

Swim England response to the Health & Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report

June 2017

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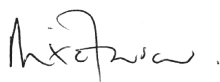
Forewords

On behalf of Swim England, I welcome the Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report from the Swimming and Health Commission and would like to thank all the academics who contributed to it. Particular appreciation is extended to Professor Ian Cumming and Ann Gates for their contributions and editing of the report.

What shines through from the report is the enormous potential that swimming and wider aquatic activity has to contribute to supporting the health and wellbeing of the population. Equally, that for too long national guidelines have concentrated too narrowly on the cardio vascular benefits of exercise and sport undertaken by healthy people, when for many people who are less fit or have long term conditions, there are many benefits to mental health or muscular skeletal problems that sport, and swimming in particular, can deliver.

It is clear that further research is required to fully understand the impact of swimming, and we believe that resources should be made available to undertake this. Swim England is committed to maximising this potential and to make swimming the main sport for supporting the health and wellbeing of England.

The following document highlights how Swim England has already begun to address some of the recommendations in the Swimming and Health Commission report, alongside some of the key activities it would like to develop in the future.



Mike Farrar

Chairman, Swim England Group Board



The Swimming and Health Commission was established by Swim England to explore the evidence base for the health benefits of swimming. I was invited to bring together an independent group of people from a wide range of backgrounds to determine how to approach this task. We concluded that an academic report authored by a team of academic researchers from across the country evaluating the impact of swimming on the health of individuals, patients, and communities was the way forward. Little did I realise when I agreed to chair the Commission just what a fantastic piece of truly ground breaking work would be produced by our authors.

I encourage everyone to read the full report - all 150 pages of it - to see the many physical and mental health benefits of swimming that have been identified. The full report provides striking and robust evidence for the significant improvements in health and in the quality of life that swimming produces. Many areas have also been identified in which there are believed to be benefits of regular swimming activities but in which more robust research is needed to confirm and quantify these.

I believe that Swim England is the first sport governing body to support such an in-depth investigation of its relationship with health and wellbeing and I would like to applaud them for their foresight and for producing a piece of work that I am sure will become a reference document for many years to come, as well as a catalyst for further research. This report now provides a solid foundation for informing the work of Swim England in this area going forward, and highlights the contribution that swimming can make to support the health of the population.

I would like to offer my grateful thanks all those who have been involved in the writing of the report, as well as members of the Commission who were instrumental in identifying its direction.



Professor Ian Cumming OBE

Chairman, Swimming and Health Commission,

Chief Executive of Health Education England and Level 3 Swimming Coach



Introduction

Swim England (formally the Amateur Swimming Association) is the national governing body for swimming in England. The organisation helps people learn how to swim, enjoy the water safely, and compete in all aquatic sports. Swim England's vision is of a nation swimming and it strives to inspire everyone to enjoy the water in the way that suits them.

A key objective for Swim England is to significantly grow the number and diversity of people enjoying and benefitting from regular swimming. As part of this work, there is a recognition of the role Swim England can play in supporting people to become more active to benefit their health.

Swim England and the health agenda

Swim England's first report to highlight the potential that swimming had to contribute to the health agenda was the 2010 document *Swimming Taking the Plunge for a Fitter Lifestyle*¹ ("Taking the Plunge"), which was later updated in 2014.

This document firmly positioned swimming as a physical activity that would play a significant role in the delivery of the government health agenda.

Key findings showed that:

- ♦ Water is a supportive environment for people to exercise.
- ♦ Swimming as a physical activity could support the prevention of key long term conditions.
- ♦ There was some evidence of the positive impact of swimming on the lives of people with certain long term conditions such as dementia, osteoarthritis and obesity.
- ♦ There was anecdotal evidence to suggest that swimming could help support mental wellbeing due to the relaxing properties of the water and opportunity for social contact.
- ♦ The report highlighted an economic modelling exercise carried out by Professor Richard Fordham which showed that:
 - » If swimmers undertook two hours of swimming per month, about 70 Quality Adjusted Life Years per 100,000 people are likely to be gained². The estimated cost per QALY for swimming was estimated to be £12,000. This compared very favourably with other healthcare interventions, and was deemed to be a conservative estimate as it assumed low levels of regular swimming participation and ignored many of the wider health and social benefits of leisure swimming.
 - » The return on investment (estimated from reduction on incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes) equated to around £1 billion of savings. This would mean a return on investment of £1.50 for every £1 spent on public pools³.

Taking the Plunge led Swim England to develop intervention programmes such as Let's Go Swimming and the Dementia Friendly Swimming Project, and invest greater resources in research and insight.

