Austria, Denmark, Australia, Portugal and Iceland. In the US, [Odyssey Open Water Swimming](#) provides weekly guided group open swims in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as special [swims to Alcatraz](#) six times a year. [Swim Oregon](#) hosts wild-swimming adventures at a different location every Sunday between May and September, and provides trained safety escorts for overnight camping swims or moonlight swims. [Mental Health Swims](#) is an award-winning mental health peer support community that hosts free, safe and inclusive swim meet ups, with 150 locations, including the UK, Norway and Portugal with a focus is on “dips, not distance, and community, not competition.”

“There is a real social aspect to wild swimming—especially for people who work from home, it can be the only time you see someone in person during the day,” says Mark Smith, who co-hosts a Mental Health Swims group in England. “It’s real grassroots wellness and so simple—and it’s free. You can buy lots of expensive kits, but you don’t need to.”

As interest in wild swimming grows, we’re seeing hospitality locations taking note. The luxury [Armathwaite Hall Hotel & Spa](#) in the UK’s scenic Lake District offers a wild-swimming package where guests can spend a half day with a guide

exploring local natural water features, including a string of spectacular waterfalls. At [Another Place the Lake Hotel](#) in England, professional ice swimmer Colin Hill provides guided wild-swimming excursions through his company, [Ullswater Swim Place](#), including winter swims, summer cross-lake swims, tarn/hike swims with a qualified mountain guide, and stargazing and moonlight swims, where each swimmer is provided with a light inside of a tow-float.

Wild swimming is often popular in mountain regions, where clear lakes and waterfalls abound. In Italy's South Tyrol region, guests can partake in a new "[Kneipp in Natur](#)" package at the [Preidlhof Resort](#), which combines a Kneipp experience in a local waterfall with nocturnal and silent hikes and wild swimming in mountain lakes and streams — often accompanied by the resort's 73-year-old guide Irmgard Moosmair. Switzerland's [Le Grand Bellevue](#) hosts a "[wild wellness experience](#)" in the Alps that combines wild swimming, guided cycle tours, trail running, massage, foraging experience, cooking class and mountaintop yoga.

At the [Maison ilā](#)—a wellness retreat in France—yoga, meditation and sound healing are complemented by wild swimming in neighboring natural pools. In Portugal, [The Salt Sisterhood](#) is hosting several five-day yoga and wild swimming retreats that take advantage of the Algarve's dramatic coastline.

Even the Americans are getting in on the action: [Mohonk Mountain House](#) in New York has introduced a Lakeside Immersion program, which begins with a dip in the glacial-formed Lake Mohonk, using singing as a form of breathwork, followed by hot cider or tea, guided yoga stretches and a warm ginger inhalation therapy in the resort's Spa Motion Room.

Cross-country swimming

As more and more people embrace wild swimming, it's only natural that the concept evolves, and one of the most exciting trends we've seen is that of [cross-country swimming](#), which combines hiking and wild swimming. "With cross-country

Ullswater Swim Place offers winter swims, summer cross-lake swims, tarn/hike swims, and stargazing and moonlight swims in England. Photo, Ullswater Swim Place



swimming, when you get to the water's edge—it could be a lake, river or coastline—you use the water as part of the adventure, rather than seeing it as an obstacle,” says Will Watt, co-founder of [Above Below](#).

Above Below is also organizing [new cross-country swimming retreats](#), including a back-to-basics adventure retreat run by a former military commando, where guests hike and swim around islands and down estuaries. Watt says that while so far the retreats are UK-focused, he's had lots of interest from Scandinavia, Holland, the US, New Zealand and Australia. “With two thirds of the world as water, there is no shortage of amazing places to explore where land meets water,” he says.

Swimming ponds, floating spas and saunas

Those without access to rivers, lakes, ponds or coastlines can replicate the feeling of wild swimming with swimming ponds like you can find at the UK's [South Lodge](#) or the [Lurzerhof Hotel](#) in Austria. These ponds mimic the natural living filtration system of ponds, using specific plants to absorb nutrients and clean and purify the water, and are regarded as a more environmentally friendly alternative to a traditional swimming pool. Adding to the appeal, celebrities like Ed Sheeran and the Beckhams are installing their own personal wild-swimming ponds at their countryside estates.

The [Blue Mind Barge](#), set to open on the Thames river in London in 2024, will include a 25-meter outdoor natural pool, a panoramic glass sauna, a cold plunge pool and hot bathing experiences. In Oslo, [a complex of floating saunas](#) has appeared in recent years, in part due to the growing popularity of wild swimming, and in Sweden's Lapland, the new [Arctic Bath](#) hotel includes a circular floating sauna and a series of cabins set in the Lule River.

Hot springs are...hot

The mineral-rich waters of natural hot springs are heated from deep within the earth's core and have been used for medicinal purposes and socializing for centuries in almost every culture. But we see 2023 as the beginning of a new hot springs revival, as consumers are waking up to the benefits of bathing in natural mineral-rich waters, and new life is being breathed into long-forgotten facilities. An irresistible combination of art, culture, food and relaxation in a natural setting is putting hot springs on the cusp of a wellness revolution.

“The pure gift of natural thermal water flowing from the earth is very appealing to the mind, body and spirit,” explains Charles Davidson, CEO of Peninsula Hot Springs in Australia and chair of the Global Wellness Institute's Hot Springs Initiative. “Hot springs provide a means of connecting with nature; they help you feel relaxed and in harmony with yourself and your surroundings.”

Above Below is organizing new cross-country swimming retreats, which combine hiking and wild swimming. Photo, Will Watt, co-founder of Above Below





Maruia Hot Springs offers a variety of bathing and wellness experiences in a natural setting. Photos, Maruia Hot Springs, New Zealand

It's that sense of relaxation and harmony that's also bringing more people to hot springs. Hot springs have been shown to reduce inflammation and pain, improve circulation, and relax muscles, and as a result, quality of sleep and perception of anxiety are impacted, says Dr. Marcus Coplin, a naturopathic medical doctor specializing in balneology and medical director of The Springs Resort in Colorado and Murrieta Hot Springs in California. "The ever-expanding scientific body supports the use of these waters as an aspect of a comprehensive treatment for a variety of ailments like anxiety, burnout, joint pain, cardiovascular issues and more."

Many locations have also extended their offerings beyond just soaking in hot pools, to include other wellness facilities and modalities such as saunas, cold plunge pools, reflexology walks, clay and mud baths, salt pools, cave pools, hammams, yoga, tai chi, mindfulness and meditation—all of which have helped turn hot springs into wellness destinations. "We've been seeing locations include high-tech recovery elements like contrast bathing, compression, IV vitamin therapy, physical therapy, stretching, hyperbaric chambers and more, and

hybrid locations that include organic farms and excellent mindfulness programming and education with hot springs," says Amy McDonald, owner and CEO of Under a Tree Health & Wellness Consulting.

Another factor in the increasing popularity of hot springs is that they can cater to a large market that can include everyone from children to grandparents, providing a fun, social space at a relatively low cost. "One of the advantages is that they allow a wellness experience with a large footfall, making them more accessible to a broader range of guests," says Davidson.

Hot springs in Australia and New Zealand

The land down under has seen numerous new facilities opened or expanded in recent years and a multitude of projects in development. At [Peninsula Hot Springs](#), which welcomes more than 500,000 annual visitors starting at AU\$65 for a day pass, guests can explore 70+ globally inspired bathing and wellness experiences. These include a fire & ice workshop on contrast bathing, hot springs yoga, and a body clay ritual where guests can paint each other using colorful local muds. In recent years, they've built a terraced pavilion with



Photo, Maruia Hot Springs, New Zealand

a stage so guests can float in pools while listening to live music. An AU\$150 million project to add 116 rooms, two new thermal bathing facilities, another wellness center, two restaurants and a function center for 250 guests is set to begin work in the latter half of 2023, opening in 2025.

Peninsula also operates the newly opened [Metung Hot Springs](#), a 25-acre wellness destination with geothermal bathing pools, architecturally designed saunas, reflexology walk, barrel pools and a glamping village that opened in November 2022 after an initial AU\$6 million investment. An additional AU\$2 million expansion will add a floating sauna, mud steam cave, five new thermal pools, two grass music amphitheater spaces and walking trails.

Other new openings in the country include the [Alba Thermal Springs](#) in Victoria, an AU\$100 million development that opened in late 2022 with more than 30 thermal pools; [Deep Blue Hotel and Hot Springs](#) in Warrnambool, Victoria, which added a AU\$3.5 million cave-based hot springs bathing park on the grounds of its oceanside hotel in 2020; and [Talaroo Hot Springs](#), in outback Queensland, a million-year-old mound spring opened in 2021 and operated by the Ewamin people.

In addition, the [Great Victorian Bathing Trail](#) is underway. It's a 900 km trail that will connect around 50 hot springs, sea baths, and floating saunas with hiking and biking routes along Australia's southern coastline.

In New Zealand, the much-anticipated [Wai Ariki Hot Springs](#) is set to open in mid-2023, drawing on the 650-year legacy of the local Māori tribe, Ngāti Whakaue, and Rotorua's famed spa heritage.

Japan

For the Japanese, relaxing and enjoying a hot spring bath on holiday has become a core leisure activity, says Tomonori Maruyama, chief researcher of Mistui Knowledge Industry in Japan, and a member of the Global Wellness Institute's Hot Springs Initiative. Japan boasts nearly 3,000 hot springs resorts, known as onsens, and the Japanese people have long nurtured a unique hot springs culture, which varies by region. "The richness of variation in the quality and culture of hot springs and the travel experiences they offer is one of the greatest characteristics of Japanese hot springs," explains Maruyama. In the [2019 Survey on Foreign Visitor Consumption Trends](#), conducted by the Japan Tourism Agency just before Covid, 49% of foreign visitors listed "bathing in hot springs" as an activity they would most like to do when visiting, making it the second-most popular activity after "eating Japanese food."

A new trend that's emerged is for travelers to visit an entire onsen area, not just the onsen hotel or ryokan, says Yoriko Somo, President of Conceptasia and a co-host of the 2019 Global Wellness Summit in Singapore. Guests spend time hopping between different onsens, enjoying the unique waters of each one or taking in the onsen town's facilities,

such as public baths and foot soaking baths. Somo also reports an increased interest in the so-called “secret onsens,” a term used to refer to secluded hot springs, often in the mountains, that can only be accessed by hiking long distances.

Recently developed onsen facilities range from modern, Western-style resorts, city hotels, business hotels, and glamping facilities, to traditional ryokan inns or renovated old houses, says Maruyama. “New facilities are appearing one after another, each trying to attract not only traditional onsen fans, but also young people and foreign tourists,” he says.

Japanese hospitality company Hoshino Resorts has been in business for over 100 years and operates 43 resorts in Japan, as well as three overseas properties in Hawaii, Taiwan and Bali. Under its KAI brand, Hoshino has opened seven new ryokans since 2021. Set on the shore of Lake Poroto, KAI Poroto opened in January 2022 and its Shiraoi Onsen contains organic minerals derived from plants deposited along the lake. KAI Yufuin is a restful, 45-room hot spring ryokan designed by Kengo Kuma with a spacious wraparound veranda offering views of Mt Yufu and terraced rice fields, which opened in August 2022. KAI Tamatsukuri, opened in November 2022, and every guest room has a private outdoor onsen fed by the historic Tamatsukuri hot spring, Japan’s oldest “spring of beauty.” Hoshino has also set its sights on the North American market, with plans to open a Japanese ryokan-style hot springs inn in the US in the next three to five years.

At the newly opened Setsu Niseko in Japan’s most popular ski resort, the onsens and extensive wellness facilities attract wealthy guests who come to bask in the 40-degree Celsius public onsens—separate for men and women—and onsen lounge with sauna and cold plunge pool. Set at the foot of Mt Zao, the new Chikusenso Mt Zao Onsen Resort & Spa features outdoor onsens surrounded by lush foliage, while the outdoor Hoshizora onsen at the

new Lotte Arai Resort allows guests to soak under a starry sky year-round.

The newly opened Mitsui Kyoto Hotel is the only luxury property in the city of Kyoto with its own natural source of spring water, which feeds the multiple onsens at the 1,000-square-meter Thermal Spring Spa.

Several exciting hot springs developments are set to open in Japan in 2023 or beyond. Senkyaku Banrai is a super-sized hot spring facility under development in Tokyo’s new central wholesale market, and will consist of a total of 34,000 square meters, including both the hot springs and the commercial buildings. Meanwhile, TOWER11, a natural hot spring, sauna and hotel complex is scheduled to open in March 2023 within the ESCON Field Hokkaido, and will include the world’s first hot spring and sauna inside a ballpark, where guests will be able to watch the games while they soak in the thermal water.

Iceland

With a long history of thermal bathing, Iceland has recently seen the addition of a number of new hot springs facilities that combine mineral-rich geothermal pools with a social spa-ing. The world famous Blue Lagoon—which sees close to a million visitors each year—added a luxury five-star hotel, restaurant, and the lagoon’s first spa in 2018, and expanded the pools with more private bathing experiences. The Sky Lagoon, on the outskirts of Reykjavik, opened in 2021 and takes inspiration from traditional Icelandic bathing culture, with a



Photo, The Springs Resort, Pagosa Springs, CO



Castle Hot Springs, established in 1896, has been reborn as a high-end hot springs resort in the Arizona desert. Photo, Castle Hot Springs

seven-step self-guided Sky Ritual experience that combines the healing powers of warm and cold waters, steam, heat and fresh air.

The newly opened [Sky Lagoon](#)—created by the same architects who built the Blue Lagoon—is a new 1,300 square-meter complex set in the woodlands of northern Iceland, which includes two infinity pools with swim-up bars, a cold tub, a sauna and a bistro.

North America

Vicky Nash, executive director of the Hot Springs Association, says about 50 hot springs projects are underway right now in the US. “The past two years, health-conscious consumers have been utilizing geothermal pools and baths in greater numbers, seeking more natural immune-boosting activities, and many resorts have recently experienced record-breaking visitation numbers.”

In Colorado, the century-old Trimble Hot Springs has been transformed from disrepair into the new [Durango Hot Springs](#) after a \$10 million renovation. The facility now features 41 thermal mineral water features (adult soaks are \$39, children are \$15), and in the summer, guests can soak in the hot springs while they listen to live music performances. Owners report visitation numbers are now over 400,000 a year.

At [Iron Mountain Hot Springs](#) (pricing from \$36-\$48) in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, expansion is nearing completion with the addition of ten rock-bottom, adult-only pools, which doubles the size of this eight-year-old attraction. [The Springs](#) resort in Pagosa Springs, Colorado (day passes start at \$65 for adults) has also benefited from new owners and a renovation, with 25 mineral hot spring pools and a variety of health and [wellness activities](#) on offer, including a new guided ritual that introduces guests to the benefits of hot and cold contrast bathing. The new owners, [Olympus Real Estate Group](#), have purchased neighboring land and plan to double the size of the resort, with 21 new riverfront pools, nearly 80 new hotel rooms, a restaurant and an outdoor music venue.

Olympus has also purchased California’s historic [Murrieta Hot Springs](#) for \$50 million and plans to renovate the 46-acre property and reopen it as a wellness resort with expanded use of the natural hot springs, overnight guest lodging, a full suite of wellness classes and activities, a geothermal-focused spa and access for day guests. Another historic California property, [Dr. Wilkinson’s Backyard Resort & Mineral Springs](#), completed a multimillion-dollar renovation in 2022, adding an outdoor spa garden, four indoor mud baths, seven indoor and two outdoor mineral baths, a cold deluge shower, and a dedicated geothermal mineral pool. And in downtown Palm Springs, California, the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla Indians will soon open the 40,000 square foot [Spa at Séc-he](#), designed to celebrate their sacred healing waters.

On the other end of the price spectrum is [Castle Hot Springs](#), which was originally established in 1896, but has been brought back to life under new ownership as a high-end boutique resort in the Arizona desert. Set on 1,100 acres with just 30 cabins and bungalows, rates at the resort start at \$1,200 a night, including meals and activities.

In the Canadian Yukon, the newly renovated [Eclipse Nordic Springs](#) has opened on the site of the former Takhini Hot Springs, with a focus on Japanese, Nordic and Turkish bathing traditions. Guests can view the Northern Lights from the

Japanese onsen pool, partake in a Nordic contrast bathing circuit, or soak in one of eight Japanese clay pots. Walk-in pricing starts at CA\$35.

THE FUTURE

The desire for connection with nature shows no signs of slowing down, and while the pandemic may have brought the idea to the surface, today's increasingly technology-focused, disconnected lifestyles ensure the demand will be there for years to come. When it comes to wild swimming, we are only just seeing the tip of the iceberg; the UK remains at the forefront of the movement, but interest is growing around the world. With an appeal to a wide range of ages and next to no barriers to participate—all you need is a swimsuit, a body of water, and the ability to swim—we see this trend growing organically, especially in times of recession, with social media helping to propel the trend forward. Cross-country swimming is only just getting started, and new gear now promises to make longer adventures possible. And as hot springs facilities improve, expand, and add in fun, cultural experiences, we also see this area ripe for growth. With lakes, ponds, oceans and hot springs all over the world, it is truly a global wellness experience.

