

Home » MEETING AND EVENT INDUSTRY NEWS » Preventive Wellness Revolution: ITB Berlin Experts Say One Year of Prevention Beats Seven Years of Therapy

Preventive Wellness Revolution: ITB Berlin Experts Say One Year of Prevention Beats Seven Years of Therapy

Published on March 4, 2026

By: **Tuhin Sarkar**



Image generated with Ai

Preventive Wellness Revolution: ITB Berlin Experts Say One Year of Prevention Beats Seven Years of Therapy

Preventive healthcare and medically guided wellness therapies emerged as a central topic at ITB Berlin 2026, where tourism and health industry leaders called for a major shift in how societies approach longevity and disease prevention. Experts speaking at the Medical & Health Tourism Pavilion argued that investing in early preventive care could dramatically reduce long-term medical costs and improve overall quality of life.

Image generated with Ai

The debate was sparked by Siyka Katsarova, president of the Bulgarian Association of Health Resorts and Spa Tourism Providers, who highlighted a striking conclusion from current research trends: one year of preventive care can save the equivalent cost of seven years of medical treatment. According to Katsarova, this calculation demonstrates why governments and health systems must rethink the role of medically indicated wellness therapies within national health strategies.

The conversation reflects a growing recognition that tourism, health policy and preventive medicine are becoming increasingly interconnected. As populations age and chronic illnesses rise worldwide, health resorts, spa destinations and wellness retreats are positioning themselves not merely as leisure attractions but as essential pillars of preventive healthcare.

Post-Pandemic Surge in Health Resort Demand

Katsarova noted that demand for health resorts surged after the COVID-19 pandemic, as people sought environments that offered both physical recovery and mental renewal. The appeal of clean air, nature-based therapies and holistic wellness programs became particularly evident during the recovery phase of global travel.

Advertisement

Health resorts, traditionally known for thermal waters, mineral treatments and therapeutic landscapes, experienced renewed attention as travellers prioritised wellbeing. According to Katsarova, the pandemic shifted public perception of wellness tourism from luxury indulgence to preventive necessity.

She emphasised that natural healing methods should receive greater recognition in healthcare systems because they often address health challenges through a holistic framework. Unlike pharmaceutical treatments that target specific symptoms, wellness therapies typically combine physical activity, mental relaxation, environmental exposure and nutrition-based approaches.

Advertisement



Spendi meno. Cresci di più.

Risparmia sul terminale POS e investi sul tuo business con myPOS Go 2, ora a un prezzo...

Sponsored | Mypos IT

Non è uno scherzo! Questa tendenza è meglio del Botox? 1 sola applicazione riduce le rughe!

Sponsored | femme-divine.it

Advertisement

This multidimensional model, she argued, can strengthen resilience before illness develops.

Prevention Still Hard to Market

Despite its growing relevance, prevention remains one of the most difficult concepts to market within both tourism and healthcare industries. Martina Lalli, vice president of Italy's thermal springs association Federterme, highlighted the economic paradox facing spa towns, wellness hotels and medical resorts.

While preventive therapies can reduce long-term healthcare costs, their benefits are often gradual and difficult to quantify. Patients tend to seek treatment after illness occurs, rather than investing in preventative routines earlier in life.

Lalli explained that longevity is influenced by several key factors including genetics, mental wellbeing, fitness levels and access to preventive healthcare structures. Wellness programs that combine these elements can significantly improve life expectancy and quality of life, yet convincing consumers to invest in prevention remains a challenge.

She suggested that policymakers must integrate wellness and preventive care into broader public health strategies, particularly within the European Union's future health framework.

Engaging Younger Generations

Frank Halmos, CEO of the Ensana hotel group, argued that preventive wellness must reach younger audiences if it is to achieve meaningful impact. According to Halmos, many wellness resorts traditionally attract older visitors seeking rehabilitation or relief from chronic conditions.

However, longevity strategies are far more effective when individuals begin healthy routines earlier in life. Halmos acknowledged that wellness programs can still benefit older clients but stressed that prevention works best when adopted long before health problems develop.

He illustrated this point by reflecting on the emotional complexity of treating older patients seeking to extend their lifespan. While therapies can provide meaningful relief, he believes the greater opportunity lies in encouraging healthier habits from the beginning of adulthood.

Nevertheless, Halmos emphasised that holistic therapies can produce remarkable outcomes even later in life. In some cases, he said, older visitors leave wellness programs with significant improvements in mobility and physical strength.

Nature as a Therapeutic Environment

A recurring theme during the panel discussion was the healing potential of natural environments. Lalli highlighted the role of outdoor experiences in supporting

mental health, particularly in an era when burnout and stress-related conditions are increasing globally.

Halmos offered a striking example from a wellness destination in Transylvania, where forest environments play a central role in therapeutic programs. Guests at the property are immersed in nature, surrounded by dense woodland and wildlife, including local bear populations.

Despite the remote setting, Halmos explained that the forest environment provides a calming psychological effect that can significantly reduce stress and anxiety. This “forest therapy” concept aligns with broader research showing that exposure to nature can lower cortisol levels, improve mood and support mental recovery.

Such experiences, he argued, illustrate why wellness tourism should be integrated into healthcare planning rather than treated as a purely recreational sector.

Human Interaction Remains Essential

While technology is transforming many industries, Halmos cautioned against excessive automation within the wellness and hospitality sectors. In his view, human interaction remains a fundamental component of therapeutic care.

Some hospitality operators have begun experimenting with robots in service roles, but Halmos argued that emotional connection and personalised attention are essential elements of healing environments. Guests seeking wellness therapies often require empathy, guidance and human communication.

Mental health recovery, in particular, relies heavily on trust and interpersonal engagement. Removing human interaction from wellness experiences could undermine the very benefits these environments are designed to provide.

Medical Wellness Gains Strategic Importance

The panel concluded with a shared consensus: medical wellness is becoming a critical pillar of modern healthcare systems. As governments struggle to manage rising healthcare costs and ageing populations, prevention may offer one of the most effective long-term solutions.

Experts at ITB Berlin suggested that health resorts, spa towns and wellness tourism destinations could play a much larger role in national health strategies if preventive care receives greater institutional support.

In practical terms, this could involve stronger cooperation between tourism providers, healthcare institutions and public policymakers. Subsidised preventive wellness programs, insurance coverage for therapeutic stays and medical referrals to wellness resorts are among the potential strategies discussed.

Tourism and Healthcare Converge

The discussion at ITB Berlin 2026 highlights a broader transformation within the travel industry. Wellness tourism is no longer confined to luxury spas or leisure retreats; it is evolving into a structured healthcare segment with measurable economic and social impact.

As awareness of preventive medicine grows, the boundaries between tourism, medicine and public health policy are becoming increasingly blurred.

If policymakers adopt the recommendations outlined at ITB Berlin, wellness tourism could soon become a cornerstone of healthcare strategies designed to promote longevity, reduce healthcare costs and improve quality of life across Europe and beyond.

For now, the message from industry leaders is clear: prevention may not always be easy to sell, but its long-term value is undeniable.