In May 2016 Swim England established the independent Swimming and Health Commission to further investigate the links between swimming and health. Created in part as a response to *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*⁴, the key objectives of the Commission were to:

- ♦ Agree a common understanding of the health benefits of swimming.
- ♦ Produce a set of recommendations that help deliver a more unified approach, including promoting swimming to maximise the positive impact it can have on health.

Swim England recognised the need to fully understand the latest evidence surrounding swimming and the unique benefits that the aquatic environment provides. As a result, the Swimming and Health Commission was commissioned to undertake a review of the evidence of swimming and other aquatic activity on health and wellbeing. The remit of the report was to:

- ♦ Review and scrutinise the available evidence on the benefits of swimming for individuals, patients, communities and nations.
- ♦ Scientifically review the health and wellbeing benefits across the lifespan, to highlight disparities in the evidence practice and access evidence that discusses the many health advantages that swimming regularly affords to us all.

The resulting *Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming* report⁵ (“the report”) is the first time a national governing body of sport has commissioned such an extensive review of academic evidence to inform future work and focus.

The benefits of swimming: the evidence

The report covered seven areas:

- ♦ The individual physical health benefits of swimming (Chapter 1)
- ♦ The wellbeing benefits of swimming (Chapter 2)
- ♦ The physiological effects of swimming (Chapter 3)
- ♦ The wellbeing benefits of swimming to communities (Chapter 4)
- ♦ The public health benefits of swimming (Chapter 5)
- ♦ Swimming as a sport – the health and wellbeing benefits (Chapter 6)
- ♦ Swimming for health and wellbeing (Chapter 7)

Each chapter was written by experts from within the fields of health and physical activity and evaluated existing research relating to the relevant area. Although the report highlighted that some areas require further and more robust research, it presented a range of evidence showing specifically how swimming and related aquatic activity can positively impact on an individual’s health and wellbeing. This is a clear development from *Taking the Plunge* which focused on swimming’s potential contribution to preventing inactivity.

The report findings can be divided into three key groupings, which are discussed in further detail below:

- i. The popularity and accessibility of swimming across the lifespan
- ii. The unique properties of water
- iii. The positive impact of swimming on health and society

The popularity and accessibility of swimming across the lifespan

One of the unique aspects of swimming is that it is something everyone can do. Young or old, fit or inactive - swimming does not discriminate and is a great equaliser that allows everyone to take part.

The latest data from the Swim England Tracker⁶ shows that every month, 11 million adults in England participate in swimming. Unlike other data sources which have focused on regular 30 minutes of moderate activity, Swim England’s figures relate to all ranges of aquatic activity. This includes aquafit, swimming for relaxation as well as competitive training. Additional research also shows there is a latent demand of seven million people who want to swim⁷.

The report highlights how the popularity and inclusiveness of swimming makes it ideal for long term participation in physical activity. In particular, the way swimming appeals across all communities, cultures, ages and - unlike many other sports - across genders.

Swimming supports improved life satisfaction in adults

Swimming enables an individual to exercise at their own pace and without putting great pressure on joints like land exercise. The report identifies studies which have reported improved life satisfaction, mental health and self-perception of health⁸, and better self-rated health (including psychological health), reduced levels of stress and lower levels of disability⁹.

Swimming lowers the risk of early death

One systematic review identified a study that noted a significant reduction in all-cause mortality in men compared to other forms of physical activity¹⁰. The results suggested that swimmers had a lower risk of early death versus men who were sedentary, engaged in walking or running only.

Another study in the report highlighted swimming's ability to encourage participation and retain women above other forms of exercise. Across a six and 12 month period, women aged 50-70 years old were found to be more likely to continue swimming than walking as part of their physical activity programme¹¹.

Swimming is ideal for older people

There is strong evidence that engaging in any physical activity in older age is essential for healthy ageing¹². The accessibility of swimming for older people and the specific benefits that come from water (see below), means that swimming is ideally suited to help address public health in older age.

In particular, a study identified in the report found that older swimmers who reported swimming between two and five times a week over a period of an average of 2.5 years had significantly better executive function on three tasks compared to sedentary older adults of similar age and gender who did not swim¹³. Add in the social aspect of swimming and the benefits of reducing isolation, and swimming not only helps older adults with their physical and cognitive health, but also their mental wellbeing.

Swimming and water safety is key to reducing drownings

Knowing how to be safe in and around water is key to preventing incidents of drowning. Primary schools have a responsibility through the national curriculum to teach children how to swim and understand water safety, and programmes such as Swim Safe¹⁴ and annual prevention messages¹⁵, help to reinforce these.

The report identifies swimming's unique role in the prevention of drowning, with one author exploring the direct relationship between swimming ability and drowning disparities. He concluded that having adequate opportunities to learn to swim and having positive experiences in early life, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may be an important to tackle this leading cause of avoidable and tragic death¹⁶.

