

How Grassroots Organizing for Mental Health Can Capture Political Potential and Make Well-Being the Goal of Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a mental health crisis in America. Millions are suffering from illness, while many others suffer from meaninglessness and low well-being. Due to big trends like automation, financial insecurity, and social media, this crisis will worsen. We have a moral obligation to act. To do this, we must make well-being the goal of government.

We have the power to make this change because mental health is having a moment. COVID-19 has helped reduce the mental health stigma. As a result, millions have gained mental health literacy and are now seeing well-being (not happiness) as their ultimate pursuit in life. This broadening mental health coalition has created a tremendous political opportunity to do good. But the mental health establishment is not capturing this political potential.

There is a lack of political leadership for mental health advocacy. This is because the field has not presented an ideology that motivates activists. Advocates want a vision that includes well-being, innovates on treatment, and changes things systemically. Second, there is not a dedicated and accessible grassroots organizing hub. This general lack of organizing poses an existential threat to the authority and influence of the mental health establishment. If they do not fulfill people's ideological desires, "new-age" leaders will take over. The solution to this problem is to capitalize on the COVID-19 moment by producing an exciting ideological vision. This will catalyze an activist movement that can be guided into political action with a grassroots organizing hub.

The Good Life Movement (GLM) aims to create this solution. The GLM will recruit industry authors then facilitate the drafting of a policy vision. GLM will then help to market this vision, leveraging the 2024 election cycle to spread the idea into the mainstream. The new vision will reduce the stigma, make mental health a relevant political niche, help the field gain representation, and produce leverage for policy negotiations on Capitol Hill.

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Andrew Frawley. I'm a movement builder working to help end our mental health crisis. Like many, mental health is personal to me. My *conscious* journey began in 2016 while living in San Francisco. I was fresh out of school and had just landed my dream job. To my surprise, I woke up terribly sad and fell into a depression.

During that time, I obsessed over understanding my struggles. I read into every corner of mental health literature, and it opened my eyes to the struggles of others. I came to see how clearly our system disregards what is most important. That year, I committed myself to helping to create a social system that prioritized our mental health and well-being.

This commitment led me to a meeting with Andrew Yang in 2017. He was preparing the founding team for his presidential campaign and found me interesting. He invited me to join. Yang's UBI struck me as one of the best shots we had to improve society's mental health, so I dove in.

I joined Yang's campaign for President that fall. I was the second person on our eventual staff of 300 people. I worked as our Director of Marketing. I created the MATH hat, raised nearly \$25MM, directed the #YangGang's online dominance, and grew our social media by 375,000%.

After some necessary time off, I spent all of 2021 mapping out the mental health landscape. I brushed up on my science and spoke to dozens of folks in the field. It became painstakingly clear from the beginning that mental health is in dire need of political leadership. After much due diligence, I committed to building The Good Life Movement, a grassroots organizing firm that can turbocharge the field.

The ultimate goal of this white paper is to recruit you to join my efforts in building the Good Live Movement. I'm pitching you on the huge political opportunity for mental health right in front of us. Then I'm telling you how we can strategically capitalize on it.

When I look at what's stopping the field from passing new laws, I see marketing problems. Messaging and organizing problems, specifically. I believe my world-class perspective on mass movement brings a fresh look.

My mental health knowledge is exceptional for a marketer, but at the end of the day, I'm a marketer. This is why I am humbly recruiting you. I want the experts in the room helping to draw up the policy vision that will be (as you'll see) the key to a catalyzing messaging strategy. I genuinely don't want to author a policy vision. I want the experts to write it, so I can sell it.

The white paper is split up into four sections.

If you are already convinced of one section's thesis, you can skip to the next section. Hyperlinks are included below.

[Part One — The Problem.](#)

A summary of our mental health crisis. How it will worsen. The systemic causes of it all.

[Part Two — The Opportunity.](#)

A discussion of the scope and scale of mental health advocacy in America. Data shows that people are perceiving mental health in a new way. This creates big political opportunity.

[Part Three — Unmet Opportunity.](#)

An argument that there is a lack of political leadership for mental health. This is caused by lacking ideology and organizing. Worse, a lack of leadership poses a long-term existential risk for the field. Lastly, an exploration of the strategies we can leverage to capture the political potential.

[Part Four — The Good Life Movement.](#)

A tight presentation of the new organization, The Good Life Movement. We explore the strategic vision and details that will catalyze an activist movement. How we can train an advocate army and ultimately pass laws. The section closes by discussing filing, income streams, early team and hires, and a timeline for execution.

A disclaimer about language and definitions: in this white paper, I use a definition of well-being that represents the positive end of the mental health continuum. This is in line with the field of positive psychology, the authority on the subject. Throughout the rest of the work, I also use the terms life satisfaction and happiness, which are often wrongly used interchangeably with well-being. In the paper, I make this distinction.

THE PROBLEM: A Mental Health Crisis

“What greater indictment of a system could there be than an epidemic of mental illness?”

George Monbiot

There is a mental health crisis in the United States. [One in five](#) American adults experiences a mental illness annually. Suicide rates are [up 25% since 1999](#) and are now [a top 10 leading cause of death](#) for Americans. Deaths from drug overdoses have now surged to over 100,000 people annually, a [500% increase](#) in the last 20 years. The numbers are so bad that these “Deaths of Despair” are [the attributed cause](#) of America’s declining life expectancy.

Depression is also worsening and is now [10x more common](#) than it was 50 years ago. And these numbers are not because we are paying more attention to mental health — [rising hospital visits](#) due to self-harm indicate a worsening mental state.

At the same time, there is a well-being crisis. [25% of Americans](#) say they do not have a strong sense of meaning in their lives. [67% of Americans](#) are not engaged at work, and [22% of Americans](#) find their jobs meaningless.

[40% of Americans](#) say they are lonely. [49% of Americans](#) have less than three close friends. For those Americans who are free from illness, many feel that they are “just existing” and any hope of flourishing is a long shot.

In a time when our country is richer than ever, why do we not see the same richness in our minds? We’ll explore.

The ugly truth is that our crisis is on the move and worsening with each item below. It is likely this situation may become an era-defining epidemic if we do not intervene.

FIVE MACRO TRENDS THAT WILL WORSEN OUR MENTAL HEALTH

New Technologies Automating Labor

- The automation of labor poses a dramatic challenge to our mental health. Work provides [meaning and community](#), while people who experience prolonged bouts of joblessness see [higher depression and anxiety](#).
- Unfortunately, Bain has stated that [25% of jobs could be automated by 2030](#), and McKinsey has said that up to [30% of jobs will be lost in the same window](#). Automation will decimate entire industries such as administration, sales, food prep, transportation, and production ([48.5% of the U.S. workforce](#)). It will even lurch into white-collar jobs.
- Millions of Americans who have followed the incentives of capitalism by specializing in trades will be left out to dry to no fault of their own. The effects of widespread automation

are documented from factory towns in the early 2000s. [Mental illnesses triple](#), [increases in deaths of despair](#), [8x in murder rates](#), [disability claims double](#), and [increases in political corruption](#). The coming wave of automation could see this localized decimation at a national level.