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People are fascinated with all types of sports and “celebrity athletes.” Businesses that support this trend will become the go-to brands for future generations. SIRO in Dubai, opening Q4 2023, is a fitness and recovery hotel concept. Photo, SIRO Hotel

Wellness + Sports:

New Business Models for Hospitality

By Lisa Starr

INTRODUCTION

Fitness used to be something that happened outdoors or at a gym, and you knew when you packed for a trip that your home routine would suffer while you were on the road. Happily, savvy brands are responding to today's wellness-focused consumer by creating spaces and options that ensure that wellness, fitness and recovery services can be maintained along with business meetings and networking.

Responsibility for personal wellness continues to take center stage in the lives of consumers in a post-pandemic world, and adding fuel to the fire is the focus on lifestyles of elite and professional athletes. Social media has made access to details of their lives and routines accessible to the general public and feeds our fascination with how they are able to do what they do. Aging icons like Tom Brady and LeBron James tout the effectiveness of their wellness activities including nutrition, sleep, movement and treatments—the

latter reportedly spends \$1.5 million per year on his personal maintenance. Recently, high-profile athletes such as Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka have also shared details of their struggles to maintain the mental state required to perform at the highest levels. Given the public preoccupation with sports, both professional and amateur, the health and wellness habits of the “celebrity athlete” have influenced how consumers want to live their own lives, maintaining their personal health and wellness routines wherever and whenever. When traveling, we make choices that enable us to duplicate our healthy diet and exercise habits, and the businesses that support those desires will become the go-to brands for future generations. Using sports as a lens through which to attract and connect with consumers is a timely business strategy. In a world where politics have become so divisive, emotional connections to sports have become a great unifier that transcends boundaries, languages, age and cultural differences.

FUELING THE TREND

- The recent FIFA World Cup in Qatar featured 3.4 million visitors to the stadiums, and global viewing engagement of 5 billion people. Qatar built over 100 hotels to host teams, fans and sponsors.
- More than 3 billion people watch the Olympic Summer games to root for their countrymen (and women).
- Athletes inspire us to overcome challenges and live our best lives, modeling real-life adventures that are performed by humans! Cristiano Ronaldo, who we've all heard of, has over 500 million followers on Instagram. Virat Kohli, the popular Indian cricketer who many of us may not have heard of, has 228 million! Their reach is unprecedented.
- Engagement in sports, teams and individual athletes elicits strong emotions.
- Major pro sports and athlete charity sponsorships are expected to grow by 25%. The number of charities and nonprofits with athlete sponsorship deals has increased by 85% since 2019 (*SponsorUnited*).
- Athleisure market is expected to grow from \$411.02 billion in 2021 to \$793.46 billion by 2028; it is estimated to grow at a CAGR of 9.9% from 2021 to 2028 (*Insight Partners*).
- Marriott Courtyard and the NFL have had a partnership for the last 12 years; along with advertising tie-ins, fans can win prizes such as a Fansgiving Dinner, Super Bowl Sleepover and VIP Draft tickets.
- Collaborations provide exciting options for existing hospitality loyalty and rewards programs.
- As seen at the recent Consumer Electronics Show, the market for wearables and tracking technology continues to explode on a B2C level. However, these same advancements also exist on a B2B level, enabling spas and hospitality businesses to provide more cutting-edge services and treatments than was previously possible.



Fueling the Wellness + Sports Trend: billions watching the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, along with all types of sports. This massive engagement is predicted to grow to a \$20.24 billion global sports market in 2027. Photo, World Cup 2022

- People want something fun to do when they travel, and almost everyone can relate to sports on some level.
- The Global Sports Hospitality Market was valued at \$4.75 billion in 2020 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 23% to reach a market value of \$20.24 billion in 2027. This market is comprised of a business strategy organizations use for brand building and both internal and external rewards, providing opportunities for people to watch or play sports while increasing brand awareness.

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

In response to a gap in the hospitality market for a brand that truly embraces fitness and the modern lifestyle, Kerzner International Holdings, owner of the Atlantis Resort and One&Only Resorts, has conceived the immersive global lifestyle brand SIRO (*Strength, Inclusivity, Recovery, Originality*). The first location is slated to open in Q4 2023 in Dubai at One Za'abeel. SIRO is billed as a fitness and recovery hotel concept, with a mission stating they intend "to inspire a collective of passionate people to maximize their potential by creating immersive experiences, interactive spaces, and captivating destinations."

Created on the pillars of fitness, nutrition, sleep, recovery and mindfulness, each location will feature a minimum 1,000 square-meters fitness area which will include studios for meditation and yoga as well as group fitness classes, and a lap pool. Upon arrival at SIRO, guests can

receive a complimentary 3D body composition assessment, which the in-house team will use to design fitness programming specific to the guest. In addition, each property will feature a Recovery Lab, offering a range of alternative therapies and treatments including cryotherapy, infrared and oxygen therapy, saunas, steams, physiotherapy acupuncture and signature stretch protocols, all in the interest of improving blood circulation, reducing stress and improving sleep.

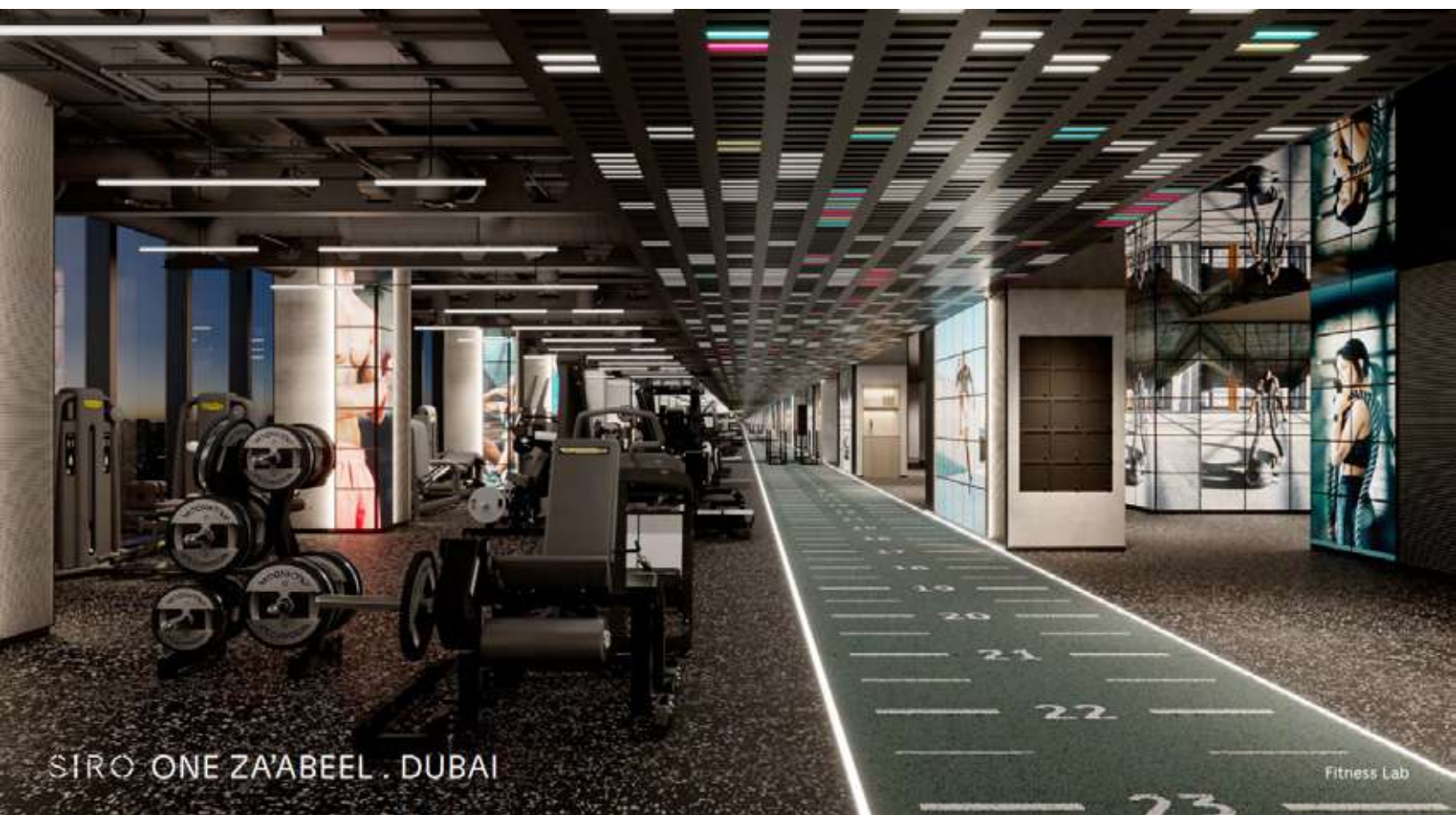
On that note, the guest rooms have not been left out; each is designed as a “recovery cocoon” including a thermally regulated mattress, soundproofing, advanced lighting systems, and a Refuel Minibar with nutritious snacks, hydration drinks and natural sweet treats, all without added sugar. As a digitally-forward brand, SIRO will provide an app through which guests can access many smart features, such as class and treatment booking systems, mobile check-in, and even curtains timed to slowly open according to the guests’ circadian rhythms. In addition, the app can be used for virtual training, nutrition planning

and vitality tracking, as well as the gamification aspect of access to competition and results boards from the gym floor.

Kerzner CEO Philippe Zuber comments that “SIRO will transform the fitness and recovery hospitality offering, combining our excellence in developing exceptional hotels and experiences with the invaluable insight and expertise of world-class athletes and fitness professionals. The result will be a curated, bold guest experience with powerful opportunities to excel, and we cannot wait to show the world what we’ve created.”

The Quinto Do Lago mixed-used development in Algarve features a boutique hotel, restaurants, privately-owned real estate and a premier sports hub called The Campus, all situated on the lovely southern coast of Portugal. The Campus is a state-of-the-art performance and innovation environment that offers a stadium-quality football pitch, high-performance gym, tennis and paddle courts, aquatic center, cycling, group classes and personal training and sports rehabilitation, as well as recovery pools, changing rooms and

*Each SIRO location will feature a 1,000+ square-meters fitness center with meditation/yoga/fitness class areas and a lap pool. Guests can receive a complimentary 3D body composition assessment on arrival.
Photo, SIRO Dubai*



a bike shed. The intention behind the multi-sports hub was to create easy access to active living and high-level sporting opportunities for both residents and visitors alike. This secure and private facility that is close to nature provides an excellent setting for professional teams and athletes to train, work, rehabilitate and relax in a secure and private environment.

Loughborough University, a post-graduate research university, opened the Elite Athlete Centre, a first for the UK. The sports-centric, fitness-focused hotel offers 20 “high-altitude” rooms which simulate the low oxygen atmosphere conditions found in mountain regions. These rooms feature the ability to duplicate the atmosphere from sea level to 5000 meters, which is the altitude of base camps on Mount Everest, and which accelerate the production of red blood cells, allowing athletes to develop stronger muscles even while sleeping. Guests have access to nutritionist-approved meals and can utilize the 50-meter swimming pool, fitness studios and ball courts of the university.

Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som in Qatar: Billed as the Middle East’s first full-immersion wellness resort, Zulal Wellness Resort offers TAIM (traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine) treatments at this sprawling resort with designated sections for individuals and families. Inspired by TAIM, which collected the ancient Unani school of medicine, treatments at Zulal Wellness Resort are thoughtfully designed on the pillars of holistic therapies: physical fitness, diet and nutrition, physiotherapy, aesthetic beauty, spa therapies and taste of Zulal. The size of the resort provides privacy as needed, and the excellent team of physicians, physios and fitness coaches, high-quality nutritional food and well-equipped fitness and recovery centers create an ideal environment for sports teams and their staffs. This property hosted the German Men’s National Football team during the recent World Cup.

After the FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa in 2010, the Protea Hotel Polokwane Ranch Resort began to cater to football teams after

the nearby stadium, originally built for the World Cup, began hosting other major matches. Given the lack of available training facilities in the area, the resort built two soccer pitches of their own as well as a high-performance center and spa, and is now able to host many professional and semi-professional teams. The property also offers a 12-hole par 3 golf course, walking and cycling trails, game drives and horseback safaris, along with an air-strip and helipad for ease of access.

Sports also plays a central role in both planned and existing mixed-used developments. Spa and wellness consultant Amy McDonald, CEO of Under a Tree, shares details of a project underway in Colorado, where a development company is creating a large sports facility that will include hyperbaric chamber, flotation tanks, cryotherapy, halotherapy and infrared as well as physical therapy, sports medicine and a wellness center with indoor/outdoor contrast bathing. Accompanying the sports center are meeting and workspaces, a hospitality component, a yoga studio and a restaurant. McDonald says that owners and developers are integrating sports facilities into hospitality and mixed-use projects as it is no longer enough to just have a fitness center. “COVID obviously increased being outdoors and exercising more, but we saw this happening even before the pandemic. Shared physical experiences such as a bathhouse or group fitness are in high demand right now; biohacking and recovery services such as vitamin IV drips, compression and percussive therapies and assisted stretching have become the new ‘spa,’ so it goes hand-in-hand that developers want to also give consumers a sport to recover from! This becomes a differentiator for hotels as well as an anchor that brings added value for developers.”

The Carillon Wellness Resort in Miami Beach has fine-tuned their programming to include several sports-related packages. Their Recovery and Pain Management Circuit can be completed in two hours, includes a full-body LED, halotherapy, infrared and cryotherapy, and flotation, along with a few other nuggets, and has been regularly attracting members of the local Miami Heat



Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som in Qatar is billed as the Middle East's first full-immersion wellness resort. Host to the German football team during the recent World Cup, Zulal offers TAIM, traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine. Photo, Zulal, Qatar

basketball team. They also offer a four-day, five-night Jumpstart Your Health program along with their partner Biostation™, which includes extensive biomarker diagnostic testing, lipotropic injections, and IV nutrient therapy treatments. Vice President of Spa and Wellness Operations Tammy Pahel shares that once athletes try the Recovery and Pain Management Circuit they are hooked. We target athletes and anyone who is physically moving and/or standing: runners, hairdressers, cyclists, body builders, NFL and NBA players, educating them that at the Carillon we have a solution for muscle recovery and pain management. This programming is what drives our room revenue.”

Marriott has long been a leader in sports

collaboration, having had partnerships through its various brands over the years with many sports leagues including the NFL, NBA, PGA, NHL, USA Swimming, USA Hockey, and US Soccer, but the JW Marriott Marquis Miami has gone one better. This hotel features an NBA-approved basketball court as part of their 50,000 square-foot indoor Lifestyle and Entertainment complex. In addition to the 10,000 square-foot court, the complex also includes a Mariano Bartolome golf school, duckpin bowling alley, Enliven Spa & Salon, Met 2 Fitness 24-hour gym and a rooftop pool, spread over two floors. “The multiplex entertainment facility was created as part of our mission to cater to the individual preferences of each guest,” said Florencia Rotemberg, the hotel’s general manager. “As a first-to-market



Sports collaboration leader Marriott boasts a NBA-approved basketball court in their 50,000 square- foot indoor Lifestyle and Entertainment complex located in Miami, Florida. Photo, JW Marriott Marquis Miami Arena

brand, and the most exclusive of its kind, the JW Marriott Marquis Miami wanted to bring world-class hotel amenities that exceeded the guests' expectations." The property shares that the court gives the hotel a competitive advantage in both attracting groups and offering something unique to leisure guests and locals.

The 10,000 square-foot court can be transformed into a tennis or pickleball court, or a carpeted event space. Continued Rotemberg, "Thanks to this feature we can attract different markets. From NBA teams, to corporate groups looking to create a team-building activity, to the leisure traveler that wants to enjoy our property, locals that learned about this feature and rent it to enjoy a game with their friends, and clients that want to add this as an activity for their social events such as a birthday party or bar mitzvah. Also, last but not least, it has been a great source of revenue from a marketing perspective due to all the filming requests for artists and advertising campaigns. We also hosted one of the Marriott Bonvoy experiences featuring NBA professionals. The court has brought a great source of revenue

to our hotel due to its diversity as a basketball court, tennis court and event space."