Learning to swim gives children the best start in life

There are indications that swimming may have a vital role to play in the healthy brain development of children and adolescents. In particular, one study highlighted that vigorous physical activity, including competitive swimming, may have an impact on cognition in adolescents¹⁷.

A further study in 2013 into the cognitive benefits of swimming lessons reported that young people achieved a range of developmental milestones much earlier than the wider population regardless of socio-economic background or gender¹⁸. The study found that young people who had swimming lessons were between six and twelve months ahead of the norm in physical skills, cognitive skills, mathematics, language development, counting and ability to follow instructions. The author concluded that these gave swimmers a considerable advantage as they start their academic studies.



Swimming is good for health and wellbeing, at any age



The unique properties of water

The report highlights how the unique properties of water make it a great environment for people to exercise. This is particularly relevant for people who may struggle with land based activity. Some examples highlighted in the report include:

- ♦ **Pregnant women and individuals who are overweight:** the unique nature of the aquatic environment to reduce weight-bearing and create a cooler environment, may make it a better option for exercise.
- ♦ **People at risk of falling:** the movement of the water may support balance training.
- ♦ **People with muscular skeletal conditions such as arthritis:** the reduced stress on the joints and reduced impact make it a more accessible and less painful activity.

In addition, the resistance of water provides an ideal environment in which to undertake aerobic, strength and balance training, which are key components of the guidelines for physical activity laid out in *Start Active, Stay Active*¹⁹, a report from the four UK Chief Medical Officers.

Case study

Kathleen, aged 69 from Honiton

"After suffering chronic arthritis in my knees in 2008, I took out swim membership at our local pool. This enabled me to exercise regularly without pain as swimming provided me with an enjoyable weight-free form of exercise.

This kept me going until 2013 when I had my right knee joint replaced followed by replacement of the second knee in 2014. Again, swimming provided invaluable exercise, strengthening my quads, which, in turn, has reduced deterioration of muscles around my knees.

My time in the pool has also helped me after suffering a mini-stroke and major stomach surgery. The medication I take causes muscle wastage and swimming is continually helping to keep this to the minimum.

In summary, swimming has provided me with a better quality of life and having a local pool that caters for my needs has proved absolutely invaluable."

Table 1:**Properties of water and benefits**

Property	What this means	Who benefits
Density/buoyancy	The human body is slightly less dense than water and therefore people experience an upward force when immersed in water which makes them feel lighter than on land. The deeper the water the greater the force so if a person is immersed in water to their chest, this equates to an offload in body weight of approximately 60 per cent.	For pregnant women and individuals who are overweight the reduction in the effect of body weight places less stress on joints and make exercise more comfortable and practical than on dry land. The reduction of stress on the joints also benefits people with musculoskeletal conditions; and the buoyancy supports people with balance problems who may fear falling.
Hydrostatic pressure	The pressure of the water on the body will vary according to the depth of water. This pressure is like a bandage around the body and can lead the blood to move away from the extremities to the centre of the body. This also means that the muscles associated with breathing have to work harder.	Water is a good environment to support pulmonary rehabilitation because by varying the depth of submersion it is possible to train the muscles associated with breathing at the right level. The pressure of the water may also temporarily reduce swelling and fluid retention in the foot and ankle. <i>People with existing heart problems and kidney problems should seek medical advice before embarking on aquatic activity.</i>
Viscosity	Limb movement in water is subject to drag force and turbulence. The higher viscosity of the water creates resistance which can be varied by changing body movements and using swimming aids and equipment.	The movement of the water makes it the ideal environment for balance training for people at risk of falls. The resistance of the water allows people to undertake multi-directional strength training in a comfortable environment. Increased resistance means there is an increased energy expenditure in swimming. This has been estimated to be approximately four times that of running the same distance. This is particularly important for people seeking to lose weight.
Thermodynamics	Water is good at conducting heat away from the body and therefore has a cooling effect.	Water may be a more comfortable exercise environment for individuals who are overweight or pregnant and struggle with overheating.

