

GEN Z & MENTAL HEALTH IN THE U.S.

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REPORT BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

GEN Z HAS COME OF AGE IN DARKNESS.

American Gen Z-ers' core formative experiences have been a consistent flow of heavy news and cultural reckonings, all in the middle of a rapidly evolving digital era:

- Global warming
- Mass shootings
- Police brutality
- Sexual violence / rape culture
- Student loan debt
- Social media
- America's mental health crisis
- COVID-19 Pandemic

DESPITE IT ALL, WE DISCOVERED THAT GEN Z'S OPTIMISM SHINES BRIGHT:

61%
are hopeful about their future.

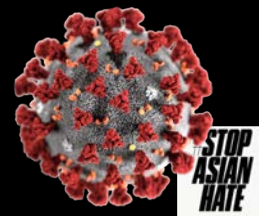
82%
believe they are likely to make as much or more money than their parents in their lifetime.



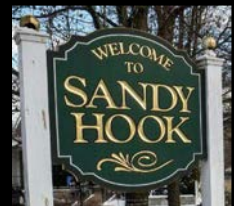
Floodwaters Devastate Mexican State of Tabasco



BLACK LIVES MATTER



STOP ASIAN HATE



Me Too



HOPE THROUGH HEALTH, HEALTH THROUGH HOPE

Our current understanding of health and Gen Z's unique approach to it shows us that health intersects with *everything*. Beyond its personal and day-to-day role, health is a vehicle for societal progress and human understanding. Health is hope, and there is hope in health.

However, data shows us that Gen Z's mental wellbeing is their most negatively impacted area of health amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding Gen Z's mental health behavior and outlook is more crucial than ever as we continue to navigate a rapidly changing cultural landscape, when so much of what we know about health is being changed and challenged.



METHODOLOGY

2021 primary survey data:

- National Quantitative Survey, April 2021
- National Quantitative Survey, August 2021
- National Quantitative Survey, October 2021
- Open-Ended Qualitative Survey, November 2021

Quantitative surveys designed in partnership with [The Generation Lab](#), distributed to a demographically representative sample of youth (18+) in the United States.

THE STATE OF GEN Z'S MENTAL HEALTH

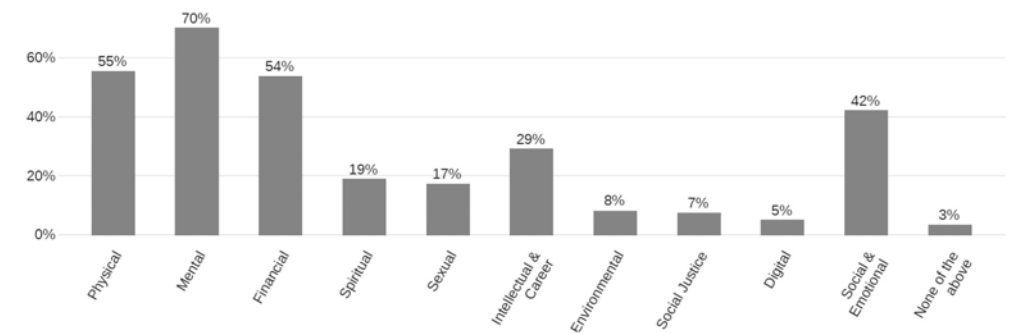
BY THE NUMBERS: GEN Z'S MENTAL HEALTH & OUTLOOK

With an overall greater openness towards, and prioritization of, mental health, Gen Z expresses a need for more mental health care in the immediate and long term.

COMPARED TO OTHER ASPECTS OF HEALTH, GEN Z'S MENTAL WELLBEING REQUIRES THE MOST URGENT ATTENTION TODAY

70%
of Gen Z in the U.S. say their mental health needs the most attention or improvement right now.

