



GLOBAL WELLNESS
INSTITUTE™

ON OUR MINDS

The latest topics fueling the work and conversations of GWI's Wellness Communities Initiative

Designing for Healthy Communities

How we can leverage our neighborhoods to enhance health and wellness

With WELL buildings in 35 countries, we've seen firsthand the effect that places and spaces, and everything in them, can have on human health and wellness. Since the inception of the healthy building movement, the International WELL Building Institute™ (IWBI™) has witnessed fast moving adoption of healthy building practices as the industry accelerates research and innovations in wellness real estate. And in our mission to transform the market – to truly make the spaces in which we live, work and play contributors to, not detractors from our health – we realized we could leverage what we've learned at the building scale into a new standard specifically for communities: the WELL Community Standard™.

An oft-cited phrase in public health is that your zip code could be a greater indication of your health than your genetic code, indicating how our environment significantly impacts our health and well-being.¹ Recognizing that not just our buildings but also our community environments – both physical and social – vitally support our day-to-day wellness provides an unprecedented opportunity to positively impact human health at scale. It also offers an equally important chance for market transformation. In my work at the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) over the last decade, one of the things I found most challenging was the effort to drive true long-term and sustainable change by empowering consumers to ask for what they need to become their most productive, engaged, and happy selves – to demand healthier schools from their schoolboards, healthier homes from their realtors, and healthier workplaces from their employers. Rick Fedrizzi, the founder and immediate past CEO of the USGBC and current CEO of IWBI, calls this the “second wave of sustainability.” And to truly ride this wave to full market transformation, we have to change not just the spaces in which people live, work, and play, but also the mindsets of consumers along the way.

In launching the WELL Community Standard last year, we aspired to give projects around the world a roadmap for creating healthy, inclusive, integrated and resilient communities that not only invest in infrastructure to support human health and well-being, but also

¹ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. City Maps: Short Distance to Large Gaps in Health. <http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/articles-andnews/2015/09/city-maps.html>. Published 2015.

support the aspirations of any individual to become their most whole and thriving self. A WELL community actively enhances the physical health of its residents, whether through access to fitness facilities and health services or the provision of free sunscreen at the fairground. A WELL community supports an equitable, engaged social identity and cohesion, whether through citizen advisory boards or local volunteerism. A WELL community utilizes natural, human and technological resources effectively, equitably and responsibly, whether through affordable food access programs or efficient waste management. And a WELL community is prepared to bounce back quickly in the face of the unexpected, whether through advance cold warnings or emergency response plans. By introducing 110 evidence-based features across 10 concepts that promote health and wellness at the district scale – Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Fitness, Temperature, Sound, Materials, Mind and Community – the WELL Community Standard offers communities the flexibility to select design and policy approaches that best meet their current and future needs, and encourages individual consumers to play an active role in establishing what those needs are.

WELL Community [projects](#) have already registered across Europe, Asia and North America, highlighting the global importance of designing neighborhoods for health and underscoring that a desire for healthier, more vibrant communities is an aspiration across cultures and geographies around the world. By taking a holistic approach that supports the whole community and the whole individual, we can turn this aspiration into a reality, and ride this second wave of sustainability into a new day that brings health and well-being to as many people as possible.

Resources are available to support individuals, organizations and communities that want to get involved. [Learn](#) from projects who have met their health and wellness goals through WELL Certification, [recognize](#) key trends across the health and wellness community market and [leverage](#) the WELL Community Standard research and guidance.

Until next time, we will be building well to live well. Cheers!

By Rachel Gutter, President, International WELL Building Institute
on Behalf of The Global Wellness Communities Initiative Team