Case study

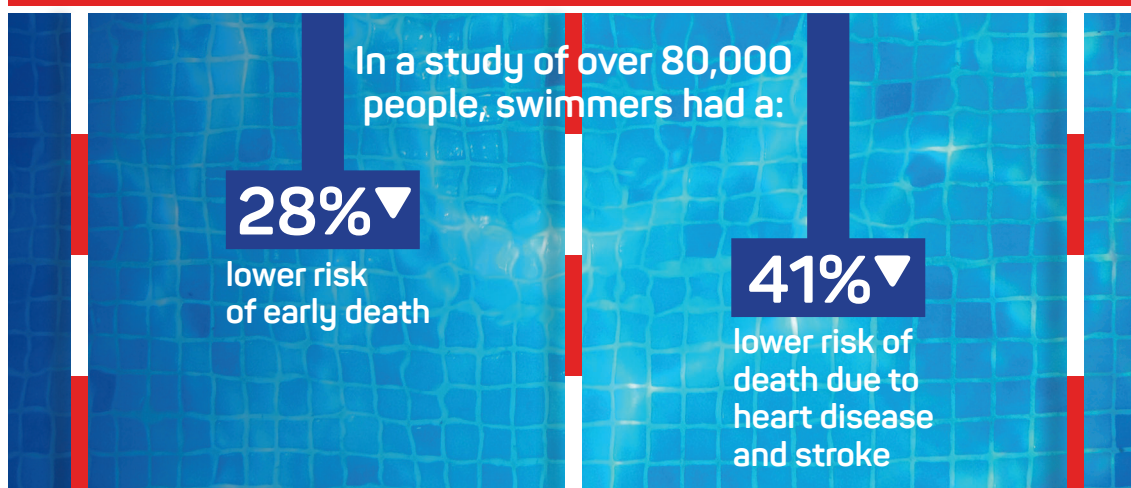
Emma, aged 31 from Worcester

"I had a really rough first few months of my pregnancy where I struggled to run or cycle – both activities I love to do – so I started doing gentle swimming which helped with my queasiness.

I'm now swimming twice a week which is helping me to stay active as riding my bike is difficult because of balancing, and I found running was impacting on my joints with the ligament stretching.

Swimming is keeping me mentally well because I am now able to exercise. And I am really enjoying spending time bonding with my baby, just the two of us. I'm currently four months pregnant and I am definitely going to try to swim throughout my pregnancy, even if it is just walking in the water, because it's definitely good for my fitness and my mind."

Swimming can boost your life expectancy



The positive impact of swimming on health and society

It is well established that physical activity is beneficial to the prevention, rehabilitation and management of long term health conditions. As highlighted in the previous section, the specific properties of water make it a positive environment for people with long term conditions to exercise.

Evidence from the report shows early indications of a range of physical and mental wellbeing benefits of swimming, which have been summarised in Table 2²⁰.

Table 2:
Positive impact of swimming on health conditions

Condition	Positive impact of swimming and aquatic activity
Obesity	When combined with calorie reduction swimming and wider aquatic activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ supports reduction in BMI♦ can reduce waist and hip circumference♦ influences positive changes in fat distribution.
Falls prevention	Due to the properties of water (see Table 1) aquatic activity helps: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ reduce the risk of future falls♦ improve balance♦ reduce fear of falling.
Cardiovascular and diabetic risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Swimming pool based activity has a positive effect on risk factors for cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
Pulmonary disease	Swimming and aquatic activity is a good activity for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ respiratory training (especially the muscles associated with inspiration) that can enhance lung volume and aid the teaching of breathing techniques♦ pulmonary rehabilitation where respiratory muscle strength needs to be maintained or gained♦ people with asthma because the environment offers humidity, warmth and low pollen exposure, and hydrostatic pressure against the chest wall reduces the work of breathing associated with expiration.
Musculoskeletal conditions (MSK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Aquatic activity is beneficial for a range of musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoarthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and fibromyalgia.♦ Aquatic programmes have shown to help people with musculoskeletal conditions improve physical function, pain and quality of life.
Neurological conditions	Swimming and/or aquatic exercise can improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ mobility in individuals with Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease and stroke♦ improve balance and MS-related fatigue and mental health.

Cancer	<p>Aquatic exercise may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ relieve breast symptoms in association with surgery and radiotherapy ♦ reduce breast cancer-related fatigue and hormone therapy-induced joint pain ♦ have a positive impact on mood/depression and quality of life in people living with and beyond cancer ♦ swimming can support weight loss which is a risk factor for a number of cancers.
Dementia and cognitive decline	<p>Swimming can support psychological wellbeing due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ being active ♦ socialisation ♦ rekindling of positive memories ♦ providing opportunities for fun and relaxation. <p>It can also lead to a reduction in adverse behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia.</p>
Cerebral palsy	<p>Aqua Therapy enables children with cerebral palsy to perform exercises that may not be possible on dry land and may improve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ respiratory function and activity levels ♦ provide an opportunity for socialising and social interaction, supporting improved emotional wellbeing ♦ impact on improved gross motor skills including walking speed ♦ lead to changes in strength and muscle action.
Osteoporosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ There is evidence that post-menopausal swimmers have a higher bone density than sedentary people, but not as high as those who engaged in high impact sport. ♦ Aquatic activity has an important role to play for individuals who can't tolerate high impact activities and may fear falling.
Psychological wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ The activities provided in swimming pools can offer a way of meeting an individual's social, emotional and cultural wellbeing. ♦ Swimming outdoors in natural water can offer wellbeing benefits. ♦ Swimming is associated with improved mental health, reduced anxiety, improved sleep and improved quality of life in people with long term conditions. ♦ Swimming has been recommended by MIND to support mental health and wellbeing.

