



# Wellness Architecture Initiative Briefing Paper 2017

## **What is the aim of your initiative?**

The purpose of the Wellness Architecture Initiative is to raise awareness, develop thought leadership, and provide resources to promote design strategies that elevate every dimension of wellness – physical, mental, social, financial, occupational, environmental, emotional and spiritual – in order for our built environments to enhance human health and well-being.

## **What or who are the current “news makers” or trends in the initiative’s industry/sector?**

The “well” trend has naturally grown out of the “green” trend. A shift in primary focus has grown beyond environmental health impacts to human health impacts. The industry is upgrading words like sustainable to regenerative, and industry thought leaders are challenging the profession to build better than not only the status quo, but also yesterday’s high performance building. The premise of Wellness Architecture is that nature, not codes or rating systems, is the top standard to model systems and design after.

## **Name some (high level) challenges facing your industry/sector?**

Increased awareness on human health and well-being is currently emerging in the building industry. The top three hurdles that the industry faces today are:

1. Lack of awareness. The majority of people are unaware that our surroundings have the power to either diminish our health or enable us to thrive.
2. Architectural curriculum and continuing education requirements. Current coursework related to health, safety, and welfare are narrowly focused on extreme incidents such as life-safety as opposed to daily health and well-being needs.
3. Real world case studies are limited in showing that designing for wellness has returns on investment and value that cannot be ignored.

## **Where do you see the opportunities for industry/sector?**

It is an innate human right to live, work, and play in environments that are healthy and increase happiness. Buildings that meet current codes often result in harmful environments, leaving enormous opportunity and responsibility on industry professionals and developers to demand more from our buildings.

More academic and scientific studies are released each year demonstrating that designing not simply for mental and physical health, but for all wellness considerations has a direct benefit on individual performance, life satisfaction, financial success and social engagement. Wellness strategies are being implemented across project typologies, from luxury resort properties to the workplace to low-income housing.

**Are there any “heroes” (either companies or individuals) who stand out in your industry/sector?**

Our heroes come in the form of scientific evidence and standards propelling wellness strategies into the mainstream, and empowering owners and designers to build “well.”

Ironically, evidence typically springs from fields only tangentially related to architecture. Environmental psychology is perhaps our biggest ally, while other key studies boil up at random. For example, one study performed by Harvard’s School of Public Health demonstrated indoor air quality designed to meet code diminishes cognitive performance, while the Mayo Clinic’s Well Living Lab conducts ongoing research measuring the physiological and mental impacts of various indoor environments.

Key standards to pay attention to in practice are the Well Building Institute’s WELL Standard, the International Building Biology and Ecology’s design principles, projects and case studies fostered by the Center for Active Design and many more.

**Is there noteworthy investment happening in your industry/sector?**

Integrating wellness strategies into the workplace environment and community design are the current focuses of early investment in wellness architecture. However, with the speed of the uprising “well” trend, it is prudent to be leery of today’s “well-washing,” as the new form of “greenwashing,” or disinformation and surface-level techniques, are being marketed as healthy environments without a holistic understanding backed by scientific evidence of how design impacts all dimensions of wellness.

**Name any key accomplishments (milestones) made by your initiative?**

The Wellness Architecture Initiative’s 2017 projects include:

- The ongoing survey of example wellness architecture projects across the globe, both historic and contemporary.
- The Future of Wellness in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction Industry Roundtable and Forum - This was an international think tank of top industry professionals and influencers who came together for the day to share ideas and tackle key questions, such as what is wellness architecture? What are the metrics for valuing well-being? How do we identify and overcome industry hurdles?

- Compiling a list of resources dealing with standards and practices for implementing design principals known to increase human health and well-being.

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