The renowned Grand Resort Bad Ragaz in Switzerland has an intriguing model that is continuing to evolve. The resort consists of four hotels, extensive thermal baths and spa, restaurants and retail, and a healthcare and nutrition center that is among the best in Europe, housing 20 medical doctors who cover a variety of specialties. 80-90% of their patients are non-hotel guests, but resort guests can also enjoy these services in the atmosphere of a luxury hotel, and the resort has developed several packages that include meetings and evaluations with medical professionals. Many of these physicians are especially focused on sports-related practices, including an orthopedist who is the team doctor for the Swiss National Ski Team. The physicians receive office space and access to a new stream of clients, and the resort is able to marry scientific diagnostic methods and therapies of conventional medicine with the evidence- and experience-based methods of complementary medicine, creating the NEWYOU

Method® which is exclusive to Grand Resort Bad Ragaz.

“At Equinox Hotels, we strive to help our guests be the highest performing versions of themselves,” shares Equinox CEO Chris Norton. “They have access to the best in sleep, fitness, nutrition, in-room wellness amenities, and innovative spa treatments, all within our properties. As this performance-based lifestyle transcends across consumers’ interests, it makes sense that a growing number of clients seek athletic experiences while they travel. This includes everything from exclusive experiences at professional sporting events to immersive ways to get moving in a destination, from running in new neighborhoods to getting a different view of the landscape via boat. Looking ahead, Equinox Hotels will continue to deliver on the promise of performance through strategic partnerships, packages, experiences both on and off property, and expansion into new markets.”

A relative newcomer to the fitness experience business are surf parks. Surfing is a fun outdoor activity, but obviously has previously been out-of-reach for many potential consumers due to geographical constraints. The technology required

to create a surf park has greatly advanced in the past few years, and development is booming. Over 100 surf park projects are reportedly in the development or planning stages globally, and the list of companies participating and their accomplishments are impressive. New projects typically feature retail and restaurant components, and some also include resort and residential accommodations. For instance, Haseko Development Corporation has built approximately 4,000 homes in the area of a new surf park in Wai Kai, on the west coast of Oahu, opening soon.

Another new concept can be found in Fountain Life™, a diagnostics and membership model that “puts you in control of your health,” according to their website. They state, “Our coveted membership gives you full transparency of your biometric data, a custom care plan, and complete ownership of your wellbeing so you can live better, for longer.” Fountain Life is opening facilities in multi-tenant, mixed-use developments to provide a best-in-class healthcare model. Several board members are also physicians with a passion for preventive health, and so their membership model provides a wide array of annual tests aimed at proactive care, and

Fountain Life's diagnostics and membership model focuses on giving members full access to biometric data and a custom care plan. The brand is opening facilities in mixed-use developments. Photo, Fountain Life, New York





Dusit Thani Krabi Beach's BeWell program includes a range of fitness programs, from ice baths to a full-sized Muay Thai ring and customized combat classes. Photo, Dusit Thani Krabi

they are now exploring collaborations with resort and hospitality locations where guests can sign up for diagnostic testing as part of their visit.

Dusit Thani Krabi Beach's BeWell program provides a variety of fitness programs and equipment, from morning power walks and Zumba classes to ice baths, to a full-sized Muay Thai ring and customized combat classes.

Four Seasons Seoul houses an 8,000 square-foot, three level gym and fitness area with pool, saunas, movement studios, and the addition of an in-house Golf Experience, allowing guests to tee-up virtually at famous courses around the world.

For a seven day immersion in physical activity, head to Euphoria for the Spartan Spirit of Adventure Retreat. Experienced trainers guide you on two or three hours of daily activity, including running, hiking, biking, interval training and rock climbing in the rugged Peloponnese.

Caribbean getaway Body Holiday publishes a schedule of themed months, which often offer

dedicated classes held by visiting athletes and big names in sports, dance and yoga. Classes in tennis, golf, sailing, mediation, tai chi and archery, among others, attract both active consumers and their families.

The 17 square mile Lake Nona development outside Orlando, FL is a mixed-use development, that along with residences features three hotels, indoor golf training from InClubGolf, a Chopra Mind-Body Zone and Spa, and the USTA National Campus, the largest tennis facility in the US, featuring 100 courts, that has become a training destination for professional, collegiate and amateur players. In addition, there are 44 miles of walking trails, and mindset and peak performance experiences from Limitless Minds, co-founded by Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson.

THE FUTURE:

Consumers continue to take responsibility for

their own health and wellness in daily life. With wearables, apps, new business models and devices to measure everything from sleep to nutrition to mental wellness to their microbiome, it stands to reason that they will gravitate to businesses that support their health, especially when it comes to spending 24+ hours somewhere other than home. The more consumers think of themselves as athletes, the more they relate to athletic brands and sporting experiences.

Concurrently, the global shortage of labor has certainly touched the hospitality and spa industries. Offering low-touch experiences and treatments, and programming that is group-oriented and utilizes outdoor and non-traditional spaces, provides options for creating revenue in new and untapped ways, as well as meeting the current wellness demands of our customers.

As consumer demand for training like a pro athlete expands, we see exciting opportunities for the hospitality industry to leverage relationships with equipment manufacturers who have been jointly serving the hospitality and sports sectors for years. Technogym, a well-known fitness company used widely in the hospitality sector, has been leveraging

their advanced technology and knowledge of physical exercise to partner with athletes around the globe for decades—from being the Official Supplier of the Olympic and Paralympic Games eight consecutive times to being the Official Fitness Partner of Ferrari and McLaren for Formula 1, as well as partnering with a myriad of other sports and sport teams from football to sailing. As this trend evolves, equipment manufacturers are an important partner for hospitality.

The collaboration between sports and hospitality really can be seen as a clear and natural evolution; when a person takes care of their health, they are able to do more things, some of them physical. Those physical abilities may transition into more sports-related activity, requiring more performance and strength-training, and thus recovery services. Additionally, in today's world, the Monday-Friday 9-5 workday has been replaced by a new model where we are both always working and always playing: The two are no longer mutually exclusive. Hospitality facilities that allow consumers to pursue their personal health goals while traveling, whether for work or leisure, or increasingly, both, are providing highly-valued options for the 21st century consumer seeking a well-lived life.



The wellness industry is turning to brands that use multiple senses to enhance wellbeing outcomes. Chromasonic explores intersections of art and science to transform awareness and connection. Photo, Chromasonic

Wellness + Senses:

Multisensory Integration

By Ari Peralta

INTRODUCTION

At its heart, multisensory design seeks to create and bring harmony to our brain by lining up the right blend of sensory cues in a way that the person finds beautiful and comfortable. After all, nature is multisensory. In all its magnificence, nature provides us with infinite combinations of sensory stimuli that help us regenerate. Welcome to multisensory integration, delivering a combination of multisensory cues such as light, scent, temperature and sound. These cues have been scientifically proven to add more meaning, context, purpose and function to wellness experiences.

Advances in neuroscience and neuroaesthetics continue to expand our understanding of how the senses actually work, how we work as people. The senses talk, influence and compete with one another. It's fascinating to look at the senses as a biological language of sorts, one that all humans already speak. In the field of design, the multisensory trend settles against visual culture as a commitment to new ways of understanding and interpreting experiences, since it is clear that

a complete experience is not limited to one or two senses. Our perception of space is carried out through the five senses, not just sight, a sense to which we have given special preference in Western culture. Today many designers have begun to explore the different sensitive dimensions of objects, which allow them to go much further than visual aesthetics. It is a design that focuses on improving the wellbeing of the user.

Sensory design is quickly evolving, and the wellness sector is playing a pivotal role shaping the trend. The senses have always been present in wellness. In fact, we subconsciously associate many wellness activities with one sense or another... spa is touch, wellness music is sound, chromotherapy is color, healthy food is taste and thermal is temperature. Wellness brands are now evolving their approach by combining sensory input to deepen and amplify felt experiences. Research conducted by [Prof. Charles Spence](#), director of neuroscience at the University of Oxford, confirms that when done right, mixing sensory cues deepens our experiences. According to more than [100 academic studies](#),



Designers are going much further than visual aesthetics and focusing on improving the wellbeing of the user through multisensory integration. Image, Bulgari x Refik Anadol (Serpenti Metamorphosis)

when one combines visuals with other relevant sensory cues (such as sound, touch and scent), together, they are more effective at influencing our perception and attention, than any one sense on its own. Scientists such as [David Eagleman](#), professor of neuroscience at Stanford University, applied multisensory design in [Neosensory](#) to help treat debilitating diseases such as tinnitus, experienced by up to 90% of first responders and law enforcement. Global Wellness Institute (GWI) advisor [Dr. Anjan Chatterjee](#), professor of neurology at University of Pennsylvania, is paving new ground in our understanding of [neuroaesthetics](#), unfolding the connection between what we perceive as beautiful and pleasurable, and how we can apply this knowledge to promote wellness outcomes. These are undoubtedly inspiring a new wave of multisensory enhanced wellness experiences, where the senses are being used to help create visceral moments at different touchpoints of the experience.

Tech-artists such as [Refik Anadol](#) and [Krista Kim](#), and industry pioneers like [Ivy Ross](#), [Ryan Douglas](#) and [Cathy Hackl](#) are giving new life to this movement. Enter the multisensory integration

renaissance, focusing on rediscoveries and fusing sensory science with cutting-edge technologies to enable a more humanistic and multisensory worldview. Fresh insights from multisensory integration research (and new immersive tech) mean ushering in a new era where we encourage interdisciplinary collaborations to help unlock sensory combinations and interventions (light/movement, color/music/taste, touch/scent, etc.) that can shift our mood, regulate our emotions and help us transform bad habits into wellness-driven ones.

Wellness has been traditionally visual-centric, that is until now. In this trend article, discover how brands are using multiple senses, simultaneously, to better support wellbeing outcomes, amplify wellness experience and influence behavioral change—think using multiple sensory cues, in a harmonious way to deepen meditation. Wellness is evolving. [AIUla Wellness](#), one of the leading Saudi wellness brands, curated a “Five Senses Sanctuary,” a 360-degree multisensory event which allowed visitors to stimulate and elevate all five senses among the ancient and stunning surroundings of the magical AIUla landscape. Tokyo-based [Medicha](#) is a studio

where guests can enjoy meditation, art, and Japanese tea. They provide guests with a unique 4-step approach that combines lighting and sound installations followed by sensory deprivation to infuse guests' five senses with a mindful awakening to create a space within. Global Wellness Summit (GWS) alum and Amsterdam-based [Sanctum](#) uses multisensory design in its dynamic fitness routines, specifically designed to help increase cardiovascular stamina and help sharpen mental focus during moments of peak fatigue. From [Sprig by Kohler](#), to [LEGO](#), to luxury brands such as [Bulgari](#), we are seeing retail brands begin to craft immersive wellness experiences using various sensory design approaches to help calm people. Beyond beautiful visuals, these projects touch upon our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing, inviting us to slow down, pay more attention to our environment and inspire a moment of deep reflection.

Taste color and sound with the rise of synesthetic dining events ([Six Senses x mycoococon](#), [Regent Taste Studio](#)), using specific sensory stimuli to enhance gustatory experiences, designing sensory seasoning of sorts to improve our perception of healthy foods and more. Discover the rise of digital senses and meditation experiences ([Tripp](#)) and spatial olfactory tech ([OVR](#)), giving new meaning to wellness in the metaverse. Multisensory design is everywhere, and we are optimistic about the prominent role it will play in the wellness sector, far beyond 2023.

FUELING THE TREND

- After 3 years of pandemic isolation, people are yearning for multisensory experiences that take us out of screen mode and into “feel” mode.
- Advances in neuroscience and neuroaesthetics continue to expand our understanding of how the senses actually work, including ways we can leverage this knowledge and apply it to wellness. When done right, using a mix of senses (instead of just one sense) creates a more holistic experience.
- Sensehacking is huge. A new interdisciplinary wave of scientists, artists and engineers are blurring the lines of silo innovation, bringing forward research insights that connect the senses and bridge sensory disciplines.
- Beyond establishing sensory signatures, brands are investing in sensory profiling tools and systems that deliver AI-driven health and wellness micro interventions.
- Meditation is being enhanced by brands that are using immersive tech to create multisensory and soothing experiences for customers.
- The rise of synesthetic experiences in culinary experiences, using other senses to enhance and influence flavor perception, create a new opportunity for healthy foods and plant-based alternatives.
- Wellness is permeating into gaming and the metaverse, bringing new opportunities to the wellness sector via digital senses.

Multisensory integration research has allowed us to better understand how humans integrate sensory information to produce a unitary experience of the external world.

Although it has been traditional to study the various senses independently, most of the time perception operates in the context of information supplied by multiple sensory modalities at the same time. Emerging multisensory technologies from computer science, engineering, and human—computer interaction (HCI) enable new ways to stimulate, replicate, and control sensory signals (touch, taste and smell). They have unlocked a new wave of multisensory integration research. Scientists are increasingly seeking out sensory artists and tech engineers to help them explore the power behind the human senses. Ask Professor [Charles Spence](#), head of the Crossmodal Research Laboratory at University of Oxford. Spence is interested in how people perceive the world around them and is considered one of the world's leading experts in the senses. In his latest book, [Sensehacking](#), Spence explores how we process the information from each of our different senses



Research conducted by Professor Charles Spence, director of neuroscience at the University of Oxford, demonstrates that mixing sensory cues can deepen experiences. More than 100 academic studies support his findings.

to form the extraordinarily rich multisensory experiences that fill our daily lives. He points out that we spend over 93% of our time indoors, under harsh lighting, noise and air pollution. In his book, Spence provides concrete examples of the evidence behind the wellness benefits of multisensory design.

“Designing for wellbeing using the senses requires a change in approach to the design brief. Regardless of design intent, experience depends on the expectations set forth by our perception. Sensory design must therefore be flexible and adaptable to a wide range of preferences and inputs.”

—Prof. Charles Spence, University of Oxford.

In a recent [research paper](#), Spence and his colleagues at Oxford discuss the experimental atmospherics from a multisensory perspective. The team found that oftentimes marketing, brand managers and designers end up relying on gut feeling or intuition rather than hard data. Their advice is to take the evidence as proof-of-principle, and reminds us of the need to experiment to determine which particular cues/combination of sensory attributes deliver the desired atmosphere (i.e. one that boosts energy or encourages sleep).

As Spence points out, we must ultimately look to nature to guide us. Take a moment to visualize any particular nature scene you like. Next, think deeper and unlock the sensory qualities of that specific nature scene. What does it sound like?

What’s the temperature like? What does it smell like? This is where the other senses come in. These are the sensory attributes that can be heightened to influence our preferences, helping us interpret various signals and translate the environment around us. Each of us decodes information and redefines the world based on our own competencies, culture, biology and mental models. That’s why nature is the ultimate healing machine, because of its infinite source of multisensory stimulation on our brain.

Over the past decade or so, Spence has collaborated with a wide range of design teams at a number of the world’s largest automotive, hospitality and retail groups, on the theme of multisensory atmospherics and wellness. According to Spence, despite the overwhelming evidence, it’s been a difficult journey to convince brands of the many benefits of multisensory integration, due to the incorrect assumption that sensory design is not as important as visual aesthetics. “Very often, the brand managers nod politely, sometimes even enthusiastically, as I review the evidence concerning the boost to sales that can be expected by engaging in multisensory atmospherics and sensory marketing,” added Spence. “Disappointingly, however, they then seemingly do nothing or, at best, perhaps just focus on the lighting/refreshing the color scheme as they have always done. There is a missed opportunity, and thankfully some brands are starting to notice the difference. Atmospherics is a fundamentally multisensory concept, and multi-modal interactions are the rule, not the exception.”

Snøezelen rooms are being tested in health care facilities to improve the wellbeing of older individuals living with dementia. Photo, Snøezelen rooms



How do multisensory/multimodal experiences impact the brain and/or body differently than single sense experiences?

Once unimodal stimuli have been appropriately integrated, we can further ask about the consequences of this integration: What are the effects of multimodal perception that would not be present if perceptual processing were only unimodal? Perhaps the most robust finding in the study of multimodal perception concerns this last question. No matter whether you are looking at the actions of neurons or the behavior of individuals, it has been found that responses to multimodal stimuli are typically greater than the combined response to either modality independently. In other words, if you presented the stimulus in one modality at a time and measured the response to each of these unimodal stimuli, you would find that adding them together would still not equal the response to the multimodal stimulus. This multisensory enhancement effect, produced by multisensory integration, indicates that there are benefits resulting from the integrated processing of multimodal stimuli.

A surprisingly large number of brain regions in the midbrain and cerebral cortex are related to multimodal perception. These regions contain neurons that respond to stimuli from not just one, but multiple sensory modalities. For example, a region called the superior temporal sulcus contains single neurons that respond to both the visual and auditory components of speech. These

multisensory convergence zones are interesting, because they are a kind of neural intersection of information coming from the different senses. That is, neurons that are devoted to the processing of one sense at a time—say vision or touch—send their information to the convergence zones, where it is processed together.

Multisensory integration precision is associated with better cognitive performance in babies, youth, teenagers, young adults and older adults. A recent study that focused on senior communities experiencing dementia noted that age-related sensory decline impacts cognitive performance and exposes individuals to a greater risk of cognitive decline.