Wealth Inequality and Financial Insecurity

- A by-product of changing technologies is [increasing wealth inequality](#) and financial insecurity. In recent years, we have seen GDP at all-time highs, [corporate profits increase by 50%](#), and [record growth in productivity](#). Yet, Americans are more financially scarce than they have been for decades.
- The [2020 median income](#) of an American adult is \$35,805. When adjusted for inflation, this is only a 10% growth in income over the last 20 years. [Inflation is 7%](#) this last year alone. As of 2021, [59% of Americans](#) are unable to pay an unexpected expense of \$1,000.
- Instead of going to the American people, the economic gains of our day have mostly consolidated at the top. The top 1% also has [more wealth than the entire middle-class](#) for the first time since the Fed began tracking wealth distribution in 1989.
- Financial insecurity is bad for mental health as it results in psychological entropy. [One study](#) even found financial insecurity to lead to a decrease in functioning IQ of 13 points.

Social Media

- Social media apps are unregulated casinos where the currency to play is attention. Mental health problems are especially acute [among young adults](#), where social media use is [strongly associated](#) with anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Algorithms are designed [using behavioral and cognitive psychology](#) to ensure users stay hooked on the apps. Social media is not all bad, but as the private industry looks to move our social fabric into the metaverse, our leaders must choose boldness in protecting our minds.

Separation From Our Nature

- People work unfulfilling jobs.
 - Workforces have consolidated into a few key meccas of opportunity. Financial pressures have [pushed individuals to leave their native communities](#) in pursuit of the opportunities in a few hyper-competitive cities. These cities like New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles are [dominating the flows of human capital](#). As a result, millions of people are working demanding jobs with little leverage against their employers. Employees are often exploited and overworked in jobs they don't like. In 2021, Gallup found that [67% of the U.S. workforce](#) is not engaged or actively disengaged at the workplace. Another study found that [22% of the workforce](#) believe their job is meaningless.
- Americans are separated from community.
 - As of August 2021, in the supposed era of remote work, [86.6% of working Americans](#) still worked in person. Long work hours and commutes in a new city

have likely contributed to the fact that [49% of Americans](#) have less than three close friends. Or that [40% of Americans feel lonely](#).

- Americans are separated from the natural world.
 - The majority of Americans spend [less than five hours a week](#) outdoors (nonetheless in nature). Nature deprivation and high screen use are [linked with depression and anxiety](#). Inversely, time in nature has been shown to have a myriad of benefits, such as [improving emotional states](#) and [relieving](#) the intensity of anxiety and depression.
- Increased digitization and financial pressures will worsen our separation from meaningful work, communities, and the natural world. This is bad for our mental health.

Climate Change and Lack of a Hope

- The world is nearly [guaranteed](#) to see a global temperature warming of 1.5°C in the next decade. As a result, we will see [natural disasters of record strength more frequently](#) and over [4 million Americans living in cities at risk of flooding](#). [The downstream effects](#) of global droughts, biodiversity reductions, and migration pose dramatic second and third-degree effects.
- These problems become exponentially more severe if temperatures continue to rise beyond 1.5°C. These disruptions to our environment can [lead to increases](#) in PTSD, anxiety, depression, and trauma.
- Existential threats as a category negatively impact our mental health. Low hope of a secure future is directly linked to [increased rates of suicide](#). Unfortunately, hope is a vanishing resource. According to [a Rasmussen Reports](#) study published in October 2021, only 33% of Americans believe the nation's best days are in the future.

These five trends are not the only macro trends at play, but they represent five powerful ones. We will discuss the stigma around mental health and our lack of health care in another section.

Imagine if we do not intervene in the future illustrated above. We will live in a have or have nots world rife with suicide and mental illness. For this reason, we are morally obliged to intervene in the future we are haphazardly wandering towards. When it comes to systemic intervention, the right question to be asking is why these things are the way they are.

Why are we not enjoying more leisure as robots do more of the work?

Why are we continually being financially squeezed while riches consolidate at the top?

Why do we let algorithms prey on the weaknesses of our minds?

Why do we accept lifestyles so incongruent with our needs for nature and connection?

Why are we struggling so gravely to unite and combat climate change?

THE SYSTEM SIDELINING OUR WELL-BEING

The fundamental problem is that our system does not prioritize our mental health and well-being directly. Our system has evolved to the belief that money is a satisfactory proxy to “the good life,” or as is most commonly measured, our life satisfaction. Unfortunately, research shows that this assumption is only half true and hotly contested.

The debate on the life satisfaction vs. income argument has had years of in-fighting, so it's easy to be misled. For example, it is fairly clear that [increases in GDP per capita do result in an increase in life satisfaction](#). But then, [the Easterlin Paradox](#) shows that several countries like the USA have had their *real GDP per capita doubled* in the last 40 years — [but life satisfaction and happiness haven't moved](#). What's to blame? Further analysis found several outlying countries did not see life satisfaction improve because of wealth inequality. People weren't actually seeing more money, so they weren't “happier.”

The general consensus at this point is that **more income in the hands of people increases life satisfaction — but only for a while**. [Data has shown](#) that each dollar we have has a lesser impact on our life satisfaction — and it's logarithmic. In other words, [the average difference in life satisfaction](#) between two people earning \$40,000 and \$80,000 is about the same as that between two earning \$80,000 and \$160,000, and so on.

The clear takeaway is that **money becomes less important in our pursuit of happiness the more of it we have. And other aspects of life would likely bring us more “units” of happiness**. Most research suggests the switch begins somewhere around \$105,000 of income per year.

Everything stated above makes intuitive sense. When we're poor, money can buy items that we desperately need and could reshape our daily experience. These are items like food or a safe community. When we're making \$105,000+, more money buys us maybe a vacation or a larger apartment. That's nice, but shorter workdays might improve our well-being more.

The problem with money as a proxy is that beyond our basic needs, [we have growth needs](#) like meaning and connection. These are hard to buy. Worse, our system's shrugging of higher needs has left people so squeezed that we often must sacrifice these needs just to keep up. An augmented system to prioritize our well-being would help balance our trade-offs between basic needs and growth needs. It could also help to distribute the money that would transform lives.

Well-being as the goal of government is possible. We have the science behind [what contributes to well-being](#) and [a myriad of ways to measure it](#). For the first time in human history, [real data](#) can inform a policy's return on well-being. We can value units of well-being in dollars and directly evaluate policy. Beyond [a few cities](#) working in isolation, the U.S. has missed the boat on optimizing for well-being.

It is no wonder why governments and institutions are lagging in updating the goalposts, though. Clear evidence showing money has a lesser impact on our happiness is a recent development. Plus, those in power tend to prefer business as usual. Our social leadership also grew up in a different era. One where material values were held up on a pedestal. But that's changing.

The values of western society are changing towards meaning. This is not speculative. The [World Values Survey](#) shows that post-industrial economies are moving from “materialist” values (such as economic and physical security) towards “post-materialist” values (such as self-expression, meaning, and purpose). As Author Gregg Easterbrook has said, “A transition from ‘material want’ to ‘meaning want’ is in progress on a historically unprecedented scale involving hundreds of millions of people.”

