The Future of Building Is Human: What the 2026 Global Wellness Economy Report Reveals

The global wellness real estate market is growing more than four times faster than the construction industry. But the most important story isn't how much we're spending. It's what we're beginning to understand about the places we live.

For decades, residential design has been largely defined by appearance, functionality, construction costs and compliance with building codes. We invest considerable attention in materials, finishes, appliances and architectural details. Yet some of the most influential characteristics of a home remain surprisingly overlooked.

How does the lighting support our vision and daily biological rhythms? What are we breathing indoors? How does noise influence our ability to concentrate, relax or sleep? How do our surroundings affect our emotional responses? And will our homes continue to support us as our physical needs change?

These questions are no longer peripheral to the conversation about good design.
The Global Wellness Institute's (GWI) newly released Global Wellness Economy Monitor 2026 provides compelling evidence that the relationship between our built environments and human well-being is becoming an increasingly important economic and industry consideration.

For WELLbuilt™, a framework developed to integrate human-centred science into residential design and construction, the findings are particularly significant.

A $7.5 Trillion Global Movement

According to the Global Wellness Institute, the global wellness economy reached US$7.5 trillion in 2025, growing 8.9% from the previous year. The organization projects that the market could reach US$10.9 trillion by 2030.
Within this enormous economy, one sector stands out.

Wellness real estate reached US$875.6 billion in 2025, making it the fastest-growing sector of the global wellness economy.

Between 2019 and 2025, wellness real estate expanded at an average annual rate of 23.5%, compared with 5.3% for the overall construction industry.

This represents a substantial shift in investment toward built environments intentionally designed to support human health and well-being.

Despite this rapid growth, wellness real estate represented only about 5.1% of global construction output in 2025.
The implications are significant. Wellness-focused building is expanding rapidly, but it remains a relatively small part of the construction industry.

For homeowners, builders, renovators and design professionals, this raises an important question: **Are we preparing our buildings for the changing expectations of the people who occupy them?**

What Does Wellness Real Estate Actually Mean?

Wellness real estate is not simply a luxury home with a spa-inspired bathroom, an exercise room or an expensive collection of amenities.

The Global Wellness Institute defines the sector around residential and commercial environments that intentionally incorporate elements supporting the holistic health of their occupants and communities.

These considerations can include healthier indoor environments, improved access to nature, opportunities for movement, better accessibility and building characteristics that support physical, mental and social well-being.

Importantly, GWI recognizes that wellness real estate is moving beyond luxury developments into housing that serves a wider range of incomes, ages and living arrangements.

This matters because the fundamentals of a healthier built environment should not depend exclusively on the size of a construction budget.

Many meaningful improvements begin with better decisions, informed specifications and a more comprehensive understanding of how buildings influence the people living inside them.
Five Principles. One Shared Direction.

One of the most striking findings in the 2026 report is how closely GWI's discussion of healthier buildings aligns with the five foundational principles of WELLbuilt.

On pages 58-59, the report addresses indoor environmental quality, human-centred lighting, noise control, neuroaesthetics, access to nature, physical movement and accessibility.

These are not isolated design trends. They are interconnected characteristics of the environments we occupy every day.

1. Lighting: Beyond Illumination
Light allows us to see, but its influence extends beyond visual tasks.

The quantity, distribution, timing and spectral characteristics of light affect visual comfort, visibility and our biological responses to the environment.

GWI specifically recognizes natural daylight and human-centred lighting among the building features associated with rest, sleep and stress reduction.

WELLbuilt approaches lighting as a measurable component of building performance. Rather than starting with the number or appearance of fixtures, the process considers illuminance, beam distribution, glare, colour quality, and the needs of the people using the space.

The question is not simply whether a room has enough lights. It is whether the lighting is appropriate for the activities, occupants and conditions it needs to support.

2. Indoor Air Quality: Understanding What We Cannot See

We spend substantial portions of our lives indoors, yet the quality of the air in our homes is often poorly understood.

GWI identifies clean air, healthier materials and reduced exposure to harmful environmental conditions as important components of wellness real estate.

Indoor air quality can be influenced by outdoor pollution, cooking activities, building materials, moisture, ventilation and filtration.

WELLbuilt begins with understanding actual conditions rather than assuming that a particular product or ventilation strategy will solve every problem.

Measure the environment, identify and control sources of contamination, manage moisture, ventilate appropriately, filter where necessary and verify performance.

You cannot effectively improve a condition you have never investigated.

3. Acoustics: The Overlooked Environmental Stressor

Noise is frequently treated as an inconvenience rather than a building-performance issue.

Yet unwanted sound can interfere with communication, concentration, rest, sleep, and recovery. The acoustic characteristics of a space influence how comfortably we function within it.