Multisensory environments such as Snøezelen rooms are becoming increasingly popular in health care facilities for individuals seeking sensory comfort. A two-stage research project examined how effective two types of multisensory environments were in improving the wellbeing of older individuals living with dementia. The two multisensory environments were a Snøezelen room and a landscaped garden. These environments were compared to the experience of the normal living environment. The observed response of 24 residents with dementia in a nursing home was measured during time spent in the Snøezelen room, in the garden, and in the living room. In the second part of the project, face-to-face interviews were conducted with six caregivers and six visitors to obtain their responses to the multisensory



At Neosensory, Dr. David Eagleman, professor of neuroscience at Stanford University, is using multisensory design to develop solutions for debilitating diseases such as tinnitus. Photos, Dr. David Eagleman

environments. These interviews identified the sensory components of the environments most used and enjoyed by residents and the ways in which they could be improved to maximize wellbeing. The findings of this research highlight the value of combining sensory stimulation to enhance perceived wellness. The interviews with the carers and visitors reveal the depth of pleasure experienced by participants in the garden and Snoezelen room, and emphasize the benefits of some of the multisensory activities or equipment used in those environments.

Neosensory is a California-based tech company led by Stanford neuroscientist Dr. David Eagleman, who partnered with engineers at the forefront of hearing and sensory technology to create a wearable meant to treat tinnitus not within your ears, but from the brain itself. Dr. Eagleman explains that “one of the leading causes of tinnitus is prolonged exposure to loud environments. As you’d expect, the most affected populations include military personnel, construction workers and, you guessed it, musicians and concertgoers.”

Neosensory condenses decades of neuroscience research into a sleek wristband to deliver hearing solutions that are brand new, simple and backed by science. Their research began with the idea that our experience of reality can go beyond our sensory limitations. Tinnitus is best described as the perception of hearing sound without any actual, external noise. Those who have tinnitus experience a wide range of sounds and symptoms, including

a sharp ringing, whistling, buzzing, whooshing, or clicking noise. The sounds can be barely audible, or loud, near-constant, or they can come and go. According to the American Tinnitus Association (ATA), nearly 50 million people have experienced some form of tinnitus, with as many as 20 million experiencing debilitating cases.

Most research on the health benefits of natural environments has focused on people’s visual habitats. Many studies have correlated indicators of mental health with starkly contrasting visual variables such as grassland versus woodland, or vegetation versus concrete. But humans experience their surroundings through sound, smell, vision and touch; and input from each of these sensory channels may amplify, modify and/or override the others. Many of the leading theories of how green spaces enhance mental health are grounded on the concept that humans are “hardwired” by their evolutionary history to derive cognitive benefits from the environments that enhanced the survival of early humans.

The multisensory integration trend has even made its way into healthcare. “multisensory recharge rooms” are a restorative space for team members to relax, refocus and recharge during their breaks, lunch, and before and after shifts. The private rooms offer immersive and multisensory environments that are customizable and encourage social connection. The design and technology—which incorporate music, aromatherapy, calming visuals, and sounds—use research in neurology and



The multisensory integration trend has made its way into healthcare. Private “multisensory recharge rooms” incorporate music, aromatherapy, calming visuals, and sounds to address trauma, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and improve cognitive performance.

psychology to address trauma, anxiety, stress, and loneliness, and improve cognitive performance. [Banner Health](#) recently announced the opening of an immersive “Studio Elsewhere Recharge Rooms” for hospital employees, offering private spaces with sensory-driven experiences involving relaxing music and sounds, aroma, visuals, and lighting. Rooms are designed using neuroscience research to address trauma, anxiety, stress and cognitive performance.

A new [study](#) published in the journal PLoS ONE has reported on the first human tests of an experimental therapy using sound and light to treat Alzheimer’s disease (AD). The initial findings are promising, with the unique treatment leading to some neurological and cognitive improvements. The MIT team, led by [Dr. Li-huei Tsai](#), started with light and later on explored the effects of adding sound stimuli to the treatment. The results revealed similar effects, with an hour’s exposure to 40 Hz

tones per day significantly reducing amyloid build-up in both the auditory cortex and hippocampus of mouse brains. In decades of research with collaborators, postdocs, and students, Tsai has led several fundamental and translatable discoveries about biological mechanisms underlying neurodegeneration including specific aberrations in epigenetic gene regulation, enzyme pathways, and repair of DNA damage. Tsai and collaborators have also uncovered substantial evidence that impaired neuronal synchrony may underlie Alzheimer’s progression, an insight that has allowed her to demonstrate a non-invasive treatment approach using multisensory stimulation (light and sound) to drive neural oscillations, engage the brain’s immune system, reduce pathology, and improve functionality in multiple mouse models. Tsai, who also directs the [Aging Brain Initiative](#) at MIT, is actively testing the technique in humans.



The AIUla Wellness Festival in Saudi Arabia focuses on mental and physical wellbeing and multisensory nature integration. Photos, AIUla, Saudi Arabia

Reimagine wellness: from unimodal to science-backed multisensory micro-interventions

Multisensory design acknowledges that people experience and react to space in many ways. Taste, touch and smell are as important as seeing and hearing when it comes to our experience of an environment. Multisensory integration is quickly becoming the bridge between evolving user experience (UX) demands and exceptional delivery of sensory environments. Through multisensory integration, the aim is to create wellness experiences in which the five senses are involved, generating a meaningful and emotional link carefully layered to last longer in the memory of individuals.

We have the potential to rethink where a wellness experience can take place, evolve wellness beyond the spa and into the guest room, the car, the airplane and of course, the spaces where we live, learn and work. We live in a time in which technology is ubiquitous, and that means delivering, measuring and assessing multisensory signals in daily life can be facilitated. To translate the science, multisensory design invites different communities to work together, and historically that kind of cross-knowledge exchange leads to exponential

innovation. The senses bring us all together. From real estate, to new wellness concepts, to spas, offering multisensory experiences provides a new opportunity for wellness to thrive in. Here are some noteworthy wellness brands leading the way forward.

[AIUla Wellness Festival](#). The mystical land of AIUla, Saudi Arabia, has become a major attraction for wellness-seekers, with AIUla Wellness Festival becoming synonymous with its desert dreamscape. The festival offers a variety of sessions for people to try different things, focusing on offering mental and physical wellbeing and multisensory nature integration. The festival was established so that visitors would feel peace, with the sound of running water and calm music enveloping them. Greenery, pleasing to the eye, sprouted from the velvety AIUla sands, and the architecture was soft and homely; there were no harsh buildings, with wood being the dominant element. This year, the Five Senses Sanctuary will return for its third edition, and features a rich program of talented instructors and practitioners. This is where people come to restore and relax their senses. The festival offers a peaceful lounge space with an alchemy bar, spa treatment rooms, a fitness center, an outdoor wellness agora



Design brand Kohler uses mutisensory integration to enhance wellness with botanical water infusion in the home. Sprig's infusion device, which hangs just below the existing shower head, features a collection of aromatherapy infusion pods. Photo, Kohler

and a sensory yoga studio, blending harmoniously into the desert itself.

Design brand Kohler turns to wellness with Sprig, a new branch of the company bringing botanical water infusion to the home. The shower infusion contraptions are easy to install on existing plumbing systems, and the kit comes in two iterations. A starter kit covers the infusion device, which hangs just below your existing shower head and comes in both white chrome and matte black, along with a selection of three pods. Six fragrant blends make up the Essentials Collection of infusion pods: Breathe, featuring refreshing eucalyptus and mint; Focus, an energizing mix of clary sage and patchouli; Recharge, with uplifting bergamot and lemongrass; Shield, combining tea tree and rosemary to help you “center”; Relax, with chamomile and green tea; and Sleep, with lavender and vanilla. The kit is also available with a Handshower Infusion Upgrade, which includes a hand shower attachment, along with the water infusion system.

Medicha is a meditation studio inspired by the methods of Los Angeles-based mindfulness teacher Jeremy Hunter; it provides a unique ambiance for those familiar with meditation or a modern introduction to those just starting out. Located underground in the trendy Aoyama area in Tokyo, the studio offers four meditation experiences. Each session lasts 80 minutes and takes place in four distinct environments to find serenity. When booking your spot, you can select a guided meditation course (offered in English or Japanese) suited to your needs, whether it's rebuilding confidence, finding love for yourself and others, or simply hitting the reset button. The guest journey starts with “Tune In,” a white, bright, somewhat cool room. The idea behind this space is to start meditating with your eyes open while slowly pushing out any distracting thoughts or anxieties you may have brought in with you.

Next is “Open Up.” Unlike Tune In, this room is completely dark with only the LED lights on the

Medicha is a meditation studio inspired by the methods of Los Angeles-based mindfulness teacher Jeremy Hunter; it provides a unique ambiance for those familiar with meditation or a modern introduction to those just starting out.





Sanctuary at Bali's forward-thinking [Desa Potato Head](#) takes wellbeing into a higher-tech zone. The wellness hub brings together spirituality and science from beach-front ice baths to sound therapies. Photos, [Desa Potato Head](#)

ceiling to guide you. This space is meant for sound meditation. There are bean bags on the floor and the wall is padded, so whether you feel like standing up or laying down, you'll be comfortable and more prone to relax. After 30 minutes of cleansing your senses, it's time for a half-hour guided meditation session. A session at Medicha ends with a touch of traditional Japanese culture: tea. With the intention of turning tea preparation and drinking into a meditative experience, everything plays with the senses and encourages visitors to be mindful. Add delicate tea leaves to a small pot, light incense and wait two minutes as tea infuses and warms up above a small candle. The smell of a seasonal tea quickly fills the room and further calms the spirit.

[Sanctuary](#) at Bali's forward-thinking [Desa Potato Head](#) takes wellbeing into an unmapped higher-tech zone. Developed with the sound-healing masters of Ubud's Pyramids of Chi, this turbo-smart wellness hub sits at the crossroads of spirituality and science—beach-front ice baths, mood-lifting breathwork and sound therapies. None is more enlightening than Sistrum, a dark, cavernous room with six waterbeds that are straight out of a sci-fi film. In each 90-minute session, the beds deliver

synchronized light and sound frequencies to induce a deeply meditative flow and higher consciousness. Sessions range from gentle relaxation to hypnotic high-intensity blasts to unleash creative energy.

Slime “therapy” has a new home with the September reopening of Manhattan-based [Sloomoo Institute](#), an experiential destination dedicated to slime play. According to its founders, playing with slime actually releases dopamine in your brain and makes you feel good. The Sloomoo Institute was founded by [Sara Schiller](#) and influenced by co-founder [Karen Robinovitz](#)'s experience with tactile therapy after experiencing grief and trauma. Slime play engages all five senses, making the Sloomoo Institute appealing to visitors across the neurodiversity spectrum. Executed by New York-based studio Method Design, the venue draws inspiration from contemporary artists, such as a slime splatter wall influenced by Yayoi Kusama's sticker-clad Obliteration Room. The intention is to attract adults and children alike to benefit from soothing sensory play. Two new Sloomoo Institutes are slated for opening in Chicago and Atlanta later this year.

SoundSauna / SoundSteam is the result of a collaboration between Barry Smith, CEO and co-founder of Dröm UK and Sara Jones of AraSpa Consulting. It combines chromotherapy and aromatherapy with specific sound frequencies, to activate different energy centers in the body. The multisensory concept sauna and steam installation aims to elevate the hydrothermal experience by incorporating vibrational frequency sound healing as well as chromotherapy and aromatherapy.

With its RainTunes range, hansgrohe presents a whole new era of showering for a tailored, wellness shower experience and demonstrates how, in the age of advancing connectivity, high quality products are redefining moments with water. After all, water is our constant companion and we come into contact with it several times a day. As one of the sector's leading innovators and designers, hansgrohe cares most about making this contact a special experience.

The innovative digital shower system links water, light, sound and fragrance to create a holistic water experience for all the senses. The focus here is totally on the individual and their personal moods and needs. In close collaboration with experts from a whole range of professions, hansgrohe has created digitally controlled shower scenarios that are geared towards the user's individual everyday life. It offers seven multisensory shower options, which adapt to the user's personal daily mood, offering just the right experience. It was developed with the support of many experts,

including dermatologists, sports physicians, physical therapists, and aromatherapy specialists. The scenarios currently available are: Good Morning, Revitalization, Vitality, Relaxation, Beauty, Nature and Good Night. The specially developed hansgrohe home app connects with the hansgrohe shower products via the home Wi-Fi network. Lighting and sound can also be controlled via Wi-Fi-connected systems already used in the smart home.

Sanctum was born from the desire to push physical, mental and spiritual boundaries to live a richer life as a result. Curiosity of life and a spirit of not settling for the ordinary got them to this breakthrough mindful movement. Sanctum was founded by partners in life and in business Luuk Melisse and Gabriel Olszewski. Luuk's professional background is dancing and acting. Gab is a marketer specializing in branding, communications and innovation. With Frequency Festival, their nomadic mindful movement community is trailblazing the festival scene with the first multi-sensorial "urban retreat," hosted at the most expressive location in Amsterdam: Westergasfabriek. The frequency festival is a reinvented immersive wellbeing experience with an edge. Sanctum is exploring the use of specific sensory stimuli, released during specific moments of the routine, designed to increase stamina during moments of peak fitness fatigue. We expect great things from this team as they continue to expand Sanctum's presence in London, Ibiza, Paris and Dubai.

Slime "therapy" has a new home with the reopening of Manhattan-based Sloomoo Institute. Photos, Sloomoo Institute





Designers at Tokyo-based art collective TeamLab challenge the senses. By taking alternating hot and cold baths, visitors open their minds, experience an ever-expanding physical sensation and become one with the art. Photo, Teamlab

Adding a therapeutic layer, Tokyo-based art collective TeamLab designs jaw-dropping spaces that challenge and please the senses. Its new art and sauna exhibition immersed visitors in art installations while they experienced a “sauna trance”—a unique neurological state brought about by alternating hot and cold baths. “Reconnect” is a brilliant example of what’s next in wellness. By taking alternating hot and cold baths, visitors open their minds, experience an ever-expanding physical sensation and become one with the art. Recognizing that the mind, body and environment are the wholeness of our being, we reconnect to the world and time.

Jimmy Kyriacou is fascinated by sound and music’s potential to transform the human experience and is the founding partner of the FutureSound platform and the Future is Sound event series. Kyriacou and his team create cutting-edge live events, experiences and educational initiatives that support some of the world’s most influential

creators, leaders and pioneers who are pushing the boundaries of what is possible with sound and other sensory modalities.

“Multisensory design is integral in the evolution of the music and wellness landscape. By creating a more immersive, holistic and engaging experience for the listener, the enjoyment of music and its effects on our wellbeing can be hugely enhanced. In recent years, I have been very impressed with innovative uses of visuals, aromatherapy, spatialisation and emerging haptic technologies that work with vibrations or pressure, giving listeners a physical sensation that corresponds to the music, making the experience hyper-real!”

—Jimmy Kyriacou, founder of FutureSound

Founding partner of Future Sound Jimmy Kyriacou uses visuals, aromatherapy, sound, music and more to transform the human experience. Photo, FutureSound





Photo, Chromasonic multisensory experience.

Playing with perception: the rise of synesthetic experiences to stimulate a sense of wellness.

A growing number of innovative designers and experimental brands are taking on the surprising cross-sensory connections exemplified by synaesthesia, and the related phenomenon of cross-modal correspondences, as a source of inspiration and aid to experience design. Synesthesia is an anomalous blending of the senses in which the stimulation of one modality simultaneously produces sensation in a different modality. Synesthetes hear colors, feel sounds and taste shapes. Several [studies](#) demonstrate the effect of sensorial stimuli on health and wellbeing. Paradoxically, healthcare facilities are often a source of aggressive sensations for their users. The conventional design approaches address this problem by trying to eliminate/minimize negative factors, working mostly to guarantee calm and privacy.

A synaesthetic design approach, instead, places the scientific knowledge on human senses at the beginning of a design project, in order to address phenomena of sensory interactions between those sensations (i.e. pain), found to affect the general condition of wellbeing. Synesthesia research offers enhanced awareness for the interaction of the

senses and a closer understanding of individual versus common processes of sensory integration. Wellness brands are taking note, as it offers new paths to designing experiences that tease and challenge our sensory perception.

A collaboration between quirky synth and hardware brand [Teenage Engineering](#) and design studios [Modem](#) and [Bureau Cool](#), the project draws inspiration from the neurological condition synesthesia. This rare phenomenon leads the brain to perceive sensory input for several senses instead of one. For example, a listener with synesthesia may see music instead of only hearing it, observing color, movement and shape in response to musical patterns. Conversely, a synesthetic person may taste shapes, feel words from a novel or hear an abstract painting. The audiovisual experiment uses the Teenage Engineering OP-Z sequencer as the music source that is then translated into AI art. In real-time, Modem and Bureau Cool's "digital extension" translates musical properties into text prompts describing colors, shapes and movements. Those prompts then feed into Stable Diffusion (an open-source tool similar to DALL-E 2 and Midjourney) to produce dreamy and synesthetic animations.