It is true that much of the transition in values has been fueled by the successes and security enabled by self-interested, profit-first capitalism. And that's great. What our system has accomplished is beyond unprecedented.

The problem, however, is that we have let the proxy of money become the end goal. And those who dare to be unhappy while in a nice home are chastised to hell. This sentiment is clear in a viral video of Louis C.K. titled *Everything is Amazing and Nobody is Happy*. In the video, Louis C.K. monologues a critique of modern society for being upset despite how great life is. All of Louis C.K.'s citations of this good life, however, are all material: cell phones, credit cards, fast travel with planes, and so on. Louis C.K.'s monologue is a symbol of our distorted western perception of “happiness.” This is not an isolated perception. Even the great Steven Pinker gave C.K.'s monologue the opening page to a chapter in his book titled *Enlightenment*. Rousseau would like a word on that interpretation.

As long as our system continues to serve material needs in absolute, an ever-growing rift will exist between that system and the people it is meant to serve. Why optimize endlessly for money when other activities in life (at some point) bring us more units of happiness? Our capitalistic system, more than any, should recognize the importance of fulfilling the demands of the market. People want meaning; it's time we stop selling materialism.

The prioritization of economic measures above all else is the biggest flaw of our broken system. But this is only one of the five flaws.

FIVE SYSTEMIC FLAWS PROPAGATING OUR MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

- 1. The false belief that money is a satisfactory proxy to the good life.**
 - a. As mentioned, this is not entirely true.
- 2. Technology is breaking capitalism.**
 - a. Modern technology risks breaking the fundamentals of capitalism. The idea that “a self-interested economic system filled with decent people will naturally benefit

everyone” is at risk. This is especially true when Amazon can be worth ten times Walmart despite fewer people at the same wage.

3. We have flawed methods to survey happiness and life satisfaction.

- a. America’s main method of evaluating “the good life” has been surveying happiness or life satisfaction. These two methods have been [proven to be mostly unreliable](#). Up to 70% of the results are based on someone’s mood in the moment. This is not good. In 2021, we have 40 years of well-being science that [we can effectively measure](#). It is imperative we update our survey methods.

4. The false belief that mental health is less real than physical health.

- a. Mental health is not less real or less important than physical health. In fact, the mind is the operating system for much of our physical body and has dramatic downstream effects on our physical health.

5. A faulty distinction between well-being and mental health.

- a. There is more to mental health than being free from illness or disorder. There is well-being. Well-being is the “positive end” of the mental health continuum and can be defined as happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress and overall good physical and mental health.

These five flawed perspectives have trickled down into a callous handling of mental health in our day-to-day lives. Beyond being the enabling conditions to the negative macro trends that will worsen our crisis, these perspectives have left our mental health ignored and ravaged.

Mental health is stigmatized. Healthcare providers do not cover or only partially cover screening and treatment. This is despite [82% of Americans](#) believing mental health is as important as physical health. We have little to no formal education around the mind in school. This creates a population that is unequipped for mental health emergencies. Employees are often discriminated against for calling out sick for mental illnesses, [despite this being illegal since 1990](#). We do not widely discuss the presence of, or the benefits of, challenging intergenerational traumas.

In fact, our system’s incentives are so distorted that one of the only ways we widely apply psychology is to exploit people’s subconscious for profit.

As many have said for years: If people are sad, what is the point of all of this industry? **What is the purpose of big homes if the cost of our materialism is our mental health? If we as a species are to have any goal at all, shouldn’t that goal be to live a good life?**

It is time we make well-being the goal of government.

THE OPPORTUNITY: Broad Mental Health Support

Americans know they are underpaid, overworked, and separated from fulfilling lives. They also know the toll this is having on their mental health. Unlike institutions, people value their mental health. This gap in priority between the people and institutions is pooling into a powerful reservoir of political might for mental health.

Below we'll explore ways people are showing their passion for mental health in record numbers.

The language of mental health is now permeating many corners of American culture in a way and volume we've never seen. For instance, the respective terms have seen, since 2010, Google search growth of [100% for mental health](#), [500% for self-care](#), [100% for well-being](#), and [100% for anxiety](#). Mental health and well-being are popping up in commercials, Alexa tips of the day, and company memos. This talk can be seen through our celebrities and prominent figures. So many big names are opening up that tabloids have begun making [list](#), after [list](#), after [list](#), after [list](#), after [list](#), after [list](#), after [list](#), after [list](#), of the notable who have shared their story.

These stories may be one reason why perspectives on mental health are changing. Gen Z and millennials [report seeking treatment or therapy at rates nearly double](#) that of baby boomers or the silent generation.

This progress is exciting, but when a movement is beginning from relatively small origins, the growth we are seeing is still far away from a critical mass. For instance, whenever mental health comes up, what is the first response from people? Usually, it is something akin to, *"Oh my gosh, mental health is so important,"* and then reliably, *"no one talks about this."* This reaction has even held true for me across the political spectrum.

Paradoxically, everyone seems to talk about this, yet our institution's lack of talking about it has made us believe that's not true.

This gap in our individual mental health beliefs vs. the perceived collective mental health beliefs can be illustrated in data. First, [data from the APA](#) shows 87% of Americans think a mental health disorder is nothing to be ashamed of. Second, [data from the same APA study](#) shows that 86% of people believe mental illness carries a stigma. In other words, nobody cares about the stigma, but we think everyone else cares about the stigma. This problem has arisen because we've never had a national conversation about mental health. And people want that to change.

This sense of an underserved social cause has led to a movement of micro-movements fighting for awareness. Below is a list of 40+ organizations. This volume of advocacy for a social cause that seemingly "no one" talks about is extraordinary.

Coffee Hip-Hop & Mental Health, Sad Girls Club, The Depression Project, Hope for the Day, Self Care is for Everyone, To Write Love on Her Arms, Project Semicolon, This is my brave, HelpGuide.org, MentalHealth.org, Choosing Therapy, Inseparable, Mindful Philanthropy, Building H, Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness, Genwell, Weave, Humana Foundation, BeyondDifferences, Centerstone, The Trevor Project, RAD Remedy, Trans LifeLine, National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA), Silence the Shame, The Steve Fund, Bring Change to Mind, Child Mind Institute, Active Minds, Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness, Jed Foundation, On Our Sleeves, Your Mom Cares, Shatterproof, Fletcher Group, Inc., Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action, Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance, Headstrong, DMAX Foundation, Lakeshore Foundation, I Don't Mind (a subsidiary of MHA), Mental Health Coalition, Fountain House, Active Minds.

THESIS: Mental Health's Political Support Has Been Stunted by the Stigma

My belief is that mental health has been a cause the general population has cared about for decades. However, the power of the stigma has scared most of the population away from having the language to even know it themselves. Instead, happiness has been the ultimate pursuit in America when in reality, what most people want is their mental health and well-being to flourish.

What this definition mismatch means is that until recent years, mental health and happiness were decoupled in mainstream thought. To the average person, mental health meant mental illness, and happiness was its own isolated concept. This claim is supported by data. A [2016 global meta-synthesis](#) about the perceptions of mental health found the general public to view “happiness [as] a concept related to ‘healthy.’” Meanwhile, they viewed “‘mental health’ as serious psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia and depression.”

