

Pool Planning Checklists for Aquatic Therapy

From Building a Therapy Pool and Renting a Pool for Therapy on Aquatic Therapy University
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EXPERT OPINION These checklists are practical guidance from ATU Educational Services, LLC, not rated as evidence, and not legal, financial, insurance, engineering, reimbursement or medical advice. The sourced facts behind them, with references, are on the two web pages:
<https://www.aquatictherapyuniversity.com/building-a-therapy-pool> and
<https://www.aquatictherapyuniversity.com/renting-a-pool-for-therapy>.

1. Build or rent decision checklist

Check each statement that is true for you. There is no score: mostly the first group suggests renting first; mostly the second suggests building may be worth a closer look.

Signs that renting fits now

- ☐ We have not yet measured demand from our referral sources.
- ☐ A pool our patients can reach has hours we could book.
- ☐ We cannot yet fund both building a pool and running it every year.
- ☐ We want to test which programs fill before we commit space and money.
- ☐ A pool owner is willing to put our hours and our part of the pool in writing.

Signs that building may fit

- ☐ Our referral sources name more patients than rented hours could serve.
- ☐ No pool nearby meets our patients' needs for water temperature, depth or access.
- ☐ We have local written estimates for building the pool and for running it each open hour.
- ☐ Community programs or partners could use the pool in the hours therapy does not.
- ☐ The people who decide have approved a written case with measures for year one.
- ☐ We have, or can hire, staff trained in aquatic therapy and in pool operations.

2. Before you rent: questions to ask the pool owner

Check each question once you have a clear answer, ideally in writing.

The water

- ☐ What temperature is the water kept at, and can it be held steady during our hours?
- ☐ What depths are available, and is there a shallow area for standing work?
- ☐ Who tests the water, how often, and can we see the latest health inspection results?

Hours and space

- ☐ Which days, hours and part of the pool can we have, and will that use be only for our patients?
- ☐ Will the public or other groups share the deck or the water during our hours?
- ☐ Where can we store equipment, and is there space on deck for transfers?

Access

- ☐ Is there a working lift or ramp, who maintains it, and is it poolside during our hours?
- ☐ Is the route from parking to changing room to deck accessible?
- ☐ Is there a private accessible changing room with a bench and shower?

Safety

- ☐ Is a lifeguard on duty during our hours? If not, what rescue-trained staff do you require us to provide?
- ☐ Where are the automated external defibrillator, first aid kit and phone, and what is your emergency plan?
- ☐ How will you tell us about closures, and how are contamination closures handled?

Money and paperwork

- ☐ What insurance do you require from us, and what do you carry?
- ☐ What is the rate, how is it billed, and what notice is needed to cancel, renew or change price?
- ☐ Will you sign a written agreement that names our part of the pool and our times?

3. Site visit checklist

Visit at the time of day you would treat.

- ☐ We visited at the time of day we would treat.
- ☐ We asked about the water temperature on the day and how much it varies.
- ☐ We tested the lift or ramp and walked the route from parking to deck.
- ☐ We saw the changing rooms, including a private accessible room.
- ☐ We checked the latest health inspection results and saw that no chemicals were left out.
- ☐ We noticed the air: a strong “chlorine” smell is worth asking about.
- ☐ We found storage for equipment and space on deck for transfers.

4. Rental agreement checklist

Have your attorney and insurer review the agreement before you sign. For Medicare rules, see Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, chapter 15, section 220 C.

- ☐ Space and hours: which part of the pool, which days and times, and that use during those times is only for our patients.
- ☐ For Medicare patients, the agreement describes the part of the pool we use exclusively and the times that exclusive use applies, and we can produce it on request.
- ☐ Insurance: who carries general and professional liability insurance, the limits required and certificates of insurance.
- ☐ Liability and indemnity: who is responsible for what, reviewed by our attorney.
- ☐ Lifeguard rules: whether a lifeguard is on duty and, if not, who provides rescue-trained staff.
- ☐ Emergency plan: who calls 911, where the automated external defibrillator and first aid kit are, and how a patient is removed from the water.
- ☐ Closures and cleaning: who tests the water and cleans changing areas, how we hear about closures and how missed sessions are handled.
- ☐ Fees and term: rate, billing, cancellation notice, renewal and price changes.

5. Pool design checklist

Use this with your design team: temperature, depth, entry and ADA access, codes, staffing and scheduling.

Program

- ☐ We have written down who we will serve, which programs we will run and how many hours a week the water will be used.

Water temperature

- ☐ We set water temperature targets with current professional guidance and our local code, for each program we plan.
- ☐ The heating and air handling can hold those temperatures steady, and we know what that costs.
- ☐ Air temperature and humidity are part of the design, not only the water.