It is recognised that health is not just about an absence of illness, there are a number of wider factors that can have a role in ensuring people reach their full potential. The report notes how swimming can contribute to building communities by supporting the development of both swimming skills, and skills that support the delivery of aquatic activities across pools and in clubs. This also includes transferable life skills associated with swimming.

Swimming can also contribute to the development of social networks, increased community engagement, and promote opportunities for social inclusion and cultural enrichment, especially within minority communities²¹.

Case study

Robert, aged 54 from Manchester

"I have found a new way of coping with my Bi-Polar and Korsakoffs. Swimming was a new outlet for my illnesses. I used to feel trapped and depressed about my conditions but going swimming with others with the same problems has made me feel good about myself and just swimming led me to join the gym. I sometimes get fed up with life but my new interests have got me out of the doldrums.

My self-worth has improved and my confidence has improved, it's just a simple swim but it has changed my life. So give it a go, its great fun."

Swim England's response to report recommendations

Swim England welcomes the recommendations in the report and is keen to work with the authors and wider partners to support additional and more robust research to maximise the potential that swimming can contribute to the health agenda.

The recommendations can be grouped into three key areas. Table 3 provides an overview of Swim England's response to the recommendation areas. Examples of Swim England's current programmes and future ideas are detailed later in this section.

Table 3:
Summary of Swim England response to Report recommendations:

Recommendation	Swim England response
Ensure water-based exercise prescription becomes a key consideration for health care clinicians and commissioners	<p>The versatility of swimming and wider aquatic activity to support people of all ages, all abilities, and from all backgrounds to stay healthy and active should make it an obvious choice for healthcare professionals to prescribe. However, we recognise that not all health professionals are aware of the benefits to their patients or the opportunities available in their area.</p> <p>As a result, Swim England is keen to work with health bodies who are supporting the education of health professionals (such as the Clinical Champions Project) to share the benefits listed in this report.</p> <p>Swim England is working with facility operators to clearly show health professionals that swimming is not only the most medically-effective exercise for the widest group of individuals, but also that it provides a safe environment in which to improve the health of their patients.</p> <p>The Swim England GP Referral project (see below) aims to make aquatic activity an integral part of GP referral schemes and ensure that swimming is an attractive and fit for purpose activity that health professionals will be confident in recommending.</p>
Ensure greater investment is given to research	<p>The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report has highlighted a need for greater research not only into the impact of swimming on the health and wellbeing agenda, but also wider physical activity. As a society, this area of work should be a priority for government and the whole sport and physical activity sector, and not just swimming.</p> <p>Swim England will use its influence with partners and commissioning bodies to raise awareness of this importance. It will consult with key stakeholders to identify important research questions relating to swimming as a sport and the health and wellbeing benefits, and support applications for research grants.</p> <p>In the meantime, Swim England's Insight team will continue to monitor its own programmes and coordinate work from other agencies to build a portfolio of evidence in this area.</p>
Ensure future studies are fit for purpose	<p>Swim England recognises the importance of evaluation and while this is always built into its programmes, resources can sometimes mean the evaluation is not as robust as recommended in the report.</p> <p>Swim England is keen to continue to work with academics to ensure future interventions are robustly evaluated so that learning can be extracted and shared with the field.</p>

Swim England health and wellbeing programmes

A number of programmes are already being delivered by Swim England that are aimed at improving the swimming skills of the population, and targeting people at risk of and already living with health conditions. Below are examples of these and future ideas that are currently being developed.

Dementia Friendly Swimming Project

Overview of programme:	<p>Swim England has been supported by the Department of Health's Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund to develop and implement the Dementia Friendly Swimming Project. The Project aims to stimulate greater use of swimming pools by people living with dementia, and their carers, by transforming the culture and practice to make swimming services and the swimming environment more appealing, fit for purpose and customer centric. The programme has three key elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Training for all pool staff to understand the needs of people with dementia (designed in conjunction with Alzheimer's Society).2. An audit of the leisure centre, including environmental changes, to ensure it is dementia friendly.3. Implementation of swim sessions for people with dementia and their carers. <p>The project launched in 2015 and is due to run until October 2017, which is when the outcomes of the evaluation will be shared with partners.</p>
Next steps:	Continue to use the learnings to change the culture of the pools. Sharing best practice across the industry and using the model to develop similar interventions.
Key stats:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ 557 staff undertaken Dementia Friendly training♦ Dementia Friendly Swimming sessions are operating in 50 sites.