The sheer volume of [nearly 30+ articles](#) on Google explicitly titled “*The Difference Between Mental Health and Mental Illness*” showcases how many have misunderstood the terms.

This is bad for people because mental health has the science to support their pursuit.

My thesis is that this definition mismatch has also caused mental health to experience far less political support than it may have historically been warranted. If more Americans appropriately recognized their pursuit of happiness as the pursuit of well-being, mental health would be one of the major political causes of our time. Instead, mental health has been a low salience political issue. However, the times are changing.

COVID-19 and the Changing Mental Health Perception

One silver lining to COVID-19 has been its [transformation around the language of mental health](#). During the lockdown, mental health took the spotlight and was presented across a

myriad of awareness campaigns. While the stigma still looms large, it has become weaker, and the tipping point towards an eventual full destigmatization may have been hit.

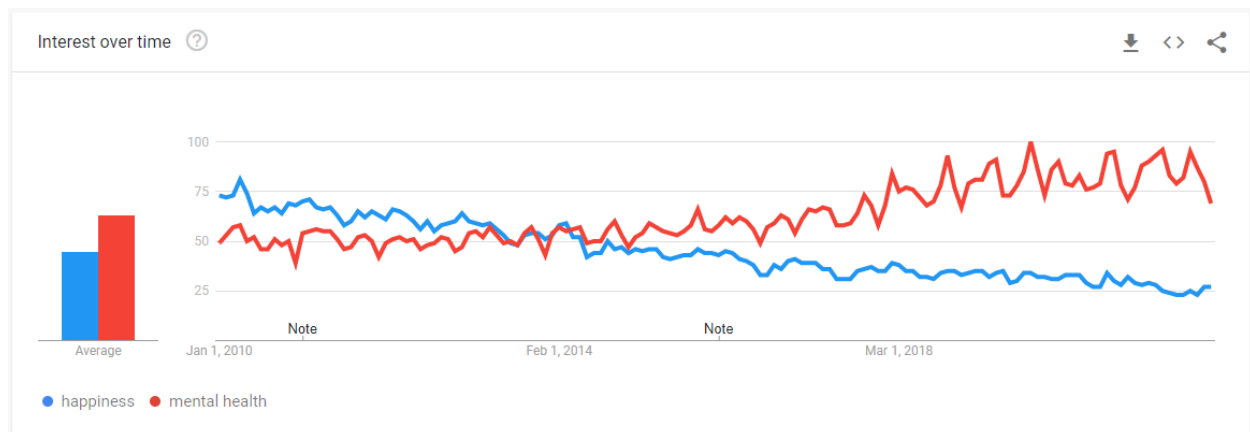
The true superpower of the awareness efforts, however, was that mental health, mental illness, and well-being were presented alongside each other. Because of the volume and intensity of the campaigning around mental health in 2020, the ideas are marrying together and **a new perception of mental health is sticking in the minds of the average American.**

In a pre-pandemic world, mental health meant mental illness, but in the post-pandemic world, the new definition of mental health is a continuum of being just as it is with physical health.

On one end of the spectrum, perspectives towards illness are changing. People are learning that [sadness can be illness](#), [illness can be temporary](#), and [“normal” people can become ill](#).

People are also seeing that there is more to mental health than being free from illness, there is well-being. There are some indicators supporting this claim. Google trends for mental health terms are at all-time highs. Conversely, U.S. queries for happiness in the last decade have decreased by nearly 66% in a pattern inversely correlated with mental health terms.

Does this mean American's are beginning to see well-being as the ultimate pursuit in life instead of happiness? It may be a sign.



People also recognize that well-being can [require different behaviors](#) when compared to nursing illnesses. This distinction can be seen through the meteoric popularity of self-care (500% growth in searches since 2010). Through self-care, many are making the connection that nearly all day-to-day behaviors influence their mental health.

A New Perception = A Broader Activist Identity

The new perception of mental health has dramatically expanded the scope and scale of who identifies with the cause. These changes given the field the opportunity to be a political power.

The fundamental argument below is that **most new advocates for mental health identify with the movement through well-being.**

Unfortunately, our institutions rarely poll mental health as a political cause. So to measure out the new scope of the movement, we need to leverage 2nd and 3rd-degree indicators.

First, this first claim makes intuitive sense because only 20% of Americans have a mental illness in a given year. For the other 80% of Americans, it follows that their interest would be in well-being. Well-being advocates also logically have a disproportionate impact right now on mental health trends because people are, for the first time, associating happiness and well-being with mental health.

We can see America's outsized interest in well-being in a few ways. When looking at all-time data on Google Trends (since 2004), there is a split in momentum down the mental health continuum. Terms like "[self-care](#)," "[well-being](#)," and "[wellness](#)" are all at record highs. Conversely, terms like "[mental illness](#)," "[depression](#)," "[bipolar disorder](#)," and "[suicide](#)" are all at record lows (yes, the lowest they've been in 18 years!). The only outlier to this data is "[anxiety](#)," which has surged in recent years.

An important distinction is that this data from Google Trends is based on relative popularity. This doesn't necessarily mean that fewer people are searching for "depression" than they did in 2004. It simply means that a smaller percentage of people are searching for the term.

What this data does represent, though, is a fairly binary trend in where the attention is. **Well-being is a growing piece of the pie; illness is a reducing piece of the pie.**

There's a similar story on social media. When we look at the top 110 mental health influencers on Instagram, there's a trend in the language of their bios. The three most common terms were "Self-care," "anxiety," then "well-being." Well-being-related terms were nearly 50% more common than illness-related terms. Instagram bios may seem like a measly indicator, but influencers are in an unprecedented war for attention. Bios are strategic and data-driven.

When looking at the top mental health influencer, we can find a shining anecdote. Dr. Nicole LePera is a licensed psychotherapist. In 2018, she left formal practice to launch "holistic psychology." Holistic psychology, she claims, "unites mental, physical, and spiritual health." But mostly, it prescribes a variety of CBT, emotional trauma work, and body health techniques like gut nutrition. Dr. LePera's reasoning for the new "field" was that she felt the mental health establishment was missing important aspects of healing and well-being. It should not be surprising that Dr. LePera has received [a range of criticisms](#). I view these critiques as valid with real consequences, but I still believe she is a net good for the field.

Whatever a person's view on Dr. LePera is, the message is being met with fanfare. In 2019 Dr. LePera's Instagram had [115,000 followers](#). With the help of the COVID-19, Dr. LePera's

following exploded. In 2022, she is nearing five million followers. That's a [growth of nearly 4,300%](#) in the last three years. An even more substantive indicator of influence is the sales of her most recent book, *How To Do The Work*. The book has [sold over 216,000 copies](#) in nine months — an astounding number.

Dr. LePera's growth is vast, but is the whole field growing like this, or is she an anomaly?

