

Healthy brains strengthen democracy

A global group have published a novel, transdisciplinary approach to brain health-directed policymaking and economic strategy.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA , November 11, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- This group aims to foster performance, cohesion, and sustainability of democratic societies internationally. This global group has published two papers via The Brookings Institution.



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Harris Eyre MD PhD, lead of the [Brain Capital Alliance](#), and senior author on both papers, noted “Democracies are increasingly under siege. Beyond direct external (e.g., warfare) and internal (e.g., populism, extremism) threats to democratic nations, multiple democracy-weakening factors are converging in our modern world. Brain health challenges, including mental, neurologic, and substance use disorders, social determinants of health, long COVID, undesired effects of technology, mis- and disinformation, and educational, health, and gender disparities, are associated with substantial economic and sociopolitical impediments. Here, we argue that thriving democracies can distinguish themselves through provision of environments that enable each citizen to achieve their full brain health potential conducive to both personal and societal wellbeing. Gearing policy making towards equitable and quality brain health may prove essential to combat brain challenges, promote societal cohesion, and boost economic productivity.” Eyre is also co-lead of the OECD Neuroscience-inspired Policy Initiative, Fellow for Brain Health at the Center for Health and Biosciences at Baker and Senior Fellow for Brain Capital with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

The papers note that brain health-directed policymaking and economic strategy have the potential to provide sustainable solutions to the challenges of the 21st century and to bolster democracy

The papers highlight linkages between poor brain health and democracy threats. Despair is linked to flawed democracy through the distortions and subversions generated by growing social and economic inequalities. In the United States, deaths of despair (suicide and poisoning by

alcohol and drugs) are now so prevalent that they are lowering the average United States life expectancy. Downstream effects of despair are postulated to include heightened susceptibility to misinformation, far-right radicalization, and extremist activities.

Carol Graham DPhil, Senior Fellow with The Brookings Institution and coauthor on the paper, stated, “Despite the threat to national security and democracy, there is a lack of federally coordinated policy measures to address the roots of despair, inequality of opportunity and outcomes, and vulnerability to misinformation, specifically from a neuroscience and bio-psycho-social perspective.” Graham leads the Brookings Working Group on Despair and Economic Recovery.

Conflicts and warfare threaten democracy and have a myriad of determinantal effects on brain health. Physical disability, psychological distress, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, suicidality, psychosomatic illnesses, and loss of social engagement are just a few of many brain health challenges that are prevalent in people who have lived in or been exposed to war-torn areas. Soldiers, women, children, the elderly, and disabled are disproportionately affected. By taking brain health into account, policies can be developed that prevent and mitigate the effects of violence and warfare.

Professor Mike Matthews PhD, Professor of Engineering Psychology at the United States Military Academy aka West Point, noted about this work, “Brain health-directed policymaking and economic strategy provide a new, human-centered approach to strengthen democracy. Several countries are advancing brain-computer interface (BCI) innovation for both civilian and military usage. When it comes to brain health, I think about those who work at the tip of the spear – surgeons, law enforcement officers, fire fighters, soldiers – where functioning at 80 percent capacity is not good enough. To function at near 100 percent capacity, where lives are on the line, requires optimizing brain health. Nations and governments must recognize this and make brain health a priority. To do less is irresponsible.”

Mr James T. Hackett, Co-founder of The Hackett Center for Mental Health and Trustee of Rice University and Baylor College of Medicine noted, “This transdisciplinary work, spanning health, economics and many other fields, is exactly what we need - to break down silos and explore new frontiers of innovation”. Hackett was a coauthor on these papers.

Hon Jay Weatherill AO, Director of Thrive by Five of the Minderoo Foundation and former Premier of South Australia, noted “This work is highly innovative. It elegantly brings together my two areas of interest, early childhood brain development and democracy science.”. Weatherill went on the note, “with the extra pressure modern life imposes, some are overwhelmed or stranded in a desert of low skilled jobs and/or limited job opportunities. We need to think about how to help these individuals flourish in life and in their communities”.

Associate Professor Jo-An Occhipinti, Co-director of the Mental Wealth Initiative at The University of Sydney noted, ‘This global partnership for brain health-focused research and policy has

emerged at a critical time. In rebuilding the Mental Wealth of nations in the post-pandemic era, optimizing brain health will be vital in efforts to achieve greater health, social, and economic system resilience and prosperity. Beyond a focus on improving individual brain health across the lifecycle, the broader policy perspective being encouraged will draw attention to the social infrastructure needed to foster civic participation and connectivity, intergenerational knowledge exchange, and deliberative democracy. It will also help orientate brain health investments towards fostering collective intelligence and innovation.'

Details of paper 1: Winter et al (2022) Brain health-directed policymaking: exploring a new concept to strengthen democracy. Brookings Policy Paper Series. See here:

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/brain-health-directed-policymaking-a-new-concept-to-strengthen-democracy/>

Details of paper 2: Smith et al (2022) Brain capital: a new vector for democracy strengthening.

Brookings Blog. See here: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2022/11/08/brain-capital-a-new-vector-for-democracy-strengthening/>

About the Brain Capital Alliance: A public-private-people partnership to optimize the brain, brain health and brain skills in the modern economy. Following on from the success of the OECD Neuroscience-inspired Policy Initiative, a group of diverse stakeholders launched an expanded, multi-national and multi-organisational programme. The programme focuses on neuroscience-inspired investment and public policy innovation as the two most powerful levers for change. It brings together radically diverse stakeholders spanning fields from brain science to policy, economics and finance. Brain capital has been profiled at the United Nations General Assembly, COP 27 (the United Nations Climate Change Conference) and in major public and private reports from the likes of the WHO.

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