GP Referral Project

Overview of programme:	<p>Research conducted by the Swim England Insight team in May 2016 highlighted the need for an aquatics based GP Referral offer. The research found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Health organisations believe they would have on average three people each month to refer to aquatics, with some up to 50 individuals.♦ If there was an option of a self-referral into aquatics, 92 per cent of health professionals would recommend it to their patients.♦ Leisure sites believe there is a demand for aquatic exercise referral - some already offer general swim or aquafit classes as part of a GP referral membership.♦ 84 per cent of leisure sites think there is demand for an aquatic element/bolt on training to the current GP referral course. <p>As a result, Swim England is working with the Institute of Swimming to pilot an aquatic exercise qualification for GP referral instructors, Aquatic Activity for Health. The training will be available across England early in 2018. Evaluation of the programme will focus on the impact of a skilled workforce on the number of exercise referral programmes delivering aquatic opportunities and how this impacts on adherence to physical activity programmes.</p>
Next steps:	Rolling out the Aquatic Activity for Health qualification from 2018 and working with operators to fully understand the benefits of incorporating the aquatic offer within GP referral schemes.
Key stats:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ By the end of 2017, at least 70 people will have undertaken GP Referral training as part of the pilots.

Swim England inclusion and primary prevention projects

In addition to the following inclusion and primary prevention projects, Swim England focuses on ensuring all children and young people have the opportunity to learn vital swimming and water safety skills at primary school and through private swimming lessons. Future work will look at understanding the needs of children with, or at risk of, long term conditions.

Overview of programme:	<p>This project taught 225 participants across five boroughs surrounding the London Aquatics Centre (Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest) to learn how to swim. There was a key emphasis on reflecting the diversity of the local demographic composition. Training was offered for those who wanted to go on to volunteer or teach. The programme saw an increase in physical activity participation and all participants agreed that the sessions helped them to improve their swim ability.</p> <p>Prior to the sessions, only 24 per cent of the participants were able to swim one width, which increased to 81 per cent by the end of each block of lessons. 24 per cent were able to swim at least eight lengths in one go by the end of their block of sessions. The sessions inspired some to consider a career in swimming: 20 new Level 1 swimming teachers, 16 new Level 2 swimming teachers and six new NPLQ lifeguards qualified as a part of this project. Some of those who learnt to swim in block 1, went on to deliver the teaching for some of the locations in block 3.</p>
Next steps:	<p>The learning from the programme led to the development of the Adult Social Swimming project, a national project aiming to drive change across the country in terms of who is delivering swimming so as to better reflect the local community. This saw an additional 60 adults trained in three areas outside of London and the project will now be rolled-out further.</p> <p>Swim England also released a new adult learn to swim programme based on a number of principles from the Swim London project which is currently being rolled out across the country.</p>
Key stats:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ 225 adults from BAME communities in London taught how to swim through a new social swimming model. ♦ 20 new Level 1 swimming teachers. ♦ 76 new Level 2 swimming teachers. ♦ Six new NPLQ lifeguards qualified.

Let's Go Swimming

Overview of programme:	<p>This programme aims to deliver an increase in disability swimming participation. The focus is to support pool providers to be as inclusive and accessible as possible by providing them with the skills and the tools to be able to encourage everyone in their local community to use their facilities. Swim England has developed a suite of resources including a disability swimming toolkit, suite of symbols to promote accessibility, advice on embedding inclusion training into best practice and best practice case studies.</p>
Next steps:	<p>Swim England has been working in partnership with the English Federation for Disability Sport (EFDS) to develop a new accessibility criteria for QUEST, and supporting them in the process of upgrading its facility design guidance. Swim England is also developing a more cohesive learn to swim pathway and is exploring new disability completion opportunities.</p>

Swim England Health and Wellbeing Model

Swim England is committed to developing a new Health and Wellbeing Model to help support people with, or at risk of, long term conditions to access aquatic activity.

Swim England has collated a lot of intelligence from the delivery of its programmes and has invested in research to understand the needs of various populations. In 2015 we undertook insight work to:

- ♦ learn about the behaviours and habits of those already participating in swimming
- ♦ explore the barriers to weekly participation
- ♦ understand what affects how often people take part in the different classes
- ♦ understand how people would prefer to access swimming/aquatic opportunities.

The research identified key behavioural challenges as laid out in Table 4.