2.1 - What area(s) of your wellbeing most needs improvement or attention right now? (Select all that apply)

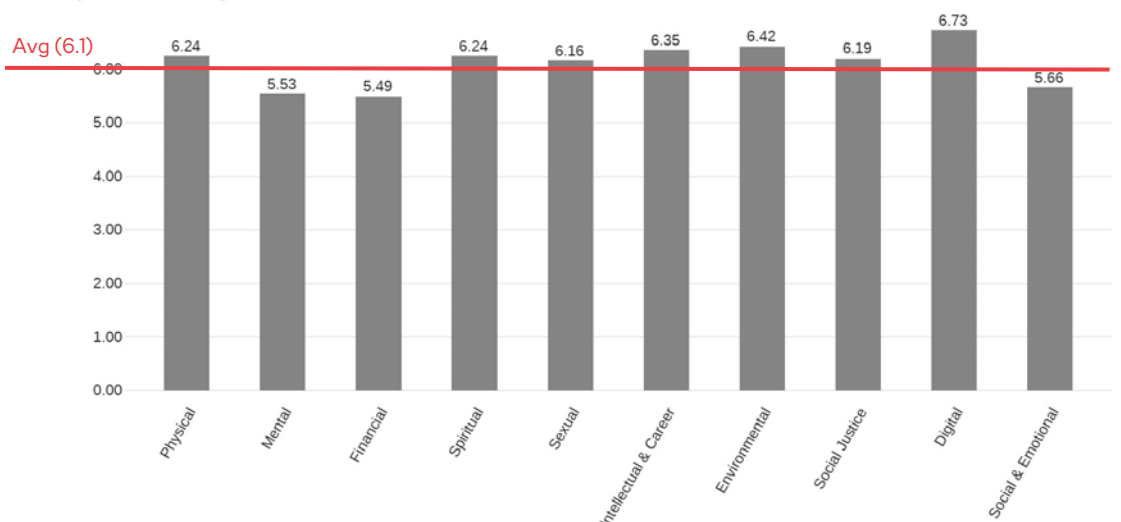


GEN Z'S OUTLOOK ON THEIR MENTAL WELLBEING FALLS BELOW AVERAGE

While Gen Z is hopeful about their health overall, mental health falls below Gen Z's average optimism score (6.1) – next to financial health.

Financial health plays a key role in Gen Z's mental health, with 81% of Gen Z-ers reporting money to be their #1 source of stress, compared to only 64% of adults overall (APA).

2.2 - On a scale of 1-10, how optimistic do you feel about each of the following components of your wellbeing?



STIGMA HAS LED TO REACTIVE CONVERSATIONS & CARE



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Gen Z's interactions with mental wellbeing in childhood and adolescence bolsters the urgency of their mental health needs today. With upbringings in environments where mental health stigma was the norm, Gen Z frequently points to their first conversations about mental health occurring in later years of adolescence and young adulthood — often reactive to a personal experience with mental health challenges.

What were conversations around mental health like in the spaces you grew up in?

When was the first time you talked about your mental health or heard others talk about mental health?

“ We didn't talk about it in church, and my school half-assed conversations about mental health and didn't really do anything to make it better.

— 18-year-old

“ It was just over a year ago, pre-pandemic, 2019. My brother was having major issues in school, and he was depressed, so my dad went with him to see a therapist. That was the first time we had really done anything like that in my family.

— 22-year-old

“ There were not many conversations surrounding it. It was taboo and something you did not discuss. It was viewed as a topic for weak minds.

— 24-year-old

“ It was when my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015 that my parents started talking more about mental health and being open regarding our mental wellbeing.

— 18-year-old

“ Mental health is neglected back home (Dominican Republic) and a stigma is prevalent in the Latin American community. This led to me having a stigma about my own mental health issues and denying them, until I came to college.

— 22-year-old

“ It was my senior year of college... I attended a leadership symposium, and we had a lesson on vulnerability. It was the first time I had ever vocalized feelings like the ones I realized I was having.

— 24-year-old

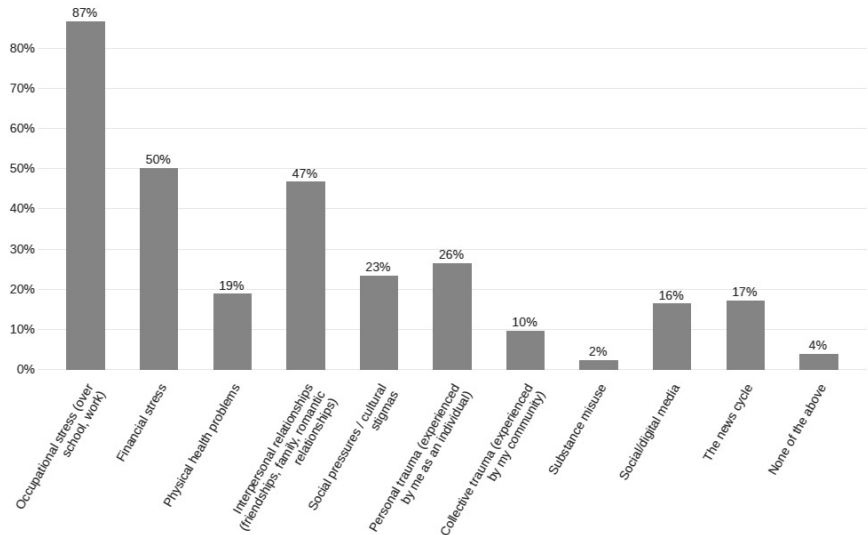
UNDERSTANDING GEN Z'S MENTAL HEALTH TRIGGERS AND STRESSORS