Chromasonic explores intersections of art and science to elicit visceral and potentially transformational experiences of presence, awareness, and connection. Their installations embrace both physical and virtual sensory technologies. Merging light and sound, they create harmonic connections between natural and artificial cognition. The works blur boundaries between physical reality and our perception, creating conditions that appear to shift the experience of time and space. Chromasonic started as a collaborative art studio and research lab founded by visual artist Johannes Girardoni with sound artists Orpheo McCord and Joel Shearer. A post-algorithm update to the Light and Space movement, but with proprietary synesthetic technology and a mission to harness the power of art in elevating empathetic consciousness, Chromasonic experiences transcend spectacle and head straight for the universe inside.

Regent Taste Studio is a one-of-a-kind, interactive dining experience, bringing together creative talent from the worlds of art, design, fashion and gastronomy. The concept brings together Regent chefs and artists from across creative disciplines—from fashion designers to film producers to musicians—where together they go beyond fine dining to create true multisensory culinary moments. Let atmospheric changes such as

lighting, sounds and even temperature transform the food in front of you. Expect each bite to taste different than the previous one (of the same dish). Let your imagination take over, as your senses and gustatory expectations will be put to the test, creating a truly memorable experience and inviting wellness to learn from this approach to improve our perception of healthy foods,

Reality Center is a state of the art sensory wellness center and digital psychedelic lab based in Santa Monica, California. By combining ancient philosophies and modern science, they are able to address a wide array of mental, physical and emotional issues in a truly unique experience. The team is pioneering the world of technodelics, which is the synchronization of light, sound and vibration to provide the healing benefits of an altered state without the need for drugs. Like Einstein and Tesla, the team at Reality Center believe that frequency is the future of healing and providing open access is their mission.

According to its co-founders Don Estes and Tarun Raj, the world has experienced an unprecedented level of trauma in the last few years and it only seems to be escalating. These conditions are having a devastating impact on the health of humanity. Drug addiction, alcoholism, mental health conditions and suicide rates have sadly

Sensory wellness center and digital psychedelic lab based in Santa Monica





A common question is, “What is the difference between mutisensory design and synthesesetic design?”

skyrocketed. The simple fact is that people need help and healing. We help take a person out of “fight or flight” through a combination of synchronized light, sound and vibration. When the body is in a rest and recovery state instead, it dramatically reduces the need for pharmaceuticals and any other substance. Our frequency therapy devices are a personal and public health solution.

Reality Center has incredible success treating a wide variety of people, ranging from Olympic athletes to special operations soldiers. The big question is, what if this was covered by insurance? What if a struggling, single mom in an inner-city could jump on one of our devices for 20 minutes, unwind and get a comparable amount of rest to good night’s sleep naturally? Our families would be closer, we could see significant decreases in domestic abuse and substance abuse. That’s how big this is.

Illustrating this approach is sensory experience agency [mycoocoon](#), who has worked with the likes of [Six Senses Hotels](#) and furniture manufacturer [Kimball International](#) to create immersive and synesthetic inspired experiences, where elements of color and sound are used to transform flavor profiles and tease flavor expectations. I sat down with [Valerie Corcias](#), CEO and founder of mycoocoon, to discuss more about this fascinating topic. With over 20 years of experience as a color wellness expert, working with brands such as Pantone, MOMA and L’Oreal, the Argentina-born

trailblazer is no stranger to teasing our senses and is known for transforming guest experiences into multisensory guest rituals.

Q. In your own words, what is synesthesia?

- A. Not everyone experiences the senses in the same way. Some people have certain senses crossed, in other words they hear color, they taste color, etc. This phenomenon fascinates me and my team and inspires us artistically to design experiences that tease the senses. Most of our experiences come with expectations, for example we often associate colors with flavors... What if we throw in something different and unexpected? Tease the senses, tease the brain and ultimately, drive the experience to a deeper level. That’s what we do.

Q. Can you share examples of some of the synesthetic-inspired experiences created at mycoocoon?

- A. We are constantly inspired by synesthetic experiments conducted in academia. We translate these protocols to create fun and captivating moments where guests can experience new ways to engage with their senses. With Six Senses Hotels, Douro Valley and Kaplankaya, both in Portugal, we’ve worked side by side with their talented head chefs to create menus inspired by color. Inviting guests to eat

guided by the color and energy they are attracted to. From blue fish to purple bread, guests enjoyed the unexpected and were encouraged to eat with their color emotions.

Q. What's the difference between multisensory design and synesthetic design?

- A. That's a tricky one. Everything is multisensory. Synesthetic design is more about how we use the senses in a different way, one where we continuously keep the brain guessing and asking for more.

Q. Do you believe this trend will continue to evolve? If so, how?

- A. Of course it will! This is only the beginning. As we continue to learn more from science, we continue to find new ways to create sensory seasoning of sorts, recipes designed to elevate basic experiences into multisensory wonders.

Multisensory integration provides an avenue for retail to provide its clients and staff with wellbeing

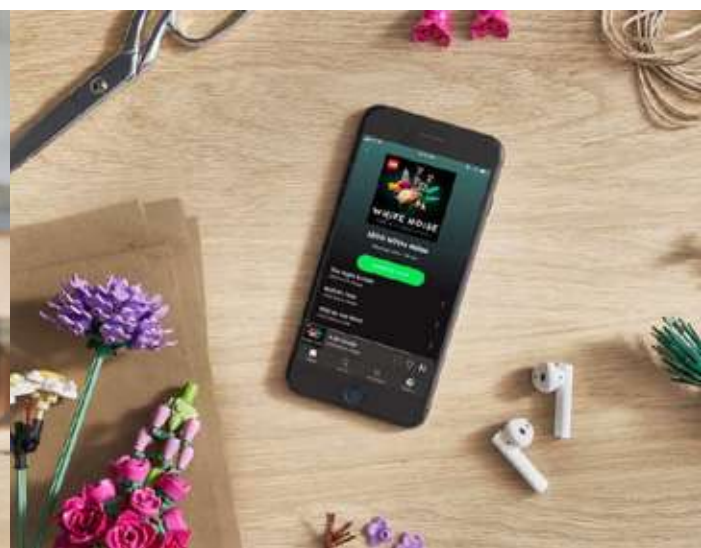
Our understanding of how the senses work is quickly evolving and changing the way we design products, places and spaces. Interdisciplinary by default, multisensory design acknowledges that people experience and react to space in many ways, subtle and obvious, consciously and subconsciously.

Regardless of market or sector, wherever we have humans, we have an opportunity for sensory design and wellness. Business, brands and services recognize the opportunity to engage multiple senses to create a greater feeling of personal, social and environmental wellbeing. Buildings that create positive touch sensations, food experiences that ask us to listen, and places that trigger tastes are all part of this emergent theme.

Bulgari invited award-winning media artist and director Refik Anadol to create an artwork inspired by the concept of metamorphosis, embodied by the maison's most coveted design icon. An immersive, multisensory sculpture created by artificial intelligence, Serpenti Metamorphosis celebrates the beauty of nature through the reprocessing and transformation of algorithm-processed data—an extraordinary experience evoking Bulgari's ability to shape the rarest and most precious materials into magnificent creations.

LEGO Group launched LEGO® White Noise, a new playlist designed to help listeners find a moment of relaxation in their busy lives. The playlist is composed of a series of audio tracks created using nothing but the iconic sounds that the brick makes, sounds that are recognized by generations all over the world. Each LEGO element makes a unique noise, which is why designers experimented with over 10,000 elements in their quest for the perfect soothing sounds. The result is a soundscape that includes tracks such as "It All Clicks," which perfectly captures the joyous sound of two LEGO elements joining together, and "The Waterfall,"

LEGO Group launched LEGO® White Noise playlist is a series of audio tracks using nothing but the iconic sounds that the bricks make, such as "clicks." The playlist is said to help listeners find relaxation. Photos, LEGO group





Famous London retailer Selfridges brings futuristic wellness into its retail space, diving deep into “feel-goodness” with multisensory VR pods, mood-altering DJ sets and sex therapy. Photo, Selfridges

created by pouring thousands of LEGO bricks on top of each other.

Selfridges brings futuristic wellness into the retail space. The London retail mecca is diving deep into “feel-goodness” with multisensory VR pods, mood-altering DJ sets and sex therapy. The Selfridges Corner Shop, a place to explore the future of feeling good through all forms of pleasure, joy, restoration and recovery. This innovative space offers ways to optimize sex and sleep through curated products from brands, changing the conversation around sexual wellness and pleasure, including Maude, LBDO and The Oh Collective. Alongside new sleep and sex technologies, guests are welcome to benefit from LED light therapy with The Light Salon and join the specialists at anatomē for a personalized sleep ritual or wellbeing routine.

Furniture manufacturer Kimball International and the Alternative Design Podcast partnered with mycoocoon to host a multisensory wellness installation during the annual NEOCON architecture and design festival. The mindful color experience invited designers and design industry leaders to take a sensory break away from exhibitors, and immerse themselves into a peaceful audio visual journey designed to unlock creativity. “Creative Aura” featured calming color gradients paired with

hypnotic binaural sounds. The five minute sensory reset experience was designed in partnership with meditation expert Mandy Jhamat and wellness music composer Riccardo Tuis.

Van Gogh Alive x Grande Experiences

Grande Experiences are the creators and producers of touring and permanent multisensory art and cultural experiences that have been visited by millions of people around the globe. Over the last decade, Grande has led the movement from artifact-based exhibitions, to multimedia exhibitions, to now fully integrated multisensory immersive experiences, large and small. With its Van Gogh Alive installation, the art of storytelling bursts into life, engaging all the senses simultaneously, immersing the visitor in an ocean of moving images, music, light, sound and even smell. What’s truly exciting is that these types of immersive art concepts are quickly being adopted by wellness activities such as yoga and breathwork. This merge creates an experience unlike any other, where one’s movement becomes a generative element, we become the wellness art itself.

Pantone turned its color of the year for 2023, magenta, into a multisensory \$1 million immersive



The popular Van Gogh Alive installation engages all the senses simultaneously—moving images, music, light, sound and even smell. Photos, Grande Experiences

experience. Launched at the recent Art Basel Miami, the “Viva Magenta” experience was considered the biggest activation that came from Miami Beach, with its 10,000 square feet and two floors dedicated to a single color meant to symbolize the “unconventional time” we’re living in. Designed by [Artehouse Studio](#), the brand-new, in-house production team of Artehouse, the exhibition cost \$1 million to produce. It’s a cornucopia of multisensory experiences to help visitors explore their own feelings and emotions associated with magenta. For Pantone, it’s about the textures, sounds, gradients and emotions the color can elicit.

Technology, specifically AI, is being used to leverage and scale multisensory data

Very soon, biosensors and AI technologies will help track human body activities and create customized experiences for people, addressing multiple senses at the same time. This will be part of our daily lives, and to be frank, this excites us. Of course, the AI part is important in this, recognizing both our biological and psychological structure, and forming the experience around that. To better connect with audiences in 2023, brands will include AR- and VR-powered wellness experiences in their marketing activities. The use of dynamic, abstract and 3D motion graphics with thematic sound effects

and scents will facilitate the separation from the physical world, as well as help accelerate positive results for both consumers and brands. According to [Nichol Bradford](#), founder of [Transformative Tech Org](#) and wellness tech investor, in an age where we seek peak performance and peak restoration, it’s becoming clear that old ideas of human cognition are limiting. Not all technology is pluggable. We ourselves are walking technology and must remind ourselves that our sensory system is the software that allows us to experience and share reality.

“New tech promises innovative ways for people to tune-in to the body, mind and spirit, and multisensory tech has the potential to treat a host of health problems.”

—Nichol Bradford, founder and tech investor, Transformative Tech Org

Bradford, who’s no stranger to tech or wellness sectors, has been involved with large gaming companies and has been an early advisor to many of today’s big wellness players from Silicon Valley. She believes we swim in a sea of technology and it is both creating a hyperdynamic, competitive environment where more real intelligence is required, and a hyper-noisy world where a day long “digital detox” doesn’t cut it. We must find

ways to boost human intelligence and effective collaboration, while transforming both work and play into restorative experiences. She expects that multimodal smell, taste, touch, hearing, feeling and more will soon be fully harnessed to normalize flow states and synchrony across individuals and groups.

NohLab is a design studio focused on producing interdisciplinary experiences around art, design and technology. It builds a bridge between the digital and the physical reality, while examining the relationship of technology with art and design. It produces tools, designs and stories in which the connection between the human and technology reflects in many different ways.

Calming stimuli can be reflected upon in a multisensory way. As the immersive experience at its best can use visual, audio, taste, touch and smell stimuli. The environment can create an atmosphere that is peaceful and mindful. But the real importance of immersive experiences is that they also try to jolt specific memories and mind states, and can create a break from everyday perception in other ways. This is an area where AI

can help us personalize such an experience.

Ivy Ross, the design powerhouse who also happens to be the VP of hardware at Google, believes that although the brain receives signals from our sensory organs (eyes, ears, tongue, nose and skin), the actual perception of sensation requires a complicated interplay in the brain and its expectations. If mastered, the technology that taps into that, enhances senses and picks on nuances of temperature shifts, balance and gravity could expand the limitations of a physical body.

“With AI, we can prove the things that designers and artists have always known—that aesthetics (which is not just making things look pretty, but enlivening all the sensory systems through space, color, texture, music and shape) affects our brain, our physiology and our wellbeing. Not everyone understands the power of that, but now neuroscience and machine learning is able to demonstrate that.”

—Ivy Ross, VP of Hardware Design, Google

NohLab design studio produces interdisciplinary experiences around art, design and technology, exploring the relationship between technology, art and design. Photo, NohLab



How exactly will AI shape the future of multisensory design?

Spatial computing uses the space around us as a canvas for digital experiences. It enables people to use voice, sight, gestures and other natural interactions to directly connect with information, eliminating the need to think and behave like a computer in order to be understood. Many in the tech community view spatial computing as more than just another fad, but a way to remove the input devices that currently intermediate our digital interactions—think keyboard, mouse or touchscreen—and make these interactions more human.

Multisensory design is a new design language that moves design beyond the confines of the screen and creates natural, emotionally engaging experiences that flow freely into the environment, and will be largely built on sensory data—for example, computer vision, machine hearing and machine touch. This requires AI-powered sensory machines that can output data like your camera's exact location, dimensions of space around you, and identify objects, people, speech and biodata.

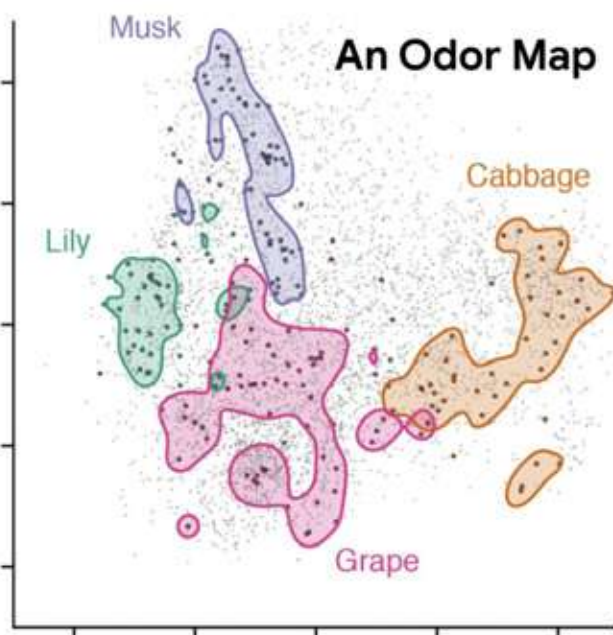
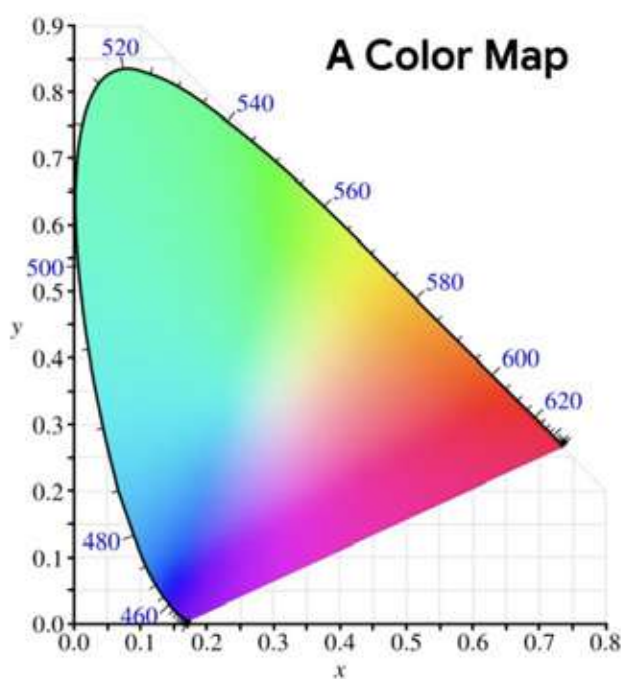
Welcome to the beginnings of digital senses. At the recent Consumer Electronic Show (CES)

Google AI debuted a machine learning-generated sensory map called “Principal Odor Map” (POM) that enables the prediction of odors from unseen molecules. Smells are produced by molecules that waft through the air, enter our noses and bind to sensory receptors. Potentially billions of molecules can produce a smell, so figuring out which ones produce which smells is difficult to catalog or predict. Sensory maps can help us solve this problem.