Table 4:
Behavioural challenges

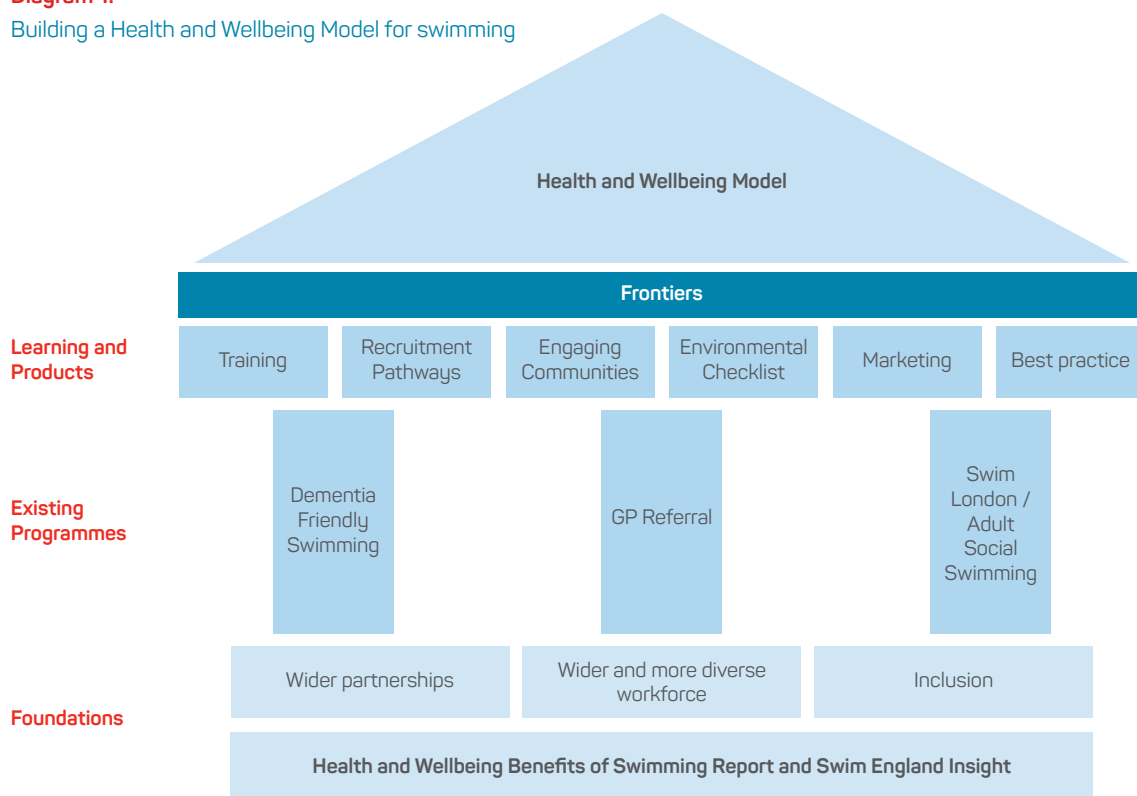
1.	Build confidence and swimming ability
2.	Broaden relevance and appeal
3.	Talk about the benefits of swimming
4.	Priming people to swim
5.	Strengthen the 'swimming habit'
6.	Create better customer engagement through proactive staff

Following on from the identification of these challenges, Swim England went on to develop the Three Frontiers Framework to support the growth of swimming. This articulated what is needed to create the best possible customer experience and attract people into swimming across the whole population²².

Swim England will build upon the work already carried out to develop a Health and Wellbeing Model that shows what needs to be done across the frontiers to support both the inactive and people with long term conditions to become more active through swimming. The Model will:

- ♦ build upon learning from current projects
- ♦ incorporate tools and training to support swim operators and other partners to market and create inclusive environments
- ♦ create recruitment strategies/physical activity pathways such as exercise referral
- ♦ create compelling and appealing opportunities.

Diagram 1:
Building a Health and Wellbeing Model for swimming



Swim England has already shared this approach with partners, all of whom are supportive as it broadens the market for swimming, makes it more inclusive and creates an opportunity for more sustainable delivery.

To be able to undertake this work rapidly, and to ensure it is properly evaluated, Swim England will look to strengthen and widen its partnerships with operators, health bodies, medical charities, housing associations, County Sport Partnerships and other groups to help co-create the Model with target groups, develop effective recruitment strategies and support delivery. There is also a commitment to speak to partners who may be able to provide resources to support this work going forward.

To ensure the Model is fully evaluated, Swim England will work to understand the Model's impact on recruitment and adherence to physical activity participation. There is also a recognition that the Model will only be taken up by operators if it is cost effective or can show benefits to wider society that may attract funding. Therefore, Swim England will seek to evaluate outcomes and understand the critical success factors needed to ensure both success and sustainability at scale.

Health and Wellbeing Conference

Swim England is currently seeking resources to support a conference that could bring together academics and practitioners to share the learning from this report and the wider health and physical activity fields.

