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# BLUE MINDS

## SYMPOSIUM



# Introduction

The Blue Minds Symposium was co-hosted by The Wave and the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences (University of Bristol). The event was held at The Wave, Bristol on the 9th of November 2022. The purpose of the symposium was to bring together stakeholders involved with coordinating, delivering and researching programmes that are delivered in “blue space”. The symposium included 1) presentations from researchers and practitioners involved with blue health initiative delivery and evaluation and 2) group based activities to explore current good practices and challenges experienced in the area of blue health practice and research.

## Overview of attendees and presentations

Twenty people attended the event (see Page 7 for more details), with a series of presentations highlighting the work currently ongoing to promote health through blue spaces. These included:

### *Brendon Ferrier & Jamie Marshall (Edinburgh Napier University)*

Brendon and Jamie led the first presentation focusing on the health impacts of surf therapy and the potential avenues for future research and practice. It was highlighted that surfing often provides a physical and emotional safe space and some of the physiological and psychological benefits are now documented. However, there is a need to understand the mechanisms through which surfing benefits different health outcomes. This understanding, coupled with our current knowledge can help to advocate for surf therapy as a useful tool to promote different aspect of health (e.g. physical, mental, social).

### *Abby Richardson & Nick Hounsfield (The Wave)*

Abby and Nick then presented the background of The Wave and its current vision. The focus of The Wave spans across:

- Waves of Growth: Developing an adaptive surfing community.
- Waves of Change: Proactively bringing surfing to more women and BAME communities.
- Waves of Support: Focus on mental health and vulnerable groups particularly affected by the pandemic.

Examples of ongoing initiatives to address each "Wave" were presented, with the importance of working in collaboration highlighted throughout.

Natalie Fox (Groundswell)

Natalie provided results from 2022 and the future vision of Groundswell England. Groundswell England creates safe and supportive blue spaces so communities can build resilience and self-efficacy, and develop safe water literacy. The presentation highlighted the importance of understanding the needs of communities and developing partnerships to deliver effective surf therapy initiatives. The importance of ensuring equity, diversity and inclusivity was also an important feature of Groundswell's work.

Ariane Gerami (University of Bristol)

Results from a recent MSc dissertation assessing the usefulness of digital technology to measure mental health outcomes for a surf program was presented by Ariane. The findings show that a "Virtual Surf Booth" can be a usable and useful tool to collect mental health data within surfing activities. Ariane highlighted that this is a promising tool that can help understand the mechanisms through which surfing impacts mental health, however further research is needed to assess its use with wider populations.

Sam Davis & Jamie Mallows (SURFWELL)

Sam and Jamie concluded the presentations, providing us with the history and programme impact of SURFWELL. SURFWELL takes a structured approach with surfing to achieve a therapeutic benefit, with focus on police officers and emergency service staff. They highlighted the importance of generating evidence to gain support from relevant partners to deliver the programme and spoke about the positive impact SURFWELL has had for police officers.



# Current good practice & challenges

The event included a collection of group activities that asked attendees to reflect on the current good practices and challenges experienced with their work around blue spaces for health. Below are the outcomes of these activities that can inform future work in this area.

## Current good practice

The following areas were identified as current good practice or successes within the area of blue health research and practice.

### Open to Collaboration

A prominent theme from this activity was the willingness of organisations, both practice and research-based to collaborate. This includes the sharing of expertise and knowledge in order to generate collective impact. There is also an appetite to establish sustainable partnerships to effectively implement effective blue health initiatives.

### Evidence is reported

Practice and research-based evidence are continually reported which helps to hear the “success stories” within this field of work. This helps to generate a strong evidence base for the impact blue spaces can have on various health outcomes. Additionally it helps those involved with delivery of initiatives see that they are genuinely making a difference in people’s lives. This can continue to support the value of embedding nature-based therapies into ongoing healthcare practice.

### Resources are already available

Accessible blue space, training and people with experience working in blue health are available. It was highlighted that people are creative with how they implement interventions (i.e. in collaboration with communities and organisations) and measure the impacts.