Identifying and addressing Gen Z's greatest stressors and tensions *today* will allow brands to make long-term impact on Gen Z's lifelong experiences with work, personal finance, and interpersonal relationships. Consider how your organization can help Gen Z alleviate their greatest mental burdens.

GEN Z IS MOST STRESSED OUT OVER WORK/SCHOOL, FINANCES, AND RELATIONSHIPS TODAY

87%
of Gen Z in the U.S. say that school/work hinders their mental health.

2.5 - What hinders your mental health today? (Select all that apply)



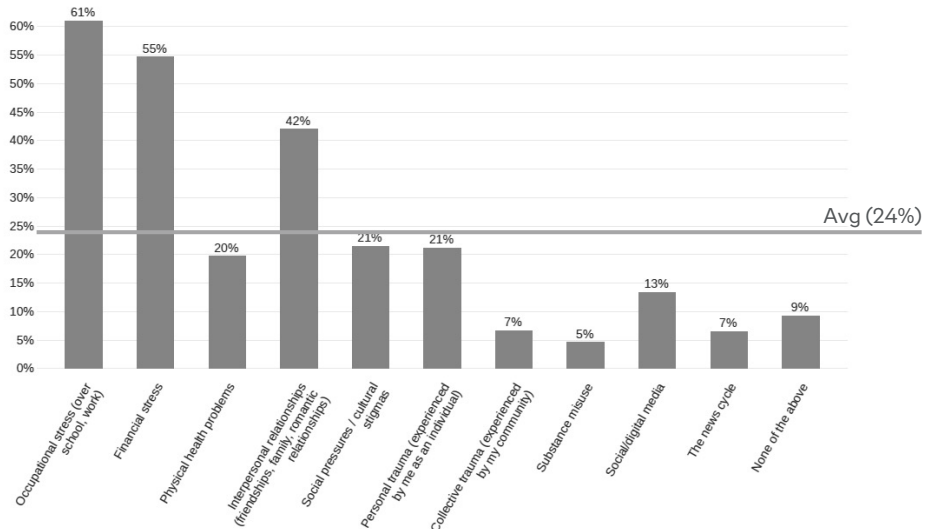
YET, THEY'RE OPTIMISTIC THESE STRESSORS WILL IMPROVE OVER THEIR LIFETIME

61% of Gen Z is hopeful their occupational stress will alleviate over their lifetime.

55% think their financial stress will alleviate over their lifetime.

42% think their relationships will improve over their lifetime.

2.6 - What stressors, if any, do you think will alleviate over your lifetime? (Select all that apply)



CARE & COPING MECHANISMS

STRESS MANAGEMENT



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Huge proponents of self-care, Gen Z turns to mindfulness, leisure, and their friendships when managing their day-to-day stress.

How do you manage stress or reset after being stressed?



OPTIMISM



My mindset is so important. I practice positivity and optimism and gratefulness.
— 23-year-old



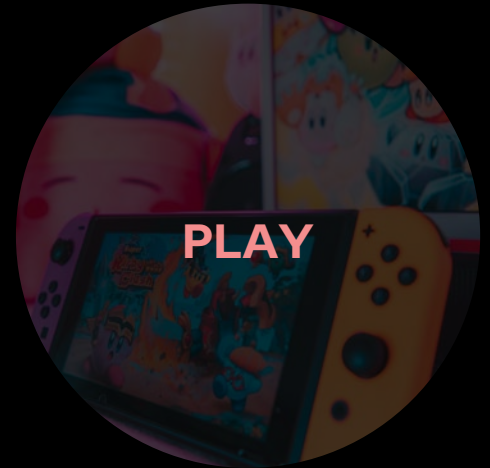
I always tell myself that things will get better.
— 22-year-old