Depth

- ☐ The depths fit our programs: shallow water for standing and gait work, and deeper water if we need it.
- ☐ We have weighed a range of depths, or an adjustable floor, against our budget.

Entry and ADA access

- ☐ Pool entry meets the 2010 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for our pool size.
- ☐ We plan more entry options than the minimum, such as stairs with rails, a ramp or a lift, for the patients we expect.
- ☐ The route from parking to changing room to deck is accessible.
- ☐ Changing rooms are private and accessible, with space for a wheelchair and a helper.

Air quality, codes and review

- ☐ The air handling brings in enough fresh air for an indoor pool.
- ☐ We know which state or local pool code applies, and we have asked the health department about plan review.
- ☐ A licensed aquatic designer or engineer with therapy-pool experience is involved early.

Staffing

- ☐ We know who will treat, who will supervise and who is rescue-trained for every open hour.
- ☐ A trained pool operator will test and run the water.

Scheduling

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- ☐ We have a draft weekly schedule with therapy blocks and time between sessions for transfers and changing.
 - ☐ Community programs or partners can fill the quieter hours.
 - ☐ There is storage for equipment, and transfer space on deck.
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6. Cost questions worksheet

Write your answers, and check each one off when you have a written source. Use local written estimates.

- ☐ What does one open hour cost: staff, chemicals, energy for water and air, dehumidification, maintenance, insurance, permits and inspections?

- ☐ How many hours a week must be filled to cover that cost?

- ☐ Which payers cover aquatic therapy for our patients, and under what conditions?

- ☐ Which community programs or partners could use, share or fund the pool when therapy does not?

- ☐ What one-time costs have qualified professionals quoted in writing?

- ☐ What would it cost to rent pool time for the same hours instead?

- ☐ What will we measure in year one, and what would make us change course?

7. Staffing and training readiness check

Each unchecked item is a gap to close before the first patient.

- ☐ Each clinician who will treat in the water has aquatic therapy training, not only land-based training.
- ☐ Supervision of assistants in the pool follows our state practice act and our payers' rules.
- ☐ Besides the treating clinician, at least one other person trained in the evacuation procedure and basic life support can respond during every session.
- ☐ We have a written emergency and evacuation plan, and staff have practiced it, including new staff.
- ☐ Every patient is screened before entering the water, including water and air temperature and any precautions or contraindications.
- ☐ Our documentation shows why each patient needs skilled care in the water.
- ☐ We know who keeps the water safe: a trained pool operator for our own pool, or the owner's operator for a rented pool.
- ☐ We have a plan for staff absences, so sessions are not run short of trained people.

8. Program launch plan

Work through the steps in order and set your own dates.

1. Decide

- ☐ Ask referral sources which patients they cannot place now, and write down their answers.
- ☐ Pick the patient groups and programs you will start with.
- ☐ Choose two or three matching research reviews, limits included, to share with decision makers.
- ☐ Decide whether to rent pool time first or plan a pool of your own.

2. Secure the water

- ☐ Visit candidate pools at the times you would treat, or start plan review and design for your own pool.
- ☐ Sign a written agreement, or get written estimates and approvals for building.
- ☐ Confirm insurance, payer rules and any Medicare requirements in writing.

3. Prepare the team

- ☐ Train each treating clinician in aquatic therapy.

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- ☐ Write and practice the emergency and evacuation plan with everyone who will be on deck.
 - ☐ Set up screening forms and documentation templates.
 - ☐ Book regular time blocks, with room for transfers and changing.
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4. Open

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- ☐ Tell referral sources the start date, the patients you can take and how to refer.
 - ☐ Start with a schedule you can staff every week.
 - ☐ Track referrals, sessions held, cancellations and hours used.
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5. Review

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- ☐ Compare the year's results with the measures you set at the start.
 - ☐ Decide whether to add hours, add programs, change pools or plan a pool of your own.
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Business consulting for aquatic therapy programs

Aquatic Therapy University offers business consulting for aquatic programs: program business planning, deciding whether to build or rent, budgeting and cost questions, Medicare and billing setup, staffing and training plans, and program launch. We do not design or build pools, act as a pool designer or engineer, or find or broker pools; for pool design, work with a licensed aquatic designer or engineer.

To ask about consulting or training your team: call 865-204-0618 • email info@swimatu.com • Contact Us form: <https://www.aquatictherapyuniversity.com/custom-courses> • Courses: <https://www.aquatictherapyuniversity.com/aquatic-therapy-courses-approved-for-continuing-education-units>

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