The first organization we can look at is Mental Health America (MHA). MHA is a leader in lobbying, but they're also one of the most prominent institutions for B2C advocacy. For instance, MHA was the creator of Mental Health Awareness month dating back to 1949. How has their growth been? In early 2019, MHA had about 50,000 followers on Instagram. Today, they have [about 215,000 followers](#), representing growth of about 300%. Far behind Dr. LePera.

If we look beyond MHA towards a more modern and trendy firm, we have a similar story. The Trevor Project was founded in 1998 to support LGBTQ mental health. Despite being a niche organization, they're one of the most beloved firms among advocates. In early 2019, The Trevor Project had [around 135,000 Instagram followers](#). Today, in 2022, they have about 575,000, representing growth of about 325% in three years.

I affirm that social media data is far from scientific. But mental health is a predominantly youth-based movement that lives online. Who and what these youth engage with is relevant. When people search for, follow, and engage more with the “positive” end of the mental health continuum, it means something.

Could it mean there is a new perception of mental health prioritizing well-being? It's possible.

A new perception of mental health is cause for celebration. This is good for people. And it's good for the field. After all, broadening advocacy to include well-being has been [an explicit industry goal for decades](#). However, what should excite us most is that a new perception of mental health represents an enormous activism opportunity.

A Broader Activist Identity = Political Salience

Mental health has the capacity to be the everyman's political cause because it can be the vehicle to all things good. A well-being-first government makes sense for the same reasons, so too does a mental health-first political alignment. When mental health is your main political cause, you effectively prioritize all other human-first policies like walkable cities, shorter workweeks, or parity in healthcare. Americans are discovering this.

The new audience also increases the political activism of the base. [Research](#) has shown that people suffering from mental illnesses or disorders have lower political participation. A broader mental health coalition increases the total population for the cause and the rate of participation of that population.

How mental health becomes the central political cause of our time is somewhat simple. Support for mental health is a flywheel, and the linchpin is the state of the stigma. It seems likely that the tipping point has been hit regarding destigmatization.

The Mental Health Political Flywheel

As the stigma is further reduced, the perception of mental health will continue to change for more Americans. As the perception changes, more Americans will consciously align with mental health as a political cause relevant to them. A broader group consciousness has given (and will continue to give) mental health more political salience. Once we tap into this salience, the result will be increased representation and policy responsiveness.

This is the Mental Health Political Flywheel.

UNMET OPPORTUNITY: Untapped Political Potential

My phrase in the previous section, “once we tap into this salience,” is not an accident. Mental health is having a moment, and yet, politically, progress remains slow. As it stands, “we” are not tapping into the salience of our cause. Not me, not the mental health establishment, not influencers. Untapped political potential is the motivation for this entire paper.

If you need evidence, ask your gas station clerk, your taxi driver, or your restaurant server, “Who is leading the mental health movement?” Hardly will you find a clear answer. This is a problem. Movements have leaders. They unite, motivate, and direct the energy around a cause. As the great philosopher of mass movements, Eric Hoffer, has said, “the presence of an outstanding leader is indispensable. Without him, there will be no movement.”

If you think about the other successful social movements of our day, answering this question is easy. Who is leading the fight against climate change? AOC. Civil Rights? The ACLU. Guns? March for Our Lives.

The field of mental health will miss the opportunity to pass good laws by not capturing the political momentum. A movement is needed, but leadership with a clear vision must be present to build a movement.

So what’s the problem? Where is the political leadership on mental health?

For any political cause, leadership inherently begins with that field’s establishment. Unfortunately, the mental health establishment is not delivering. This is because of a lacking in two categories: ideological doctrines and political organizing. What is at stake is the status and influence of the establishment.

UNMET NEED ONE: IDEOLOGICAL DOCTRINES

Ideological doctrines are visions that virtue signal. They are the backbone of any movement. A good doctrine unifies the activist base around the pursuit of a clear vision that is lofty. Constituents become motivated to take action. They commit to the cause.

In 2021, while doing research, I spoke to dozens of mental health leaders to get their perspectives on the advocacy landscape. Many agreed: there is no formal doctrine and no vision for the general public from the establishment. The only [recent vision from the establishment](#) was produced in 2020 by the 14 top mental health firms. This sounds compelling, but the vision is for policymakers. It's not intended to excite or organize the people.

When I introduced the 14-firm vision to the advocates, none of them had heard of it. Many liked it but felt it was not enough. I then asked them, "do you believe this 14-firm vision is representative of the field's vision and priorities?" Nearly everyone said yes.

As one advocate said, "I like their vision, but it's clinical. They're missing so much of what makes us human. I don't feel represented by their work." Below, using the 14-firm vision as a proxy, we'll unpack why the establishment's ideology does not excite people.

THREE REASONS WHY THE ESTABLISHMENT'S VISION IS NOT ENOUGH

1. [It does not include well-being](#)
 - a. Americans have a new perception of mental health that prioritizes well-being. This is what excites them. At the same time, the 14-firm vision only uses the term "well-being" four times. Advocates feel that the establishment is not representing them. People want the science and policy of well-being as a priority in the field.
2. [It does not innovate on illness treatment](#)
 - a. Top treatments such as SSRIs and CBT [have limited efficacy](#). Advocates know an epidemic will not be mitigated simply by expanding access to these treatments.
 - b. Further, many conventional treatments are administered one-on-one. Treatment of a nation through these means is extremely unscalable and unlikely. [Workforce shortages](#) exist, and we are years away from peak demand. The truth is that it's unlikely the field will ever meet demand with the current treatment models.
 - c. The one-on-one nature of treatment also makes health care parity hard to account for. In our current health care system, widespread coverage and use of psychotherapy would sky-rocket costs. Ultimately, the American people would pay for the costs through reduced wages. This would worsen the crisis.
 - d. Innovating on treatment models for illnesses and disorders is essential and must be acknowledged. This will excite people.
3. [It does not call for systemic change](#)
 - a. We are in an era of deep systemic and institutional disenchantment. Data from Gallup on the [confidence of American institutions](#) paints the picture. The

Presidency, Congress, banks, the medical system, and public schools have all seen public confidence drop by over 50% since the 70s.

- b. This fertile ground demanding systemic change is the bedrock of American politics. Consider Obama in 2008, then Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in 2016. The desire for big change is especially true within mental health. The rise and prominence of figures like Dr. LePera are powerful indicators of that reality.
- c. Meanwhile, the 14-firm vision effectively focuses on expanding access to care through parity, screening, early identification, expanded workforce, and telehealth. This would transform mental health care, but it does not solve the structural problems Americans care about.

In summary, if the establishment were to adjust its vision, there are three steps. **Include well-being, innovate on illness, and go systemically big on them both.**

To be clear, I find the vision a great step forward. Everything outlined is necessary for transforming mental health care. But people want more. And they need more.

THE EXISTENTIAL RISK OF NOT MEETING THE DEMAND

I believe our mental health crisis is a deviation away from an ideological challenger seeking to dethrone the establishment. This sort of event would be ten years away and only occurs if 1) the crisis worsens 2) the establishment continues to not meet the ideological needs of the people.

When institutions do not supply the ideology in demand, people lose confidence and find new rebel leadership. Look at the media, banks, congress, and the other institutions listed above. Legacy media to alternative media. Banks to cryptocurrency. Congress to Trump. The world of ideology is not rational. People want what they want, and the details rarely matter.

