



New Approach?

Martin Sheppard believes wellness should be an integral part of local government

In tandem with the publishers of this magazine and a number of other forward thinking identities in this industry, wellness is on its way to becoming the next 'big thing' in leisure, recreation and sport.

But this is not wellness as a fad or a fashion, I see wellness as a cornerstone of this industry and, in local government, as an integral part of council services.

For 'wellness' is more than just the opposite of illness, rather it's about a healthy mix of mind, body and spirit to ensure ongoing health, fulfilment and a balanced life. Key to the wellness mix is activity, which at a personal level is a major contributor to a full and meaningful life and one of the best forms of health insurance for individuals.

In this industry, we are all aware that lack of physical activity is linked to the most chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, colon cancer, depression, obesity, osteoporosis and injury – with the cost of ailments resulting from physical inactivity accounting for 7% of Australia's \$75 billion health costs. In addition, we have near epidemic rates of inactivity and the resultant figures that show that 63% of Australian males and 47% of Australian females are overweight or obese, while 43% of the population are insufficiently active to derive any form of health gain.

But inactivity does not just impact on physical health. Mental health disorders are not uncommon in Australia, with 1 in 4 of the population affected. With research showing that physical diseases may be caused by the consequences of emotional distress and with people under stress often turning to behaviours such as smoking, drinking, illicit drug-use and eating junk food. This, in turn, has an impact on physical health.

Wellness also has a role in social health, as poor social relationships and lack of community participation are seen to

be as big a risk to health, with socially isolated older people dying at two to three times the rate of people with a network of social relationships and sources of emotional support.

Poor health, as Paul Zane Pilzer said in these pages in his interview last year "is not a medical issue. It is primarily an economic issue", with those who are physically active and body or health conscious often being the wealthier individuals in our communities. The reverse of this is the socially, financially and physically deprived who are becoming a burden on the local community.

Herein lies the opportunity for local government, and particularly local government leisure and recreation services, to provide services for the majority of their communities who want to balance and enjoy their lifestyle. However, providing such services may need a new approach to service delivery with a realisation that wellness, wellbeing, health, leisure and physical activity should have a 'joined up' agenda wherein sport services should be integrated with recreation, leisure (both formal and informal) and physical activity.

This is currently happening in local governments around the world. In the USA, Canada, Britain and New Zealand, government-led strategies are in place to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities through changing behaviours and raising awareness of the importance of physical activity. In these countries, leisure is on the health agenda, and vice versa.

Common target groups for these initiatives are people who are inactive, children and adolescents, subgroups such as teenage girls and ethnic minorities, people who are unemployed and/or live in significant poverty, older people, people with disabilities, people at risk of chronic disease, and pregnant women and women with children.

The Australian approach to physical activity is broadly similar with programs based on schools and after school activities that promote healthy eating and regular physical activity.

At a strategic level, moving wellness to the heart of local government means moving away from the traditional leisure strategy to a focus on physical activity. For councils developing a new corporate strategy leisure needs to be on the agenda as a key contributor to the health and wellbeing of the community.

The 2002 Australian Bureau of Statistics 'Wellbeing Framework' publication identifies eight areas that can affect the community and individual's wellbeing: Prosperity; Health; Housing; Work; Education; Family and Community; Crime, Justice and Safety; and Leisure and Culture. Although 'leisure' is only one of these factors, it can have a direct impact on each of the other seven. Therefore, councils' strategy and vision should include leisure, while the other seven areas should be included in a leisure strategy.

By adopting such a strategic and holistic approach, councils can be more creative and innovative in how they provide 'lifestyle and wellness' opportunities for the community. It is no surprise that private sector developers, such as Delfin Lendlease, are adopting this approach in their development of residential communities.

In South Australia, Delfin Lendlease have developed a strategic partnership with the City of Salisbury and the University of South Australia to ensure that planning, management and service at its new Mawson Lakes development includes a range of community lifestyle activities and benefits. These include features such as walking trails, sports facilities and open space, that are integrated into the housing so that, along with schools and retail areas, they can be reached by walking rather than driving. And Delfin Lendlease's inclusion of these features has been based upon an expectation that it will improve the sales of its land and housing. So if the private sector has identified

that wellness benefits sell, local governments should surely take account of them.

In terms of management of facilities, services and programs, councils have an ongoing opportunity to provide, or at least facilitate opportunities to enhance the commitment to lifestyle and wellness. In this vein, some are enhancing their programs so that they can meet more of the non-sport aspects of wellness. Such programs include:

- Counselling rooms for 'one-to-one' lifestyle, exercise and related advice;
- Body focused programs such as 'Alexander technique', reflexology and kinesiology;
- Emotional support such as relationship counselling, meditation, personal development, aromatherapy, clairvoyance and energy healing;
- Pampering and indulgence such as facials, massage and beauty treatments;
- Activity space, for group sessions such as
 - * yoga, pilates, relaxation, belly dancing
 - * spiritual classes for religious groups
 - * personal development courses and activities

Local councils also have an opportunity to be a facilitator between schools, their own facilities, local service providers and sports clubs in order to co-ordinate the planning, management and delivery of physical activity to the groups that need it most.

With funding from Federal and State Governments for programs in health, nutrition and physical activity why wouldn't local government look broader than their current position?

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This article is based up Martin's presentation 'An Integrated Wellness Model for Local Government' presented at the recent National Health and Wellbeing Summits in Melbourne and Sydney.