Three ways we are seeing AI applied to multisensory integration

- 1) Using combinations of technologies to record atmospheric variability (such as light intensity, color spectrum, sounds, etc.).
- 2) Using wearable bio-sensing technologies to build an integrated, synchronized multisensory tool to measure people's experience and physiological responses as they move through spaces. Think sensory profiling.
- 3) Employing video playback, projection mapping and other generative techniques to capture data and deliver a seamless multisensory experience in real time.

Google AI debuted a machine learning-generated sensory map called “Principal Odor Map.” The sensory map predicts odors from unseen molecules. Photo, Google AI



Multisensory technologies are enabling deeper meditation experiences, both physical and in the metaverse

Meditation is being enhanced by brands that are using mixed reality to create multisensory—yet still soothing—experiences for customers. These modern forms of meditation are achieved through apps, VR and even online gaming. As an increasing number of startups sell investors on mobile apps that help consumers prioritize wellbeing and mindfulness, other startups are looking for a more immersive take that allows users to fully disconnect from the world around them.

Strap on a VR headset to enter a world of psychedelic images, breathing exercises, guided meditations, games and sounds designed to calm the mind. [Tripp](#) has been building immersive relaxation exercises that seek to blend some of the experiences users may find in guided meditation apps with more free-form experiences that allow users to unplug from their day and explore their thoughts inside a virtual reality headset, while watching fractal shapes, glowing trees and planets. The startup has raised some \$15 million in total funding to date. Tripp has apps on both the Oculus and PlayStation VR stores and subscription experiences that can be accessed on a monthly subscription. The company provides a variety of guided experiences, but users can also access the company's "Tripp composer" to build their own visual flows.

Beyond customization, one of Tripp's major appeals is giving consumers deeper, quicker meditative experiences, claiming that users can alleviate stress with sessions as short as eight minutes inside their headset. The startup is also exploring the platform's use in enterprise in-office wellness solutions. Tripp is currently in the midst of clinical trials to study the software platform's effectiveness as a therapeutic device.

World renown artist and tech innovator [Krista Kim](#) is one of the most outspoken and respected metaverse pioneers. Her artwork has already covered couture fashion, NFTs at Christies, luxury sports cars and, most recently, large-scale public art meditation installations. [Continuum](#) is a

soothing visual meditation that has been presented on a monumental and global scale. The large-scale meditation experience has been showcased in several major cities across the world from LA to Miami. None can compare to the magnificence and beauty of her "Midnight Moment" in Times Square. Synchronized across 90 electronic billboards, a slowly shifting gradient of color washed over Times Square, creating a moment of calm amidst one of the most visually kinetic places in the world. Kim's peaceful digital reflection took over Times Square as the world held through a pandemic that disrupted and transformed our everyday lives, mental health and collective wellbeing for almost three years. Using the technology of our times, she created a communal space that allows viewers to decompress. Midnight Moment was the world's largest, longest-running digital art exhibition, synchronized on electronic billboards throughout Times Square nightly from 11:57 p.m. to midnight.



The Brainbo app by mycoocoon is also experimenting with color as an anchor for meditation and for deeper mindfulness. Photo, mycoocoon

Another group experimenting with color as an anchor for meditation and to deepen mindfulness is the **Brainbo** App by [mycoocoon](#). Users are invited to discover their color mood of the moment—a psychological color test that in less than 90 seconds helps users discover the emotional

connection to color in that very moment. Next is a five minute audio-visual guided experience that can be brought to life by connecting the app to your smart TV or mycoocoon lighting system. Immerse in sensory wellness by using the Brainbo app and transport your senses from the here and now to a world of abstract, bliss and imagination. Developed by an interdisciplinary team of wellness experts, guided by chromotherapy and neuroscience, this simple yet effective technology allows users to shift their perspective, guided by their choice and color mood of the moment.

THE FUTURE

From physical to digital, multisensory stimulation, get ready to “feel” in the metaverse.

Where do we go from here? How will multisensory design impact us in the near future? What role will the senses play in the metaverse? Pioneers in this space are starting to give us a sense—no pun intended—on what’s to come. Scientists, artists and engineers agree that multisensory tech could effectively shape perception in the metaverse by appealing to more than simply sight and sound.

Whether we’re interacting in the physical world, online or in the metaverse, we humans are demanding a dialogue. Most of the successful dialogues are multisensory experiences that are designed to holistically appeal to our sense of sight, taste, touch, smell and sound to improve chances of building and shaping positive perceptions. Multisensory integration coupled with gaming and digital senses unlock yet another powerful way in which multisensory design can impact our lives for the better. Physical or digital, research continues to demonstrate that when sensory cues are contextual to expectations, our brain is less stressed. People enjoy more, spend more and remember more. This exciting wave of future multisensory tech is fueled by curiosity, experimentation and most of all, co-creation. Let’s meet some of the changemakers.

Cathy Hackl is a globally recognized metaverse/web3 strategist, tech futurist, sought-after business executive, speaker and media personality with deep expertise in metaverse-related fields with companies like HTC VIVE, Magic Leap and Amazon Web Services. She also happens to be a best-selling author with her latest title *Into the Metaverse*. As the chief metaverse officer and co-

DeepWell's games, work with independent creators worldwide to publish new titles spanning every platform and genre, and open the company's research-driven technologies to assist developers in designing and repurposing games to magnify their innate therapeutic value





Created by researchers at the Human Computer Integration Lab at the University of Chicago, chemical haptics uses autonomous wearable devices to simulate sensations in virtual reality. Dr. Pedro Lopes and his team use wearable devices that combine silicone patches and micropumps to deliver five different chemicals to a person's skin surface.

founder of [Journey](#), where she leads Journey's Metaverse Studio, working with the world's top brands, creating metaverse/web3 strategies, NFTs, gaming, virtual fashion, and identifying how to extend brands' reach into virtual worlds. With recent collaborations with the likes of Walmart and Clinique, Hackl believes that wellness in the metaverse is vital to its success. In a recent episode of her *AdWeek* podcast, Hackl discussed some of the exciting opportunities to be unlocked with new-aged sensory tech that can add value, not friction, to experience design. She went on to discuss the potential for wellness activities and health experiences to thrive in the metaverse. Gaming as medicine? Enter the world of [DeelWell DTX](#), the creation of Devolver Digital (LON:DEVO) co-founder [Mike Wilson](#) and [Ryan Douglas](#), the founder and former CEO of international medical device company Nextern. Together, Wilson and Douglas have assembled a team of game industry experts and medical luminaries to collaborate and lead development of DeepWell's own games, work with independent creators worldwide to publish new titles spanning every platform and genre, and open the company's research-driven technologies

to assist developers in designing and repurposing games to magnify their innate therapeutic value.

Their focus is to study what exactly makes games healthy. For example, why does playing Tetris soothe some PTSD sufferers? DeepWell looks to come up with answers. Then it will use this information to develop and publish its own line of games. And it will share (via consultation) said information with the rest of the medium's publishers/developers. And it's already doing so with the help of an advisory council consisting of dozens of developers and a handful of prominent doctors as well. In short, video games, especially those equipped with multisensory integration technology, will have the potential to change lives. Wellness and health made available worldwide to anyone with an internet connection and a desire to better themselves through the power of play.

"A convergence of medical devices and entertainment is in full swing to the benefit of patients and medical services providers everywhere."

—Ryan Douglas, co-founder, DeepWell DTX



For the first time, CES 2023 had an area solely dedicated to the Metaverse, where it showcased multiple new sensory technologies that are bringing digital experiences beyond sight and sound to the table.

According to Douglas, from entertainment we will see great increases in engagement and accessibility to care. The medical world will bring scientific evidence, risk mitigation and greater quantification of why media is such a powerful therapeutic tool. And achieving wellness outcomes through sensory play will be what will draw us in. Multisensory experiences in the metaverse will require significant advancement in the sensory tech needed to provide us the right feedback, not worsen our sensory overloaded society. While haptic feedback is already available today, there is still some way to go until the senses of weight, motion, temperature and texture of digital objects are just right. Some research has turned to chemistry for solutions. A team at the University of Chicago is developing a new kind of haptic feedback it calls “[chemical haptics](#).” Their approach is based on a system of wearable patches that

stimulate the skin through five different chemicals they contain. Menthol and capsaicin simulate coolness and warmth, respectively; lidocaine is used for a sensation of numbness; sanshool tingles the skin; and cinnamaldehyde simulates a stinging sensation, which could be useful to relay negative feedback. Other companies working on bringing haptic tech and touch into the metaverse are: [HaptX](#), [Sense Glove](#), [Fundamental VR](#), [Manus](#), and [Teslasuit](#).

Created by researchers at the Human Computer Integration Lab at the University of Chicago, [chemical haptics](#) uses autonomous wearable devices to simulate sensations in virtual reality. Dr. Pedro Lopes and his team use wearable devices that combine silicone patches and micropumps to deliver five different chemicals to a person’s skin surface.

OVR was one of these technologies and with the announcement of their next product, OVR is expanding beyond VR into a broader space they're defining as "digital scent technologies."



Whether we realize it or not, our sense of smell helps us navigate the world. We can use scent in the metaverse in a multitude of ways, but the immediate game changers will be applications of storytelling and utility. For the first time, CES 2023 had an area solely dedicated to the Metaverse, where it showcased multiple new sensory technologies that are bringing digital experiences beyond sight and sound to the table. OVR was one of these technologies and with the announcement of their next product, OVR is expanding beyond VR into a broader space they're defining as Digital Scent Technologies. The ION 3 revealed at the show supports immersive experiences across platforms by allowing all audio/visual media to be scent enabled and therefore deeply engaging the limbic system to create more emotional connections and add immersion.

This new iteration of OVR Scent Technology connects to content on mobile and desktop via the OVR Scent Studio app, allowing users to engage with a feed of existing scent-enabled content and then empowering them to create new multisensory wellness experiences of their own. This brings a new toolset and platform that can help people connect, heal, and play.

CONCLUSION

Life is an orchestra of multisensory signals. So is nature. For us humans, much of the processing of these signals takes place subconsciously: one isn't aware of the automatic feedback between brain and body that helps keep our blood pressure level, for instance, or the signals that help stabilize our blood sugar levels. But many of these sensations—such as tension in muscles, the clenching of stomach, or the beating of heart—should be available to the conscious mind, at least some of the time. And the ways we read and interpret those feelings will have important consequences for our wellbeing. From Alzheimer's to workplace wellness to spa, multisensory integration offers a new layer of potential. A new opportunity to heal.

The insights from neuroscience will no doubt help designers and engineers make scientifically informed decisions that improve people's lives by designing around the senses. It will also influence the way tech giants approach future tech and notification design. By now we're starting to accept that multisensory design is capable of shifting the dynamics of entire industries, both from producer and consumer perspectives. As we move to new plains of technological brilliance and wellness 3.0, expect to see the multisensory integration trend grow into its own wellness category, "Sensory Wellness"—keeping pace with ever more creative and thought-provoking research and ingenious sensory tech developments that put human wellbeing front and center.



Practitioners at Six Senses Resorts use health screenings to understand biological processes and provide clients with personalized wellness programs and experiences, including “biohacks.” Photo, Six Senses

Wellness + Biohacking:

The Wild, Wild West of Biohacking

By Marc Cohen, MD

INTRODUCTION

Although the term biohacking is rapidly becoming the new wellness “buzzword,” it covers multiple activities that can be difficult to grasp. However, because it is emerging in both the wellness and medical arenas, biohacking is worth exploring so we can collectively find—and understand—the best way forward. The following background and information will help the curious discern a valid path for its use, or where to exercise caution because of potential risks.

Biohacking Basics

Put simply, biohacking is the attempt to gain control over previously unconscious or unknown biological processes to enhance human performance and longevity. As mentioned, it has become a buzzword that is being adopted by celebrities, wealthy tech-savvy executives, fitness gurus, science geeks and home hobbyists. These medical and wellness adventurers seek to defy nature through the use of engineering principles to modify their biology according to their own conscious whims and

desires. Biohacking can involve a wide range of activities, including using technology to monitor and track health metrics, manipulate sensory inputs, use biochemistry to alter the body's functions, or modify biology through genetic engineering or implants. Biohackers thereby aim to defy disease, decay and death, and evolve and expand human abilities beyond current limits.

Biohacking was a hot topic at the recent [Global Wellness Summit](#) in Tel Aviv where Anna Bjurstam, wellness pioneer at [Six Senses](#), led a popular after-dinner discussion. While the Summit addresses new technologies, as well as medicine and wellness, biohacking goes beyond current medical processes or prudent lifestyle advice such as eating more vegetables. Rather than aiming to relieve suffering or treat and prevent disease, biohackers look to break into our biological operating system and expand physical, mental and cognitive performance, as well as human lifespan beyond current limits. In other words, the goal is to become “superhuman.”



Celebrity biohacker and cold therapy pioneer Wim Hof spoke at the 2017 GWS in Palm Beach Florida. Photo, Global Wellness Summit

Biohacking is a broad and rapidly evolving field and is often associated with the do-it-yourself movement, and can be controversial due to the potential risks and ethical concerns involved. Driven by the quest for supremacy over the human condition, biohackers focus on small interventions that have large and/or lasting effects. Thus, just as computer hackers tweak computer code to gain “unauthorized” access to computer systems, biohackers aim to manipulate biology and access biological control processes in ways not previously thought possible; and, just as lone computer hackers bypass security systems, they access their own biology without oversight, regulation or recourse to established authorities, or the conventional healthcare system.

Some biohackers seek fame through self-experimentation: celebrity biohackers and self-proclaimed human guinea pigs like David Asprey, Tim Ferris, Joe Rogan, Ben Greenfield and Wim Hof have amassed huge followings amongst those keen to push the boundaries of human performance. Yet, biohacking is now coming of age and is moving from a hobbyist pursuit to the cutting-edge of healthcare and big tech, at an interface where medicine meets media hype and science meets science fiction. As such, biohacking represents a new frontier and the cutting edge of self-discovery, human performance and achievement, fueled by the convergence of advanced exponential technologies, the growth of the wellness industry,

and the grassroots, cyberpunk, do-it-yourself ethos that sparked the growth of personal computers and the human potential movement.

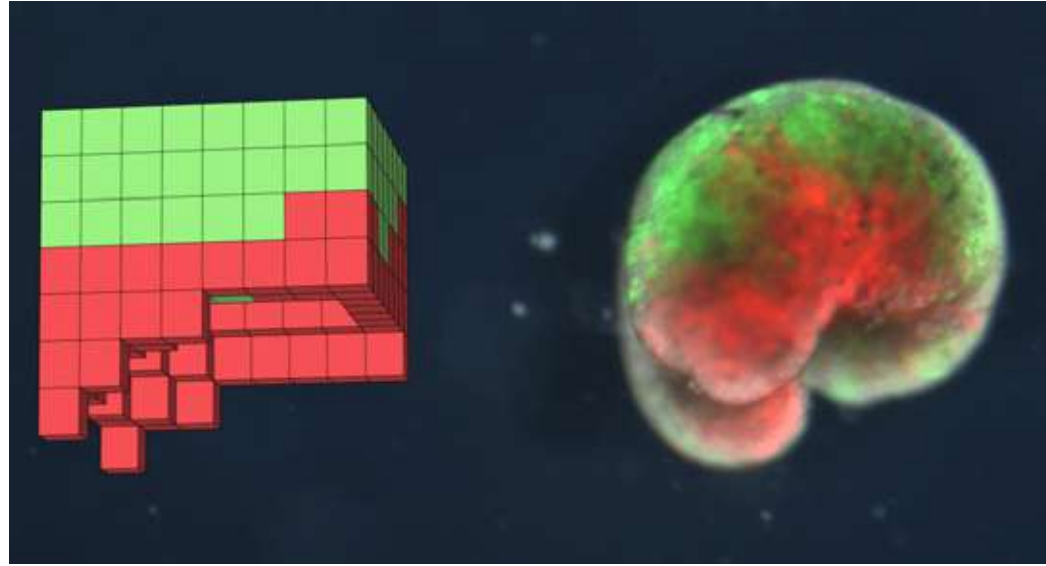
Ancient Biohacks

While the term biohacking is recent, the desire to biohack is not new. It is a trend that’s stood the test of time driven by the basic human desire to create, explore and gain control over life. Primitive humans found multiple ways to hack their biology and many of these have been ingrained into human culture and passed down through religious rituals, cultural practices and medical modalities.