When alternative ideologies arise, they should be taken seriously. They are the precursor to rebels.

If you want to see indicators of the already slipping authority of the mental health establishment, go to social media. Of [the top ten](#) mental health influencers on Instagram, only one is a licensed and practicing psychologist. The other nine influencers have over 14 million followers in aggregate. Mental Health America has 213,000 followers.

Several of these top influencers also promote pseudosciences like MBTI, enneagram, and astrology. This is not good. The risk of waning establishment influence is mental health turning into a DIY pseudoscience project at home.

The truth is that ideology is the only weapon the establishment has. Policy moves at the pace of a review board and ideology at the speed of a tweet. A change in vision and intentions can reach and excite the people overnight. **The establishment must win the people over with a bold ideology calling for systemic change.**

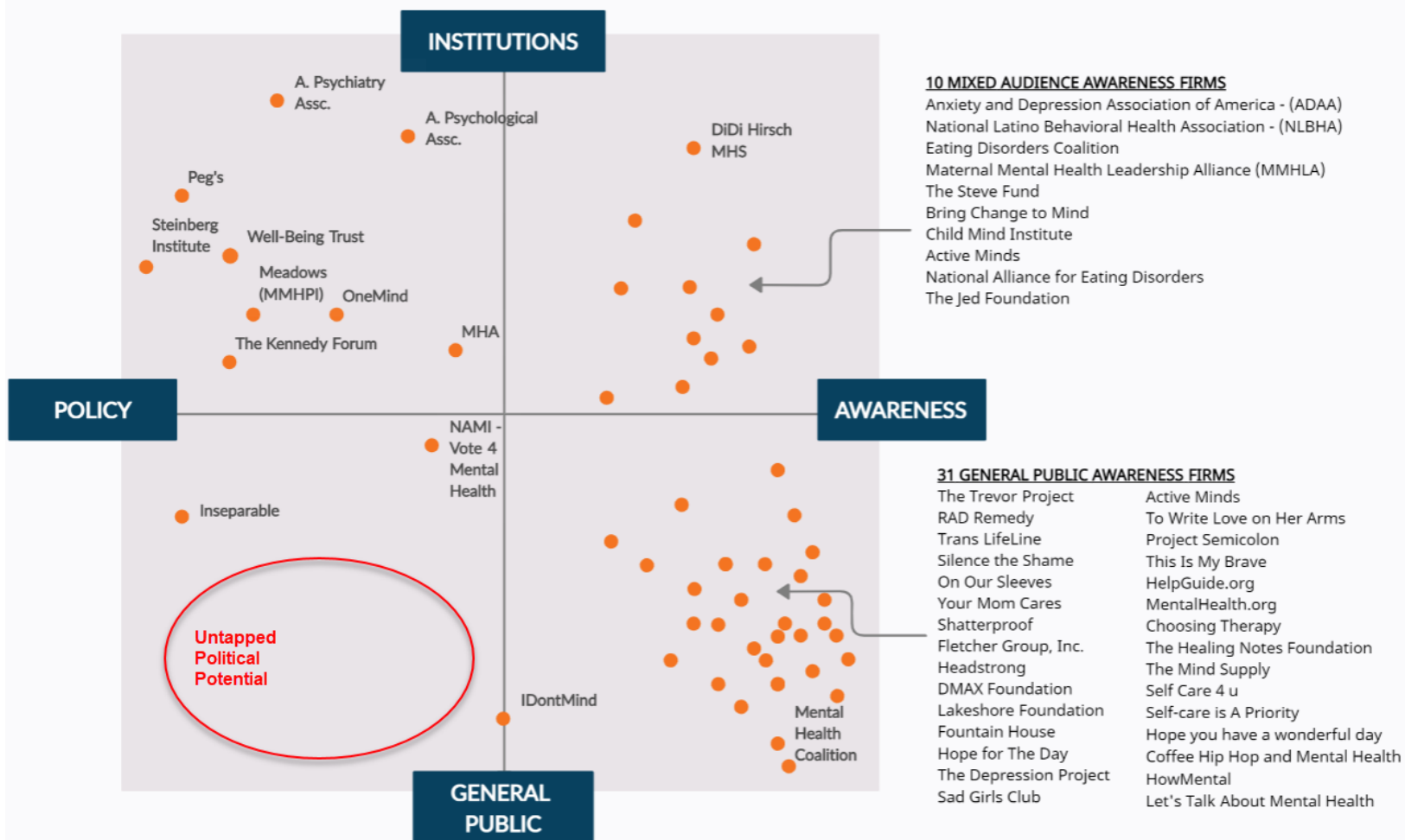
It's time to look at the second reason the establishment is not effectively leading the mental health movement: political organizing.

UNMET NEED TWO: POLITICAL ORGANIZING

Americans care about mental health and want to voice that support in the political arena. Unfortunately, there is no obvious organization that helps Americans do that. It may be hard to imagine that there is not a dedicated grassroots organizing hub for mental health, but it's true.

Presented below is a market positioning map of the mental health advocacy landscape. The X-axis is the organization's mission. The Y-axis is the organization's primary audience.

THE MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY LANDSCAPE: Audience vs. Mission Matrix



The **top-left** quadrant displays our most formal institutions. These organizations lead lobbying and the mental health conversation among U.S. institutions. The **top-right** quadrant has awareness organizations with a mixed audience. These firms split their awareness efforts

between individuals and communities. The **bottom-right** quadrant are organizations raising awareness in the general public. This corner is the movement of micro-movements referenced earlier. It speaks volumes how many citizens have launched organizations to support this cause.

The last section is the **bottom-left** quadrant. This corner represents organizations leading public political action. These are the people who lead movements and unify the people. For mental health, the quadrant is empty.

While leadership begins with the establishment, the reality is that they cannot lead *political organizing*. Brands can only be one thing. It's hard to be the institutional leader and the general public leader. Consider Mental Health America.

MHA

MHA has a huge scope of work under their brand. Education, outreach, research, screening, policy, and information. Consumers already think of MHA for these services. Adding a political movement would muddy the brand to little success of all ventures. This is not a ding on MHA. It's the reality of interfacing with the general public. MHA knows this. They have tried to solve their own problem.

I Don't Mind

The organization named "I Dont Mind" is an affiliate of MHA. The strategy was surely to present a simpler brand to interface with the people. Unfortunately, I Dont Mind has split their objectives. One goal is to share resources and educate. The other goal is to take political action. You can't do both, so it is not surprising it has not resonated with the people.

Look at the [Sunrise Movement](#), the organization that wrote the Green New Deal. This organization is an absolute hub for organizing. There is no education of climate science. It is 100% dedicated to being an accessible hub for action.

I Dont Mind also does not seem to be the priority of MHA. In January 2022, the billboard of the website was an advertisement for a conference that happened in November 2021. In the midst of mental health's big moment, this is not a good sign.