### Emphasis on Surfing for All

The benefits of nature, including blue spaces, for all populations is increasingly being recognised. The focus on building safe and inclusive spaces to allow all populations to engage with blue space was seen as a current good practice. This is being demonstrated through the delivery of initiatives that engage a wide range of population groups.

## **Current challenges**

The following areas were identified as the current challenges related to the area of blue health research and practice.

### *Stigma and awareness of surfing and water*

Different types of stigma were highlighted as creating challenges for blue health, especially surfing initiatives. This includes the stigma around the “type” of population who engage in surfing and a need to make surfing more inclusive and accessible for those who don’t know how to surf, swim or have a fear of water. There is also a need to accept the stigma that surfing is “just fun” but also highlight the benefits of surfing and engagement with blue space. From a research perspective, there is a need to address the stigma that you must be a “surfer” to be involved in collaborative research projects.

### *Available Resources*

Lack of resources were seen as a challenge for progressing this area of work. These include a lack of sustainable funding, time and capacity to enable the delivery and evaluation of blue health initiatives. Furthermore, the funding that is offered is often restrictive leading to further challenges with delivering blue health initiatives. Finally, there is a lack of support for practitioners when working around mental wellbeing (e.g. surf coaches need mental health training).

### *Lack of working collectively*

Despite the willingness to work in collaboration, there is still a lack of it happening. There is a need to build connections between research and practice, to avoid wasting resources and effort that comes from working in silos. Increased collaboration can also help the sharing of knowledge, outcomes and potential partnerships, leading to the generation of more valuable evidence. Additionally, there is a need to work in collaboration with members of the community to help create safe and accessible blue spaces.

### *Generating and communicating evidence*

There is a need to address the evidence gaps around mechanisms for the impact of blue health. While momentum around blue spaces are good, this must be underpinned by evidenced-based approaches. However, challenges with the time required to generate evidence which addresses these gaps were noted. Once generated, the evidence needs to be communicated wider than the research community, something that could be made possible through greater collaboration.

## Suggested strategies for future success

The following areas were identified as ways to overcome challenges and progress the area of blue health.



### Identify collaborations and partnerships

Opportunities to enable increased collaboration across and within research and practice are needed. Identifying or hosting conferences and meetings, such as the Blue Minds Symposium, were seen as one mechanism to support this. Using these collaborations to conduct scoping work, helping identify and prioritise current evidence gaps would be a fantastic initial step. From a surfing perspective, there is a need to work in partnership with brands to improve the image around the inclusivity of surfing.

### Clear communication strategy

Creation of a communication strategy to 1) define terminology around “blue health” for different populations, 2) highlight the current evidence and good practice within blue health. so that it is understandable and 3) identify ways to communicate evidence outside of the research community. Such a strategy can help to facilitate the cultural shifts around the acceptance of engagement with blue spaces to promote positive health outcomes (Surf therapy on the UK registry).

### Identify valid and usable measurement tools to generate useful data

Through collaboration, create a standardised set of valid and reliable tools to help researchers and practitioners collect data which can be comparable across initiatives. Any set of tools need to be usable in practice with different populations, adaptable for different outcomes and collect data that is meaningful to gain future support.

# Acknowledgements

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## List of attendees

Below you can find a list of attendees and their represented organisations.

- Abby Richardson, The Wave
- Ariane Gerami, University of Bristol
- Brendon Ferrier, Edinburgh Napier University
- Charlie Foster, University of Bristol
- Charlie Hartley-Hodge, ActiveBeing
- Erin Dooley, University of Bristol
- James Mallows, SURFWELL
- Jamie Marshall, Edinburgh Napier University
- Joey Murphy, University of Bristol
- Josh Dickson, Resurface
- Katie Gibbs, Swansea University
- Lewis Youngson, University of Bath
- Maggy Blagrove, Open Minds Active
- Natalie Fox, Groundswell
- Nick Hounsfeld, The Wave
- Sam Davies, SURFWELL
- Sydney Charitos , University of Bristol
- Tim Trythall, Wave Project
- Tirion Jenkins, Cardiff University
- Yvette Curtis, Wave Wahines