Our ancestors were masterful biohackers. They learned that fasting, isolation, silent meditation and certain plants and natural products could produce altered states, and augment human performance. This led to the classification of herbs and natural substances into herbal pharmacopoeias, the use of plant medicines to expand human consciousness, and meditation practices that bestowed mastery over mind and body. Early humans also manipulated their body temperature in settings like sweat lodges and cold plunges, used chanting, drumming, music and dance to induce trance states and control consciousness, and developed yoga and martial arts practices that gave them extraordinary powers.

Ancient practitioners also mastered information gathering and diagnostics, and developed the abil-

Xenobotics is one of the many emerging technologies creating new possibilities for manipulating biology. These technologies also enable biohackers to share and compare their data, protocols and experiences. Image, Xenobot



ity to assess the human condition with seemingly superhuman perception. Master practitioners could interpret subtle information from a person's appearance and derive a wealth of information that appeared magical or superhuman to the uninitiated.

FUELING THE TREND

Increased access to health information

Physicians are no longer the sole gatekeepers of medical information and biotechnology, and research is no longer limited to esteemed universities, Big Pharma or well-funded biotech companies. Home hobbyists and citizen scientists now have more information at their disposal than the most sophisticated laboratories or research institutes had only a decade or so earlier. In addition, laboratories and hospitals in many countries now give consumers access to results of medical tests (think blood tests and scans), often before a medical doctor has the opportunity to review the findings. This “open access” to medical results empowers consumers to take control of their own health and demand even more information.

Developments in artificial intelligence

AI can now perceive and do things that humans simply can't, and can do them much cheaper and more consistently. It is likely AI will soon exceed skilled humans in diagnostics and clinical care and the global AI healthcare market is expected to grow at a compound annual rate of 38.4% and reach more than \$208 billion in 2030. While we're yet to see AI used in routine medical care, this time is fast approaching and even now AI is being touted

to replace radiologists and pathologists. Plus, smartphone apps and medical voice assistants have the potential to make expert medical care available to everyone on earth at very little cost.

Emerging technologies and the race to connect humans and machines:

New technologies such as AI, Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs), sensorless sensing, CRISPR, xenobotics, nanobotics, probiotics, morphochemicals, electrochemicals, 3D-tissue printing, cloud-computing and blockchain technologies are opening new possibilities for manipulating biology. These technologies also enable biohackers to conduct experiments on themselves and analyze, share and compare their data, protocols and experiences, and thereby further fast track innovation.

Integration of health information with practical interventions

Smart wearable devices are closing the loop between information acquisition and practical interventions so that fitness trackers can personalize your Peloton, Technogym or other “smart gym” equipment, while EEG signals can control neurofeedback devices. The market for WIFI-enabled and other smart devices that make up the Global Internet of Medical Things (IoMT), is currently growing at an annual rate of 23.9% and is expected to reach \$270.4 billion by 2029. Soon AI-assisted real-time biofeedback will be used to control temperature, pressure, colour, sound, smell and electromagnetic stimulation and create storylines and augmented reality games that take us on personalised healing journeys.

Understanding the Brain

FIG. 1



SCIENCE →

Interfacing with the Brain

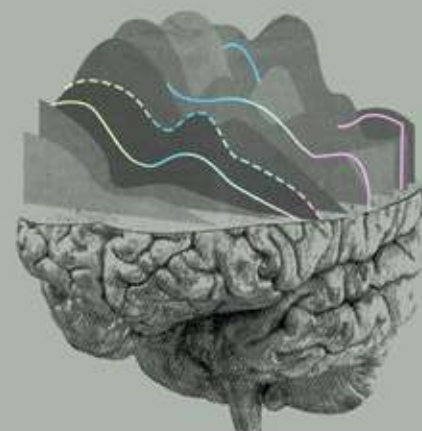
FIG. 2



APPROACH →

Engineering with the Brain

FIG. 3



APPLICATIONS →

Biological implants have become big business, and med-tech companies such as Elon Musk's Neuralink are biohacking the brain. These technologies promise to treat neurological disorders and enhance intelligence. Image, Neuralink website screenshot

ASPECTS OF THE TREND

Hacking Biological Information—From Wearables to Artificial Intelligence (AI)

While biohacking is not new, modern technology and advanced scientific understanding of biological and molecular processes has given biohackers new tools to fulfill the ancient Greek desire to “know thyself.” Today a plethora of sophisticated wearable devices can track our biometrics while being integrated into jewellery. For example, devices such as the [Ouraring](#), [Fitbit](#) and [Apple Watch](#) along with specialised sensors such as [Xtrodes](#) and neuroimaging companies such as [Kernel](#) are revolutionizing the human-machine interface. Biohackers, [Lifeloggers](#) and members of the [Quantified Self](#) and [Quantified Baby](#) movement can now record a vast array of data including their physical activity, posture, body composition, caloric intake, sleep quality, blood pressure, heart rate variability, blood oxygen saturation, brain waves, blood glucose, ketone levels and other internal processes with relatively inexpensive consumer electronics.

In addition to data from biosensors, biohackers can access modern laboratories and analyze their

blood, urine, feces, hair, sweat, saliva, skin and sperm, and obtain data on nutritional status, toxic load, microbiome status diversity and genetic profile. Modern diagnostic imaging extends this by making CT, MRI scans and ultrasound accessible to those who can afford them.

Hacking the Brain from Grinders to Brain Implants

For some biohackers it is not enough to collect diagnostic data from biosensors or biological samples. The Quantified Self movement is giving way to so-called “Grinders,” who are a loose network of punkish, do-it-yourself, grassroots hobbyists exploring new frontiers of biohacking through body modification and biological implants. While many cultures have practiced body modification such as foot binding, lip plates and ear stretching for cultural, aesthetic and religious reasons, Grinders take body modification a step further. They aim to self-experiment with new technologies and are willing to put their lives on the line and surgically modify themselves by inserting computer chips, magnets, RFID tags, data transmitters and other devices into their bodies in an attempt to merge with technology and become transhuman cyborgs.

Biological implants have also become big business, and significant expertise and resources are being directed at BCIs (Brain Computer Interface). Well-funded med-tech companies such as Elon Musk's [Neuralink](#), along with [Paradromics](#) and [Blackrock Neurotech](#) are currently biohacking the brain via ultra-high bandwidth brain-computer interfaces, which are doubling their [data capture rate every 2-3 years](#). These technologies promise the ability to treat neurological disorders, enhance intelligence and control machines at the speed of thought, and the global BCI market is projected to grow at an annual rate of 13.9% and is expected to reach \$5.4 billion by 2030. The technology may eventually allow human memories to be backed up and human minds to directly connect to the cloud to form a superhuman global consciousness or "Meta-Intelligence."

Sensorless Sensing

The explosion in our ability to acquire biological data and interact with technology is not limited to wearable or implantable devices. For example, stress levels can be monitored using data from [car steering wheels](#) or the [movements of a computer mouse](#). There are also significant inroads being made into [sensorless sensing](#), whereby existing WIFI networks can be used for passive, non-intrusive, contactless data collection and simultaneous perception and transmission of data without extra communication infrastructure.

Anna Bjurstam, who helped develop advanced diagnostic and biomarker testing at Six Senses noted that while biohacks can include high tech devices, they can also be as simple as exposing yourself to morning sunshine. Photo, Global Wellness Summit

The ability of technology to assess and interpret the human condition is approaching the skill of master clinicians and this expertise is becoming available without years of training, or the moral and ethical standards imposed on the medical profession. It seems likely AI will soon have (or already has) access to virtually all the data in the world, including data we are not even aware of, and will know us better than we know ourselves. AI is likely to keep learning at an accelerating pace and has the potential to either liberate or imprison us. This raises [existential](#) and [ethical issues](#), including those around informed consent, privacy, data protection, data input and analysis quality, and the use of data.

Less is More

Biohacking does not have to be high-tech or involve doing more. Removing unwanted or excessive inputs from one sensory channel can enhance the ability or sensitivity of other channels, and there are many biohacks that involve removing elements from life and doing less. Elimination diets, noise blocking headphones, EMF shields, [blue-light blocking glasses](#), [silent Vipassana meditation retreats](#), and [sensory deprivation floatation tanks](#) all involve stripping away extraneous inputs in order to reveal and enhance our inherent natural powers.

Many biohacks require very little or no technology. For example, breathing practices such as those promoted by Konstantin Buteyko or Wim Hof simply require instruction and dedicated practice, while contrast bathing only requires access to a sauna and ice bath, or just hot and cold water and the will to step out of your comfort zone. Anna Bjurstam, who helped develop the Six Senses bespoke "[Rose Bar](#)" concept—which uses advanced diagnostic and biomarker testing along with various biohacking modalities—suggests that while biohacks can include high tech devices such as hyperbaric chambers or [Normotech boots](#), they can also be as simple as exposing yourself to morning sunshine, which ensures you get up in the morning, stimulate natural vitamin D production and regulate your circadian rhythms.



Basic low-tech biohacking techniques are now being adopted by social wellness clubs and franchises such as [Remedy Place](#), [Restore](#) and [Perspire](#), which are integrating technologies such as sauna and cryotherapy into their offerings, while [extreme biohacking retreats](#), [wild wellness experiences](#) and intentional wellness communities are forming a new social frontier for biohacking wellness.

Ingestible and Injectable Hacks

One of the more controversial and cutting-edge areas of biohacking is the use of ingestible and injectable products, which overlap with the highly regulated healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. While time-restricted eating, ketogenic diets and elimination diets involve general dietary modifications to enhance health, there are a range of dietary biohacks that are more focused on expanding human performance. There are now

a plethora of superfoods, herbs and nutritional supplements gleaned from the world's medical traditions that are widely available to enhance health and human performance and are described in texts such as "[Herb and Natural Supplements: An Evidenced Based Guide](#)."

While it is commonplace for healthy people to seek performance enhancement through the use of herbs, caffeine or electrolyte drinks, the supplement industry has begun to focus on the use of adaptogens (herbs that enhance resilience and adaptation to stress), nootropics (smart drugs and cognitive enhancers claimed to improve mood, relaxation, executive function, attention, memory, creativity or motivation) and [entheogens](#) (psychoactive substances used to foster spiritual development). A global community of biohackers are now microdosing mushrooms, LSD or MDMA, consuming plant medicines such as ayahuasca, and iboga, imbibing kambo (frog medicine), bufo (toad medicine) and hapè (sacred tobacco) and using entheogens to hack their inner spiritual worlds in order to help navigate their outer worlds. Biohackers are also injecting hormones, stem cells or plasma from young donors with the aim of expanding their human capacity for spiritual insight, joy and resilience.

Water, Water and More Water

The most basic ingestible is water and biohacks involving water are flourishing. Water is certainly a complex and mysterious substance that is not fully understood. The subtle properties of water have been exposed by a series of water pioneers including [Prof. Gerald Pollack](#), who discusses the [Forth Phase of Water](#), [Masaru Emoto](#), whose images reveal messages from water, [Veda Austin](#), who creates photographs that demonstrate the secret intelligence of water, [Viktor Schauberger](#), who revealed implosion technologies and the power of water vortices, and [Dr. Bernd Kröplin](#) who creates images that demonstrate water memory and the "[world in a drop](#)."



Ninety-nine percent of human molecules are water. Staying well hydrated is an obvious biohack, and more sophisticated versions of water are flourishing. Photo, Beautiful Water



More people are using fermented products like kombucha, which has become the world's fastest growing functional beverage, to hack their inner ecology. Fermentation has been used throughout human history to harness the power of microbes. Photo, iStock

We are about two thirds water by mass or volume, yet if we count our molecules, 99.99% of them are water molecules. Other than the obvious biohack of staying well hydrated, biohacks involving water include the use of Deuterium depleted water (DDW), which is water that contains lower levels of the heavy hydrogen isotope deuterium and may improve athletic performance, enhance recovery from exercise and slow down aging; “hydrogen water,” which is water infused with hydrogen gas and promoted as a health supplement that reduces inflammation, improves athletic performance, and enhances recovery from exercise, improves skin health and slows aging; and Beautiful Water, which is water that is filtered, structured, balanced, blessed and free.

Nutrition Based on Genetic Profiles

The decoding of the human genome has led the nutrition and supplement industry to embrace nutrigenomics, which leverages data from direct-to-consumer companies such as 23andme to personalize supplement or nutritional recommendations based on genetic profile. Nutrigenomics expands on the traditional Ayurvedic

and Chinese medicine practice of personalizing nutritional and other health recommendations through the use of technology that allows biohackers to analyze the data contained in their DNA and target specific metabolic pathways such as those that influence ageing or cognitive function.

While there are some known genetic associations between genes and diet, it is unclear how much of a nutrient a person needs to compensate for a genetic disadvantage and the field of nutrigenomics has been criticized for not revealing how nutritional recommendations are derived from consumers’ DNA. It appears there is still a way to go before genetic testing produces practical science-backed nutritional recommendations, yet despite current uncertainties, the field is expanding rapidly and the nutrigenomics market is expected to grow at a rate of 12.5% during 2022-2027 and exceed \$2 billion by 2027.

Hacking our Inner Ecology with Kombucha and Probiotics

While the human genome project opened the

realms of consumer genetic testing, the advent of Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) has revealed the importance and complexity of the microbiome. This has led to a renaissance in the use of fermented products such as kombucha to hack our inner ecology and literally infect ourselves with good health. Like many other biohacks, hacking the microbiome is not new. Fermentation is used throughout human cultures and harnessing the power of microbes goes back to our early ancestors who used fermentation to preserve food without refrigeration and produce everyday food staples such as bread, cheese, wine, beer, tea, coffee, chocolate, pickles, soy sauce, yoghurt, etc. The ability of ferments to satisfy the human desire for longevity and enhanced performance was recognised over 2,000 years ago in ancient China when kombucha was labelled “the tea of immortality” and the “elixir of life,” after it was discovered that fermented tea produces a delicious, effervescent, tart and slightly alcoholic drink that makes the drinker feel wonderful. The health effects of kombucha, which include assisting detoxification, digestion, antioxidation, immunity and glucose control, have led kombucha to become the world’s fastest growing functional beverage.

Like many other biohacks, brewing kombucha is both a large commercial enterprise and an unregulated, home-based, do-it-yourself biology experiment. In 2022 the global kombucha market was estimated to be \$575.6 million and it is projected to grow at an annual rate of 15.3% and exceed \$2.3 billion by 2032. This is fueled by a growing recognition of the importance of gut health, along with a desire to reduce consumption of soft drinks and alcohol, and a recognition that alcoholic kombucha or kombucha cocktails allow you to “detox while you retox.”

Interest in the microbiome and the revival in kombucha is resulting in a range of novel uses including probiotic kombucha-based powders, supplements, cosmetics, confectionary, and pet food. NGS and microbiome research is also giving rise to the development of rational precision probiotics and targeted prebiotics. We will soon have targeted microbes that allow manipulation of the gut microbiome through multiple approaches that include inhibition of gut bacterial enzymes, selective depletion of undesirable strains, engineered strains that deliver a therapeutic payload, genetic modification of existing strains and development of new microbiome-derived drugs.

Research on the microbiome of homes led to Homebiotics, which offers probiotic sprays with selected bacteria from the gut and healthy soil. Photo, Homebiotic



Probiotic Skin Care

Kombucha is not only beneficial for gut health, it's also beneficial for skin. New research is revealing the importance of the skin microbiome, which acts as the first line of defense against pathogens, controls inflammation and educates our immune system. Our understanding of the skin has changed dramatically over the past decade. It was previously thought the surface area of human skin was less than two square meters. This was re-evaluated recently when it was realized the skin has millions of tiny clefts produced by sweat ducts, hair follicles and glands that expand the surface of the skin to around 30 square meters. These clefts house and nurture a myriad of microbes that vary according to body part and provide the largest epithelial surface for interaction with microbes.

Supporting skin microbial health promises to be a major growth area. The prospects of probiotic cosmetics opens many new opportunities for the personal care industry to move further into the health and wellness realm, and kombucha-based skin care is a fast-growing segment that offers living products for oral, skin and intimate care.

The Microbiome of Home

The use of probiotics is also spreading to other industries and recent research in the microbiome of our homes led renown biohacker and serial entrepreneur Dave Asprey to develop Homebiotics, which offers probiotic sprays with selected bacteria from the gut and healthy soil that are touted to keep surfaces “clean” and protect against grime and mould. While research has not yet validated this approach, there is a wealth of evidence that our connection to nature is mediated by microbes. For example, research into forest bathing is revealing how spending time in nature is a cure for nature deficit disorder and may improve our microbial health through exposure to phytoncides, which are volatile organic compounds released from forest plants. Research into the bathing biome is also fostering a greater appreciation of the naturally-occurring organisms in bathing waters and the development of chlorine-free sanitation methods that preserve healthy microbes.