Inseparable

The only organization committed in absolute (it seems) to being a grassroots organizing hub is [Inseparable](#). Inseparable is two years old with big names on advisory. Patrick Kennedy and Doug Jones headline alongside executives from establishment firms. This is also concerning. This is a youth movement, and that energy is clearly not in the room. The firm sits at around 1,000 followers on their social media accounts. Worse, Alexa Web Rankings [shows](#) the Inseparable website to be [1.3 million positions behind my own personal website](#). My website gets 250 visitors a month.

I respect the efforts of any organization working to solve this crisis. Every organization has a role to play. But we are missing the opportunity of a lifetime. People are ready to go to war for this cause. There is unguided passion sprawling across the web. We must unify these efforts, capture the untapped political potential, and augment the system towards our well-being.

HOW CAN WE EFFECTIVELY ORGANIZE THE PEOPLE?

We need to organize the people by building a movement with a central hub. There are a few simple strategic pieces we can employ to achieve this. There are three macro forces with the power to unite, organize, and move people to action.

1. Catalyzing Events

- a. Catalyzing events are moments that serve as anecdotal evidence of macro problems. They surge activist motivation. Wildfires, flooding, or cops shooting an unarmed citizen are all examples.

2. Catalyzing Doctrines

- a. Catalyzing doctrines are powerful visions that virtue signal. The Green New Deal is a good example of an accessible vision that motivates citizens.

3. Catalyzing Leaders

- a. Catalyzing leaders are vehicles for people's values. Greta Thunberg made her way simply by taking a stand. Catalyzing leaders can also be created by their alignment with doctrines. As seen with AOC adopting the Green New Deal.

But what would happen if you united all three strategies? The result is an unmistakable force of reckoning. This is the exact opportunity we have before us and the exact solution I am pursuing with an exceptional team. Together we can make well-being the goal of government and end our needless suffering.

Let me introduce to you The Good Life Movement (GLM).

THE GOOD LIFE MOVEMENT (GLM)

The Good Life Movement's mission is to help end the mental health crisis. We can do this by making human well-being the goal of government. To achieve this aim, we are seeking to solve the problem of untapped political potential in the mental health advocacy landscape. Our organization will serve as a grassroots organizing hub that will help to catalyze and guide an activist movement.

The underlying strategic play for the GLM is to leverage the three catalyzing strategies listed in the previous section: catalyzing events, catalyzing doctrines, catalyzing leaders. These strategies will be well-received by the American public because of the mental health crisis that has created a landscape ready for activism. COVID-19 is our catalyzing event. Our catalyzing doctrine will be a shared vision drafted by the field. This vision will meet the people's demand by including well-being, innovating on illness, and going systemically big on them both. A collaborative and diverse author group will ensure our vision includes a broad coalition. This diverse vision will unify and motivate advocates to act politically. We will use this initial energy to recruit a political leader to serve as our catalyzing leader. The GLM's strategic linchpin will be timing and leveraging the 2024 election cycle to spread its vision into mainstream America.

In the section below, I will unpack our strategy.

CORE STRATEGY: “The Catalyzing Doctrine”

The GLM's strategy begins with the catalyzing doctrine. The catalyzing doctrine can best be compared to the Green New Deal. The doctrine strives to be a hopeful, far-reaching policy vision that will excite and give activists a tangible objective to organize around.

Facilitation

The GLM will source and facilitate a group of diverse collaborators to draft this vision. The GLM intends to be a project manager and strategic advisor for the document. Not the arbiter of truth.

The contributors for the doctrine will be recruited from a variety of key constituent groups. These niches include positive psychology, youth, veterans, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, SUD communities, psychiatry, and of course, establishment firms like the APA.

The establishment will likely be hesitant to join at first, but many underserved activist groups will inherently have a desire to come to the table. This is because many advocates find the current ideology of the field lacking and their visions excluded. These groups will be excited to contribute to a new movement. Activists will believe this project is worth their time because they know of the GLM's marketing power, credibility, and connections to government officials.

Once the underserved activists are at the table, the establishment will be incentivized to join. The establishment will want to maintain a role of influence and image of collaboration. This is a good thing. The GLM wants the establishment's wisdom and involvement.

The Doctrine Itself

The doctrine is a policy vision. It will be a document outlining social problems, opportunities, and policies. It will include phases of development and strive to create an image of a future that puts humans and their mental health first.

The absolute objective of the doctrine is to produce a vision to the general public that will unite them and motivate them into political action. To achieve this, the doctrine must look serious but above all else, it must virtue signal.

It's helpful to recognize that visions and doctrines are ultimately sales collateral. They simplify complex ideas into sellable and relatable values. Visions are used to change minds and behavior. The Green New Deal is a successful example of this.

The [Green New Deal](#) introduced in the 116th congress sounds like a serious document. In many ways, it is. But the truth is that it is a "simple resolution." This is the legislative version of a virtue-signaling nothing-burger. Simple resolutions share opinions, condolences of deceased congressional members, and do not include enforceable legislation. The introduced Green New Deal is a 2,200-word listicle of policies. It does not outline logistics and rarely dollar amounts. To a legislator, this document means nearly nothing. Yet, this document and the successive organizing by the Sunrise Movement has spurred more climate action than we have seen in the last decade combined.

Politics is not a rational place. It's a game of signaling virtues, ideology, and juggling a narrative. The Green New Deal authors knew this. They knew that by listing off exciting policies as a simple resolution, the interpretation in the media would be, "serious new legislation in congress promises jobs and saves us from climate change." This is the game of political marketing.

Our doctrine will follow a similar course. It will retain seriousness, but it is ultimately signaling values with the goal of catalyzing activism.

The current proposed model for the doctrine is to parse it into phases. The phases will allow the field to capture the excitement of emerging policies while providing the time necessary to test them. For example, the first phase of our doctrine could include pursuits like the below:

- Passage of laws around telehealth, parity, equity, standards, and workforce.
- Passage of paid leave and mental health sick days.
- City trials of well-being as a policy objective.
- Instruct Department of Education to research mental health curriculum.
- Increase government funding for alternative treatments like psychedelics and ketamine.
- Begin trials of 4.5 day work weeks.

A vision like the above with multiple phases and official presentation will have the same effect as the Green New Deal. The media headline will be, “new plan to solve mental health crisis explores 4.5 day work weeks and psychedelics.” This vision will excite Americans while still giving the field the space to study and rigorously review policy efficacy.

THE MARKETING PLAN.

Launching and spreading the catalyzing doctrine is a simple two-part plan.

PART ONE: Initial Launch and Momentum — The Early Adopters

The first part of our marketing plan is the initial launch, maintenance of momentum, and preparation for going mainstream. Our goal is to recruit our early adopters and then train them as activists. Our early adopters include young people, industry professionals, and the various niche groups at the author's table. Operationally we will aim to avoid the infamous “[trough of sorrow](#).” We will do this by slow-burning our marketing resources which will ensure stable growth of our communities. Stable growth at first is key to fostering an activist nexus.

Our key marketing resources during this phase will be celebrities, advocates, and the beginning of our activist army. Months before our launch, we'll be assembling a network of celebrities and advocates who resonate with our objective. Given how strongly these groups are seeking political leadership, we expect there to be upwards of 15 celebrities in our plan. We expect our mental health influencer advocates to host over 20 million followers in aggregate at launch.

