



Wellness Communities Initiative Briefing Paper 2017

What is the aim of your initiative?

The purpose of the Global Wellness Communities Initiative (GWCI) is to foster the effective development of wellness communities – defined by GWCI as “communities proactively developed with the holistic health of its residents, environment (natural and built) and local community in mind” – by identifying common needs, principles and resources for those with active commercial interests in the space.

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

The greatest “newsmaker” today is the question: “What makes a community well?” We believe, at a minimum, that a community must demonstrate a commitment to each of the following three principles over the course of its life cycle to be deemed “well”:

- 1) **Environmental consciousness** demonstrated by sustainable development and operating practices.
- 2) **Holistic health and wellness** demonstrated by offering residents opportunities via programs and facilities – whether indoor or outdoor – to proactively take care of themselves and enhance their overall quality of life and well-being.
- 3) **Social connections** demonstrated by both physical and programmatic elements that foster intergenerational socialization and connectivity among fellow residents.

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

The greatest challenge to date is securing investment for new or renovating projects. Like any industry that is relatively new, business models for wellness communities are still in an experimental stage and have yet to be widely proven or accepted. However, as part of our work, we’ve discovered (1) a lack of supply despite growing consumer demand to live well, (2) a willingness of consumers to pay a premium for wellness, (3) opportunities for hospitality operators to expand into community management, and (4) notable economic and societal performance within real life projects that make investment, albeit long-term, highly appealing.

Where do you see the opportunities for industry/sector?

The greatest opportunity for the sector is to reconsider the “who” and “what” of wellness communities. To date, the greater “wellness lifestyle real estate” sector (now sized at \$120B USD per research conducted by the GWI) has been inclusive of projects mostly geared towards the luxury marketplace, yet the appeal of “living well” crosses generations and cultures. Living well is not about traditional demographics, but much more about psychographics that are multi-generational in nature. Community projects, whether new or renovating, public or private, should think creatively about the health, wellness, and frankly, the pocketbooks of mainstream and low-income consumers as well.

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

Yes! Serenbe in Georgia (one of the best models we’ve seen) and Lake Nona in Florida (coined “A City for Wellness” by the New York Times) are pioneers in the field. In the UK, the BioRegional Group has authored the famed “One Planet Living Principles,” now guiding sustainable community development around the globe. And the Leisure Media Group, owner of trade publications CLAD and Spa Business, has worked with us to author a three-part series on “Living Well” featuring several other “heroes” in Europe and Asia with the United States feature in progress. For more examples, please visit www.globalwellnessinstitute.org/wellness-communities.

Is there noteworthy investment happening in your industry/sector?

To date, the most noteworthy investment has been private and piecemeal in nature. For wellness communities to make the kind of impact we know that they are capable of, broader institutional investment is needed. The key will be finding investors that are not only interested in traditional return on investment, but who are also interested in return on wellness (ROW); that is, impacting the well-being of our planet's citizens. Fortunately, and perhaps surprisingly to some, we know that there are economic reasons to do both.

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

Since the GWCI was first founded in May of 2015, we have achieved the following:

- Launched [a website of resources](#) including sample communities in operation and development, articles and other reference information.
- Moderated the first international [breakout session](#) at GWS Mexico City.
- Authored [a white paper](#) answering four key questions and [presented our findings](#) at GWS Austria during a general session.
- Hosted a [GWI roundtable](#) to “Redefine Living Well,” inclusive of representatives from multiple industry sectors, and completed a summary report of the discussion.
- Lobbied the GWI to commission [a major six-figure study](#), which is scheduled to be released in January 2018.

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