BioHacking Basic Biology - CRISPR, Xenobots, Morphochemicals and Regenerative Medicine

Humanity as a species is now wielding superhuman powers and performing “deep biohacks” using technologies such as CRISPR, xenobiotics, nanobiotics, morphochemicals, electrochemicals and 3D-tissue printing to manipulate fundamental life processes. Gene editing technologies such as CRISPR open our genetic operating system to being hacked and allows life to be reprogramed to produce genetically modified organisms or correct genetic defects. CRISPR is currently used commercially to produce genetically modified organisms and vaccines, and it has the potential to cure a wide range of genetic diseases, treat cancer and hack human reproduction to create designer babies.

While CRISPR technology allows us to hack the genetic code and reprogram our cellular hardware, it does not control the software that instructs our cells how to join together to form organic structures. This is the role of non-neural bioelectricity, which controls how groups of cells behave. Researchers from the University of Vermont and Tufts University have recently shown it's possible to use the convergence of molecular biology, AI and supercomputers to hack biological control processes and reprogram living cells to create “xenobots, which are computer-designed organisms,” “synthetic lifeforms” or “living robots,” produced from the embryonic cells of the African clawed frog *Xenopus laevis* from which they derive their name.

So far xenobots are small (less than a millimetre in size) and consist of collections of around 5,000 cells, which function as “living Lego blocks” assembled to perform simple actions such as walk, swim, push pellets, carry payloads, and work together in swarms. Xenobots have potential applications in drug delivery, cancer treatment, digesting toxic materials and cleaning up microplastics in the environment, and as living machines they can heal themselves after injury, survive for weeks without food and even self-replicate. Xenobots may be further augmented by nanobots, which are nano-scale machines with the

ability to control matter and energy in ways that seem like magic. Nanobots are currently being developed to target drug delivery, kill pathogens, repair DNA and provide nano surgical tools and the nanobot market is expected to reach \$21.5 billion by 2030. The fields of “xenobotics” and “nanobotics” are still in their infancy and we are yet to understand their full potential or possible risks, yet they have the potential to transform our ability to profoundly modify our biology and our ecosystems for the better.

In addition to reprogramming cells to form living robots, researchers are discovering how to decode the non-neural bioelectrical signals that control morphology. Morphoceuticals is a start-up company founded by Michael Levin and David Kaplan from Tufts University with a mission to detect and manipulate collections of cells to enable tissue regeneration. This involves the use of biodomes to control the cellular environment and “electroceuticals,” which are drugs that target the ion-channels and gap-junctions that control bioelectrical networks and determine gene expression, growth and pattern formation. Researchers have already shown the success of this approach by regrowing frog legs and this technology opens the possibility for novel regenerative interventions that overlap with 3D-tissue printing that has already been used to implant an ear 3D-printed from a patient’s own tissue. Thus, soon we may be able to heal the unhealable, regrow tissues, limbs, or organs on-

Author, Marc Cohen, MD, biohacking in the Somadome meditation capsule at Gwinganna Health Retreat. Photo provided by author



demand, replace body parts damaged by trauma or ageing, or even using living tissue for body adornment or new biological functions.

Ethics, Legalities and Pitfalls

Biohacking is constantly pushing the boundaries of science and technology and while there are many potential benefits, it is clear that some biohacking techniques come with serious health risks. With the plethora of new products flooding the market, it can be difficult for consumers to distinguish the wheat from the chaff. And while search engines such as Google Scholar and more curated websites such as the Global Wellness Institute’s wellnessevidence.com provide access to the scientific literature and help distinguish evidenced-based practices from more fringe practices, most biohackers exist outside of academia and don’t test their procedures with gold-standard randomized controlled trials, or publish their results in peer-reviewed journals.

Biohacking not only pushes the envelope of science and technology; it also pushes the boundaries of ethics and law. Medicine is one of the most regulated professions and there can be serious legal ramifications when regulations are breached. In most jurisdictions the supply of drugs and certain supplements must adhere to strict regulatory requirements and only be prescribed for specific medical uses. Medical devices may also be restricted to approved uses and biomedical implants require strict standards to ensure they are sterile, biocompatible, and do not leak or leach dangerous materials. Grinders who administer anaesthetic drugs and undertake unsupervised surgeries to implant devices risk being charged with assault or practicing medicine without a license. Moreover, biohackers selling DIY biology kits, drugs or supplements can be in breach of local laws.

Public debates about the ethics of new technologies often lag well behind scientific progress, leaving pioneers in new technologies such as human-machine interfaces, gene editing and personal data acquisition acting without ethical oversight. This raises many moral and ethical questions such as ownership and privacy of personal data, the

voluntary or compulsory use of biometric data and its use for mass surveillance, and the creation of designer babies for aesthetic or personal rather than medical reasons.

In addition to legal and ethical issues, biohacking can have personal pitfalls. A focus on biomarkers can lead to considerable expense and may waste valuable resources that are better directed elsewhere. Or it can become an unhealthy obsession. The focus on biometric indicators also creates the risk of having your biomarkers within a desired range yet losing touch with your intuition and your humanity.

THE FUTURE

Our understanding of human biology is still a work in progress. As science and engineering continue to advance and become more accessible, new frontiers are emerging where medicine and lifestyle modification intersect with new technologies and personal development, bringing us closer to the merging of living organisms and machines. At the same time, the growing use of entheogens is fostering a deeper awareness of the mystic realisation that everything is alive.

As we move towards a transhuman future, it is important to consider not only how we can improve our physical and biological capabilities, but also what we want from life. While the trend of biohacking opens new frontiers, it also raises questions about ethics, legalities and risk. The next phase of evolution may therefore not just involve hacking our biology, but also our consciousness to improve our moral and ethical nature, leading the way to a truly healthy world.



Faith is important to people's identity. This trend shows how corporations are including faith in their diversity, equity and inclusion commitments—and as part of workplace wellness policy and programs. Photo, Shutterstock

Wellness + Faith:

Having Faith in Business

By Brian Grim

INTRODUCTION

While diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have focused on race, gender, sexual orientation, poverty and marginalized populations, one aspect that's been largely left out of the conversation is now making a case for good business practice and workplace wellness: faith.

That the pandemic has led to a resurgence of faith is not surprising. That the corporate world is embracing it is.

Until recently, the prevailing notion has argued against religion in the workplace for fear that it could be divisive and controversial. But recent research studies are proving the contrary. When work makes room for employees to express and practice religious identity and faith, it measurably contributes to recruitment, retention and revenue.

A number of corporations have already been practicing faith-friendly initiatives, whether it's providing food choices in canteens to observing different religious holidays and accommodating

prayer times and rooms. As documented by the annual Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Index, a growing number of multinational corporations are embracing religion and belief as part of their diversity, equity and inclusion commitments. Just as companies allow and encourage employees who are women, LGBTQ+, and people of color or differing abilities to form company sponsored, employee-led resource groups or ERGs, companies are increasingly allowing and encouraging employees to establish similar groups around faith, interfaith, and/or belief.

A case in point: The Intel Corporation has seven different faith and/or belief ERGs each sponsored by a C-suite executive. These include not only the major faiths, but also official groups for atheists, agnostics, and their allies, as well as smaller faiths such as Bahá'í. The head of the Christian group approached all seven group leaders to form an interfaith coalition, and in the process built networks that previously did not exist but have had significant business impact.



A short Religious Freedom & Business survey from REDI Index

A member of the Intel Christian ERG from predominantly Christian Costa Rica was recently assigned a project in Muslim-majority Malaysia. He didn't know anything about Muslims, and because of the network the head of the Intel Muslim ERG voluntarily helped him navigate Muslim society, resulting in business success. The same Muslim ERG leader, when reflecting on a recent corporate milestone, found himself in tears. As he reflected on why he was so emotional, he realized it was because he was able to not only bring his "whole self" to work, but also his whole "soul." Intel had become more than just a place to work for him. It had become family.

Perhaps one of the largest corporate shifts towards a faith-friendly workplace in recent years has been at Google. Until a few years ago, Google had a "no religion" policy. However, when they realized that this was alienating tens of thousands of employees for whom faith was important, they launched the

Inter Belief Network (IBN), enabling the employees to establish sub chapters for various faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and others as they wished to formally organize. Core to IBN is also their interfaith chapter, that is inclusive of all faiths and beliefs, religious or not. This has had an impact not only on morale, but also on product development, such as the IBN members designing special religion landing pages as part of Google search of religious holidays.

Recruiting others for whom faith is important becomes so much easier in such a faith-friendly corporate environment as was found at Intel. In fact, according to the highly respected Pew Research Center, religion is an important identifier for more than 84% of people in the world. Moreover, as companies continue to globalize, businesses that understand and adopt respect for employees' faiths and beliefs are not only recognizing micro-level factors but also the macro factor that religious populations are outgrowing nonreligious populations 23-to-1, according to an analysis of Pew Research Center projections.

As companies continue to globalize, businesses that understand and adopt respect for employees' faiths and beliefs are not only manifested in private and public lives but also promote a better understanding of customer needs and inform how to market products and services. This is fundamental to being competitive in a global economy where religious populations are projected to outgrow nonreligious ones 23-to-1.

ERGs provide a platform for employees to support one another and give employees of faith an official voice within the company to make their concerns and ideas known. These initiatives increase employee morale, and therefore, retention.

Findings from the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation REDI Index also underscore the growing trend towards faith-friendly workplaces. In particular, top companies are sharing with one another best practices. This happens directly between faith-oriented ERGs at different companies as well as at the CEO level.

At Stanford University's "The Role of Faith in

Business in the Silicon Valley” conference last fall, Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger argued for the importance of a faith-and-belief-friendly workplace.

This movement is spreading among other top leaders and top companies and was the topic of a Harvard Business Review article in September 2022 discussing how DEI efforts are missing one critical component—faith.

To be fully competitive in today’s and tomorrow’s marketplaces, companies need to tap into the full identity, strength and potential of their employees by including religion as a full-fledged part of their DEI commitments.

An inclusive workplace where non-theists are equally welcomed and valued, as are people of faith, means that diverse perspectives will enrich corporate culture and improve the quality of business decisions. When employees talk about their core beliefs and values, they get to know one another on a deeper level. This overcomes distrust and fear and forges warm, more trusting relationships.

In addition to the contribution of faith-friendly workplaces to recruitment, retention and revenue, research from the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation shows that religion has a significant macro impact on economies.

First, looking at the world’s largest economy, a study found that religion annually contributes nearly \$1.2 trillion of socio-economic value to the US economy. That is equivalent to being the world’s 15th largest national economy, putting it ahead of about 180 other countries. It’s more than the annual revenues of the world’s top 10 tech companies, including Apple, Amazon and Google. And it’s also more than 50% larger than that of the annual global revenues of America’s six largest oil and gas companies.

Religion contributes economically to American society in three general categories: Congregations: \$418 billion; Religious institutions: \$303 billion; Business: \$437 billion (faith-based, -related or -inspired). All these figures come from a careful analysis of survey and financial data from a wide range

This trend acknowledges that companies need to recognize the full identity of their employees by including religion as a part of their DEI commitments.





Religion is the world's 15th largest national economy, putting it ahead of about 180 other countries and the annual revenues of top companies like Apple, Amazon and Google. Photo, iStock

of national sources, detailed in the research article in the [*Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*](#) and a law review version in the [*University of St. Thomas Law Journal*](#).

Second, as the world navigates away from years of poor economic performance, religious freedom may be an unrecognized asset to economic recovery and growth, according to the global study [*Is Religious Freedom Good for Business? A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis*](#). The study examines and finds a positive relationship between religious freedom and ten of the twelve pillars of global competitiveness, as measured by the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index. The study looked at GDP growth for 173 countries and controlled for two-dozen different financial, social, and regulatory influences, finding that religious freedom is one of only three factors significantly associated with global economic growth.

There are many examples of how this pays out across the world, both in terms of company operations and the social causes business leaders address. Here are a few.

Following the sectarian conflicts in Iraq, many families were forced to flee the country in hopes

of seeking a safe place to openly practice their faith and beliefs. In response, [Khalid Khowshnaw](#) founded the Hemn Group which combats any form of discrimination in his construction company, including that of race, religion, ethnicity, or sectarian groups. The Hemn Group promotes inclusion of differing nationalities working alongside one another, oftentimes sharing in each other's celebrations and feasts. The group is also credited for providing jobs for countless Christians, Muslims, and Yezidi in areas that are safe to practice their faith and beliefs free of discrimination, and for facilitating the free practice of worship. This also creates an inclusive, sustainable economy, an antidote to sectarian conflict.

As a direct outgrowth of her industry-leading heart stint business in Israel, Medinol CEO [Dr. Judith Richter](#) founded the NIR School of the Heart to help high school students not only understand cardiovascular career opportunities but also connect the hearts of people from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Dr. Richter helps students build bridges across cultures through the process of learning. As one graduate summed up the experience, the NIR School of the Heart "will make the whole Middle East a better place." The program has become widely popular and currently has 826 graduates who are functioning as ambassadors for

peace, out of which 225 are also pursuing careers in medical-related professions.

In India, Candice Corby, CEO of Cobra Legal Solutions, promotes the celebration of religion and belief, encouraging employees to be their full selves, including bringing their faith and beliefs to work. Cobra Legal Solutions accomplishes the goal of being a religiously inclusive workplace by observing every festival and religious holiday world-wide, and also by hosting a commemoration for religions in a week known as “Cobra Life Week.”

And in the Netherlands, using the communications business he co-founded, Mark Woerde believes he can make the world a better place through

advertising. This year his team advanced interfaith understanding and peace in a global campaign featuring the world’s most prominent religious leaders—from Pope Francis to ayatollahs, chief rabbis and Hindu swamis—making a joint appeal to “Make Friends Across Religions.”

As workplace environments around the world are being radically reshaped to address social issues, changing consumer values, employees wellbeing, and a rally call for purpose and inclusivity, companies are being called upon to tap into the full identity, strength and potential of their employees by including religion as a full-fledged part of their DEI commitments.

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Brian Grim is the founding president of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation and works with Fortune 500 companies to include religion and belief as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. He is the leading expert on the positive socio-economic impact of freedom of religion and belief for all. Previously, Brian was chair of the World Economic Forum's council on the role of faith, a Davos speaker, a TEDx speaker, and director of global religion data research at the highly respected Pew Research Center in Washington DC.



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Robert Hammond recently joined Therme after serving for over two decades as co-founder and executive director of Friends of the High Line, where he led the transformation of an abandoned elevated railway line in Manhattan into an iconic and beloved urban park. He also created the High Line Network to foster community and share best practices among leaders of infrastructure renewal projects around the world. He has won numerous awards for his work and advised myriad companies and organizations.



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Skyler Hubler is a journalist and senior cultural strategist at Backslash, the cultural intelligence unit of the international advertising agency TBWA\Worldwide. In her role, she works across categories to help today's biggest brands stay one step ahead of culture. She was also a staff writer on Backslash's debut zine, ED\GE, which unpacks the influence of wellness on everything, from finance to food.



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Jane Kitchen has a 20-year career in journalism, specializing in the spa and wellness industry. Jane is editor at large at Spa Business magazine and has traveled the world in the name of wellness, writing first-person features on the latest spa openings, interviewing some of the most influential people in the business, and examining trends in the marketplace. She is also the editor of the annual Spa Handbook and co-author of the Spa Handbook's annual Spa Foresight. A seasoned content creator, Jane also runs her own communications firm.

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Thierry Malleret is the founder and managing partner of Monthly Barometer—a succinct predictive analysis provided to private investors, global CEOs and some of today's most influential decision-makers. He possesses decades of unique professional experience, spanning investment banking, think tanks, academia and government, including three years in the French Prime Minister's office. At the World Economic Forum, he founded and headed the Global Risk Network and for several years was responsible for the program of the annual meeting at Davos.

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Forbes-recognized innovator and award-winning sensory designer Ari Peralta is one of the world's leading voices in neuroscience and the senses. The winner of top design awards across multiple media disciplines, Ari champions ways to use the senses to elevate quality of life and promote self-awareness through Arigami UK—an innovative research consultancy dedicated to multisensory research. The “40 under 40” Harvard alumnus makes a positive impact through interdisciplinary projects that focus on using the senses and technology to support people's mental health.

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Michael Roizen, MD, served as the Cleveland Clinic's first chief wellness officer (2007-2019) and founding chair of its Wellness Institute. Dr. Roizen is a recipient of an Emmy, an Elle, and the Paul G. Rogers Award from the National Library of Medicine for Best Medical Communicator. He initiated and developed the RealAge concept, a motivating metric that promotes behavioral and lifestyle changes to improve health. He believes that soon 90 will be the new 40, as he describes in his book *The Great Age Reboot* and the *Reboot Your Age* app.

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