I usually resort to video games if I'm stressed. I play more creative games than FPS, because they are more relaxing to me.
— 21-year-old



I manage stress by working-out. When I get overwhelmed, I go for a run, and I run until I clear my head.
— 24-year-old



PLAY



VULNERABILITY



I manage stress by leaning on my support people to talk about it and get out my feelings.
— 23-year-old



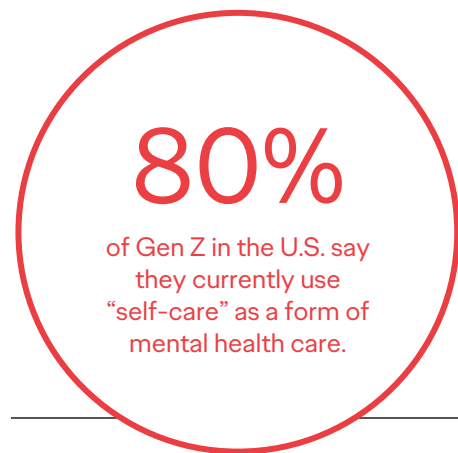
I'll debrief with my partner or roommate or coworker about the situation and how I can best resolve it moving forward.
— 24-year-old

PREFERRED & EMERGING METHODS OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE

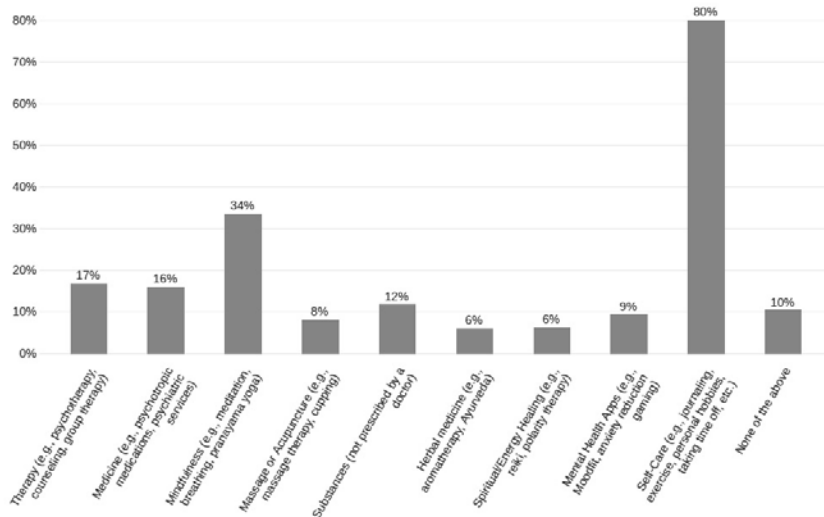
While Gen Z embraces self-care as their greatest proponent of mental health, there is so much opportunity to introduce and capture Gen Z consumers across other wellness categories in the long-term.

SELF-CARE IS EVERYTHING TODAY

Self-care is overwhelmingly Gen Z's #1 method for maintaining their mental wellbeing, followed by mindfulness (34%).



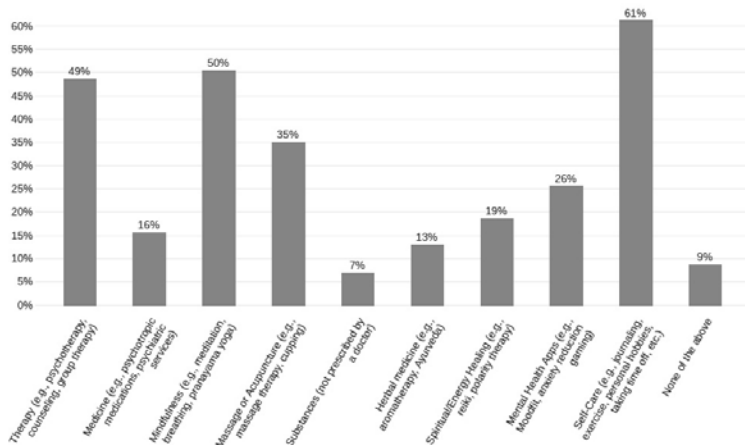
2.9 - What methods of mental health care do you currently use? (Select all that apply)



GEN Z CONSUMERS ARE INTERESTED IN TRYING MORE MINDFULNESS, THERAPY, AND MORE IN THE FUTURE

Despite not using certain forms of care now, Gen Z expresses interest in trying or doing a variety of methods in the future, including therapy, mindfulness, massage, and mental health apps.