GWI includes noise control and soundproofing among the building strategies that can support rest and stress reduction.

WELLbuilt examines sound at its source, along its transmission pathways and at the point where it affects occupants.

This means considering mechanical equipment, plumbing, room acoustics, sound transmission and the different acoustic needs of individual spaces.

A beautiful room that constantly exposes its occupants to distracting or intrusive noise may not be performing as well as it should.

4. Neuroaesthetics & Biophilia: How Environments Influence Our Responses

The relationship between architecture and human experience extends well beyond personal decorating preferences.

Neuroaesthetics examines how aesthetic experiences relate to perception, emotion and neural processing. Biophilic design explores our relationships with natural environments and the characteristics of nature incorporated into built spaces.

The GWI report explicitly recognizes both neuroaesthetics and access to nature in its discussion of mental and emotional wellness.

WELLbuilt examines how visual complexity, coherence, colour, pattern, natural elements, spatial characteristics and individual experiences can influence our responses to a space.

These responses are not identical for everyone. Personal history, sensory sensitivity, context and individual preferences matter.

The objective is not to prescribe one universal aesthetic. It is to make more informed decisions about the sensory environments we create.

5. Movement & Accessibility: Designing for Real Life

Buildings influence how we move through daily life.

Circulation, floor transitions, reach distances, storage locations, physical clearances and accessibility features can either support or complicate ordinary activities.

GWI recognizes that healthier environments should encourage movement while improving mobility, safety and accessibility for people of different ages and abilities.

WELLbuilt applies these considerations to the practical details of residential design, including kitchens, bathrooms, circulation routes and adaptable living environments.

A home should not become unnecessarily difficult to navigate simply because its occupants grow older or their physical abilities change.

Good design anticipates human needs throughout all stages of life, rather than forcing people to continually adapt to avoidable limitations.

What This Means for Builders and Design Professionals

The construction industry has become increasingly sophisticated in its understanding of energy efficiency, building envelopes, materials and construction methods.

Human performance deserves comparable attention.

The GWI figures indicate that wellness-oriented real estate is expanding considerably faster than construction overall. This does not mean every homeowner is demanding wellness features or that every project will command a price premium.

It does, however, give builders and designers a strong reason to understand the emerging market and evaluate how healthier building strategies can become part of their professional services.

For builders, this can mean better-informed specifications, more meaningful conversations with clients and opportunities to differentiate projects through measurable characteristics rather than aesthetics alone.

For designers, it means expanding the criteria used to evaluate successful spaces.

And for homeowners, it creates an opportunity to ask better questions before investing in renovations or new construction.

From Industry Research to Practical Implementation

The Global Wellness Institute provides important economic research demonstrating the growing relevance of wellness within the built environment.

Scientific research, building standards and measurable performance criteria provide another essential layer: understanding how particular environmental conditions can affect human experience and what design strategies may improve them.

WELLbuilt brings these considerations together through five interconnected principles and translates them into practical guidance for homeowners, builders and design professionals.

It is not another building certification or a promise that a particular design will prevent illness.
It is a structured approach to making better-informed decisions about the environments we create.

Because a home should do more than look beautiful, meet minimum requirements and accommodate our belongings.

It should support the people living in it.

The Future of Building Is Human

The 2026 Global Wellness Economy Monitor is a powerful indication that wellness is becoming an increasingly important consideration in global investment and development.

The challenge now is to move beyond the language of wellness and into the measurable details of building performance.

Better lighting. Cleaner air. More comfortable acoustic environments. Thoughtful sensory design. Safer and more accessible spaces.

These are not necessarily extravagant additions. They are considerations that deserve a place in the design process from the beginning.

WELLbuilt™ — Human Science. Built In.

Explore WELLbuilt™

Discover how the five WELLbuilt principles can inform your next renovation, new home or building project. For homeowners: Start with the complimentary WELLbuilt Home Check to explore 25 considerations that may influence how your home supports everyday life.

For builders and design professionals: Explore the WELLbuilt framework and architectural lighting design services to understand how human-centred performance strategies can be integrated into your projects.

Research and References
Johnston, K. (2026). Global Wellness Economy Monitor 2026. Global Wellness Institute.
Key sections referenced:

- Executive Summary, pp. vi–vii: Global wellness economy and sector growth.
- Chapter 2, pp. 20–22: Wellness real estate trends, growth drivers and preventive approaches.
- Chapter 3, pp. 51–59: Wellness real estate market data, definitions and physical and mental wellness considerations.

Read the original Global Wellness Institute report

Market figures are reported in US dollars. Historical figures refer to 2025 or earlier; 2030 estimates are projections. GWI's research is independent of WELLbuilt, and the alignment discussed here does not constitute an endorsement of WELLbuilt by GWI.