Swimming and Health Commission

Swim England is keen to continue to retain the Swimming and Health Commission and work with the membership to define its role going forward and its input into the development of future projects.

Summary

The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report has shown the vast potential swimming and aquatic activity has to support the health of the population. This is due to swimming's popularity, accessibility across the lifespan, and the unique properties of water that makes it beneficial to those who may have an injury, long term condition or impairment and struggle to exercise on land.

It is recognised that further robust research is required to fully understand the role swimming plays in the health and wellbeing agenda, and wider community benefits. In the meantime, the report has identified a significant number of ways that swimming positively impacts on the health of the population, including prevention, management and treatment of long term conditions. This is alongside the potential wider benefits to society such as community engagement, reducing social isolation and the development of life skills.

The report provides a good platform to help shape the future direction of Swim England's health and wellbeing work. It also highlights the need to continue to ensure high quality facilities are available that create the right environment and a tailored offer supported by a highly trained, diverse workforce. By doing this, Swim England believes swimming will become a more attractive, safe and effective service to which GPs and other health practitioners will be confident in signposting their patients.

Swim England's vision is of a nation swimming. To achieve this aim, Swim England is keen to work with partners across the physical activity, health and charity sectors who can support the development, implementation and evaluation of the Health and Wellbeing Model.

To find out more information about the work of Swim England please visit swimming.org/swimengland or email health@swimming.org.

Endnotes

- ¹ Swimming Taking the Plunge for a Fitter Lifestyle, Amateur Swimming Association, 2010. Reprinted 2014: www.swimming.org/library/documents/143/download
- ² Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALY) is an expression of a year of near perfect health and can be accumulated by several individuals who gain small amounts each.
- ³ An estimate of the economic value and cost effectiveness of swimming in the community, R.Fordham, 2010. Unpublished work referenced in Swimming Taking the Plunge for a Fitter Lifestyle
- ⁴ Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, released December 2015 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport: www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-a-new-strategy-for-an-active-nation
- ⁵ The full report can be found at swimming.org/swimengland
- ⁶ Every quarter Swim England releases the latest research and insight from the its Swim England Tracker. This shows how many people have engaged with swimming over the previous three months by surveying a nationally representative group of 3,000 11+ year old, helping to create a full picture of swimming in England.
- ⁷ Swim England Tracker research, 2016.
- ⁸ Chapter 2, p28 referencing Lee and Oh 2013.
- ⁹ Chapter 2, p28 referencing Oh and Lee 2015.
- ¹⁰ Chapter 5, p123 referencing Sui Chase et al, 2008.
- ¹¹ Chapter 1, p16 referencing Cox et al, 2008. The study showed that after six months the retention rate for swimming was 76.3% versus 74.3% for walkers; and at twelve months it was 65.8% for swimmers versus 54.6% for walkers.
- ¹² Chapter 5, p124 referencing Windle, Hughes et al, 2010.
- ¹³ Chapter 5, p124 referencing Albinet Abou-Dest, Albinet et al. 2012
- ¹⁴ Swim Safe is an annual initiative run jointly by Swim England and the RNLI to provide children aged between 7-14 with practical skills to help them stay safe outdoors <https://swimsafe.org.uk>
- ¹⁵ Examples include the RLSS Drowning Prevention Week and the RNLI Respect the Water campaign.
- ¹⁶ Chapter 5, p120 referencing Liu Stempski et al, 2015
- ¹⁷ Chapter 2, p30 referencing Esteban-Cornejo et al, 2015
- ¹⁸ Chapter 2, p31 referencing R Jorgensen, 2013
- ¹⁹ Start Active, Stay Active, 2011. www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-a-report-on-physical-activity-from-the-four-home-countrieschief-medical-officers
- ²⁰ The benefits have been drawn from studies listed throughout the report.
- ²¹ Chapter 4, Dr Fiona Moffatt.
- ²² More information on Swim England's Three Frontier model can be accessed via www.swimming.org/swimengland/research-insight

Swimming and Health Commission

The Swimming and Health Commission was established in May 2016 to identify the links between swimming and health. Established by Swim England, it is an independent group made up of representatives from across the swimming and health sector.

Commission chairman:

Professor Ian Cumming OBE, Health Education England

Commission members:

Emma Bould, Alzheimer's Society

Andrew Boyd, Royal College of General Practitioners

Kevin Boyd, British Swimming Medical Committee

Sandra Dodd, PFP Leisure

Dave Fletcher, ASA London Swimming

Professor Richard Fordham, University of East Anglia

Dr Ian Gordon, Swim England

Simon Johnson, Swim England Group Board

Scarlett McNally, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon

Dr Justin Varney, Public Health England



This report has been written in response to the
Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming report
which was commissioned by the Swimming and Health
Commission on behalf of Swim England, June 2017

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