At launch, these individuals will be intentionally spread across the media landscape targeting their niche audiences. Some will be on podcasts, others on TikTok, others on legacy media.

After launch, we will utilize a similar strategy that Andrew Frawley used to build the #YangGang. All of our online marketing channels will consolidate supporters into a few small communities. Once there, we will work hard to develop and nurture a culture focused on high leverage and impactful organizing. These communities will train, embolden, and reward our activists.

[You can join the early inkling of one community here on Discord.](#)

This strategy will give us the secure base of activists to make a splash in the mainstream. It also gives us the capabilities to handle the exponential growth of going mainstream without losing our activist culture. This is because the trained activists will become the new cultural leaders propagating the values of action, and so on.

The strongest value-add from these early efforts is that they will create a tangible and identifiable activist group that is worth courting in a competitive political climate.

PART TWO: A Catalyzing Leader — The Mainstream

The 2024 election is going to be a historically competitive one. Joe Biden, who would be 82 in 2025, has an approval rating of 42%. He is not a candidate that excites the people, and most likely, he will not re-run for president. This means that both the Democrats and the Republicans will have an open primary. The result will be an open field with 20+ candidates all desperate to stand out. There are a few ways we can leverage this.

1.) Comments and Scorecards

At a minimum, we can get candidates to comment on our vision which will propel it into the media. This is a simple process. We go to campaign events and ask the candidates to comment. In a crowded primary, candidates are incentivized to take a stance that will help to court our now active niche of mental health activists. Once a few candidates do this, it is easier to make it a liability to not comment. This strategy is turbocharged by then creating scorecards of accountability.

2.) The Catalyzing Leader

We have the potential to recruit a “Catalyzing Leader” for our cause. As mentioned, politics is not a rational, straightforward game. Many candidates who run for president are not trying to win. They are instead advocating for a cause or trying to raise their profile. Our cause carries immense popularity with limited political baggage at this time. In the 2024 primary, with our proposed vision, onboarding a political figure to make this their cause is plausible. One example figure is Congressman Tim Ryan from Ohio. Tim has consistently voted in favor of mental health and is an outspoken advocate. Tim also ran for President in 2020 and is a politician I have personally met and have contact with. Tim is currently running for Senate in Ohio in 2022, and I do hope he wins. But if he doesn’t, he’s out of congress. Does being the mental health champion create a lane for him to regain his political capital quickly? Yes, it does.

3.) All the Way Down Ballot

Both strategies listed above can be utilized down the entire ballot. Our new mental health coalition will represent a new niche worth fighting for within every close state primary and general election.

Without being over-prescriptive, this is the initial marketing schematic. And it’s going to work. Money and people can accelerate these goals. But the power of this marketing plan is that a small group of people can lift our ideals into prominence.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Good Life Movement is filing with the FEC as a Carey Committee. Carey Committees are hybrid political action committees and are the same model used by the Sunrise Movement. Carey committees have the ability to operate both as a traditional PAC, contributing funds to a candidate's committee, and as a super PAC, which makes independent expenditures. This is done by having two bank accounts. The committee can collect unlimited contributions from almost any source for its independent expenditure account.

INCOME STREAMS

Being a political action committee, the income streams of The Good Life Movement come from three primary sources.

1.) Grassroots Donations

GLM expects grassroots donors to make up 60% of our revenue. This will be a prioritized KPI in the activist marketing funnel.

2.) Merchandise and Other Goods

Merchandise and other goods are another variety of grassroots donations. Donations are in exchange for items or access to events. GLM intends to lean into this revenue arm with an expected 15% of revenue.

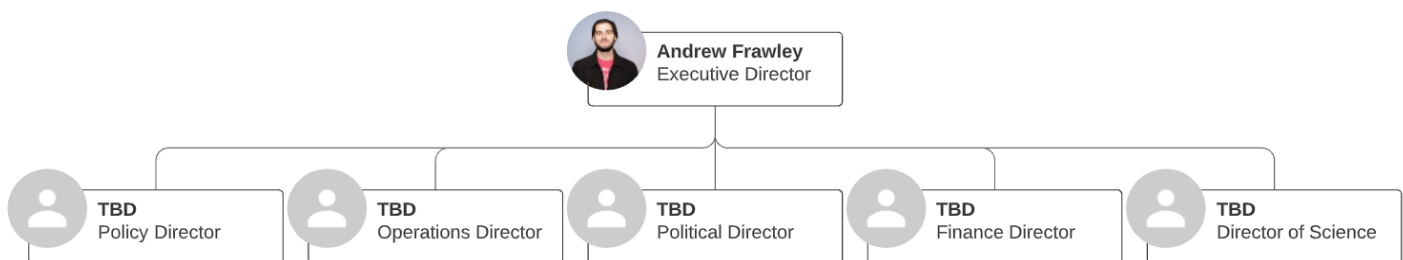
3.) Big Donor Fundraising

We expect big donors to make up 25% of our revenue. This comes from events and private functions.

TEAM STRUCTURE

The initial team structure for The Good Life Movement will include an executive team of six. Andrew Frawley will serve as the Executive Director. The ensuing team members will include a Political Director, Policy Director, Finance Director, Director of Science, and Director of Operations. Marketing and organizing will initially be handled by Andrew Frawley to be distributed to formal directors after launch.

If you want to join, email hello@goodlifemovement.org.



THE ROADMAP

Below is a tentative roadmap for The Good Life Movement.

PRE-LAUNCH: February 2022 — September 2022

- Recruit authors, drafting the policy vision
- Recruit early team
- Recruit industry collaborators: institutions, niche awareness firms, etc.
- Recruit marketing collaborators: celebrities, public figures, advocates, etc.
- Begin warm courtship of 2024 election candidates

PUBLIC LAUNCH: October 2022 — February 2023

- Launch to the general public
- Begin celebrity and advocate public relations and marketing tour
- Begin coalescing and training of activist community infrastructure
- Recruiting of a mental health champion for the 2024 presidential party primary
- Continue all previous efforts during this time period

ELECTION ORGANIZING: February 2023 — November 2024

- Make mental health a central topic of the 2024 presidential party primary

PASS LAWS: Spring 2025

- Use our new mental-health-aware congress to pass laws

CONCLUSION

Our organization will accomplish tremendous benefits for mental health advocacy and, ultimately people. Our movement will help to unify advocacy efforts in the landscape. The gap for political leadership will be erased. Making calls and fighting for mental health legislation will never be easier.

By taking a big policy vision mainstream, we will gain the benefits of using our doctrine as an anchor in legislative negotiation. Our grand vision will help to easily pass legislation that today seems far off.

Last, by taking our cause into the mainstream, we will further reduce the stigma. This is big if you remember the Mental Health Political Flywheel. Reducing the stigma broadens the perception of mental health for Americans. This increases the scope of our conscious activist identity, which leads to a larger coalition and ultimately more political representation.

With The Good Life Movement, even if we fall short, we win.

The stage is set, the people are readied. Let's unite them, pass laws, and end this crisis.

Now is our time.