2.10 - What methods of mental health care are you interested in trying or doing more of in the future? (Select all that apply)



High-potential services for Gen Z's mental health care:

1. Mindfulness (50%)
2. Therapy (49%)
3. Massage or acupuncture (35%)
4. Mental health apps (26%)

HOW GEN Z DEFINES “SELF CARE”



IN THEIR
OWN
WORDS

Self care looks different for everyone, but for Gen Z, it typically revolves around relaxation, unplugging and spending time away from the noise, and infusing moments of joy in the everyday.

How would you define self care?

RELAXING



Doing what makes you feel relaxed, happy, and in control of the situation, like relaxing baths or taking a nap in the middle of a busy day.

— 21-year-old



It's giving yourself time to relax. I try to practice it, but it's hard. My favorite self-care is sleeping in fresh sheets, when they're still warm from the dryer.

— 18-year-old

TIME ALONE



Doing something for myself/by myself that is something I want to do or does not include others' opinions. I like to take a bath, face mask, get high, watch some tv in my bed with tea or wine.

— 22-year-old



Self-care to me is having time to re-energize myself. Sometimes that's time alone, time with family, a bath, a run... it varies.

— 24-year-old

FINDING JOY



Activities that feed my soul. I like to hangout with my dog and partner and either go on a long walk if I have energy or watch some tv.

— 23-year-old



Self-care as doing activities/making decisions that bring you joy and happiness.

— 24-year-old

GEN Z AND THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

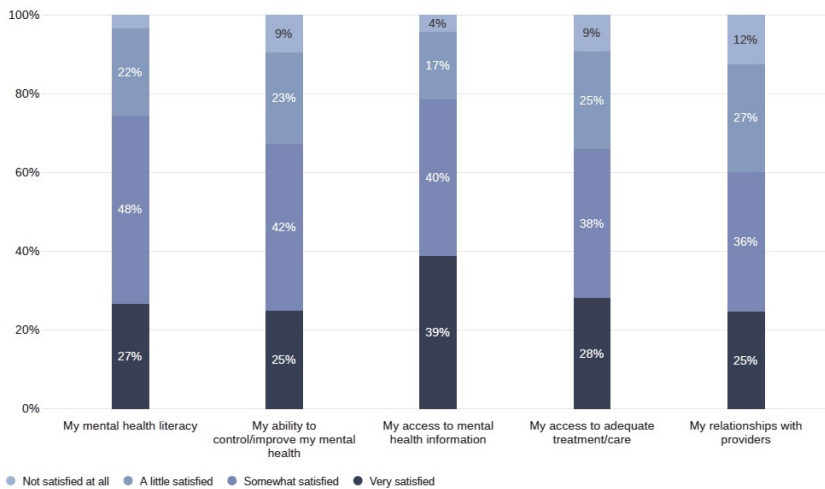
TRUST IN CARE PROVIDERS

Health care providers, wellness brands, and employers alike have an opportunity to better connect and empathize with Gen Z by building relationships and care mechanisms centered around listening, inclusion, and representation.

GEN Z'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS NEED IMPROVEMENT

When it comes to mental health, Gen Z reports the least net satisfaction with their relationships with healthcare providers. They also place a higher emphasis on long-term provider relationships over convenience and immediate treatment like virtual care.

2.11 - In your experience navigating your own mental health journey, how satisfied are you with the following today?



58%
of Gen Z in the U.S. say they want more personal, long-term relationships with providers who understand them – 16% higher than Gen Z's interest in immediate treatment (42%).

“
I'm still trying to find the right fit for therapy.
— 23-year-old, gender fluid

BETTER SUPPORT AND RESOURCES ARE ESPECIALLY NEEDED FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

LGBTQ+ youth are 20% more likely than the total Gen Z population to say they are “not satisfied at all” with their ability to control or improve their mental health.

Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth are 10% more likely to say they are not satisfied with their relationships with mental healthcare providers.

BARRIERS TO SEEKING, RECEIVING CARE



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Gen Z's self-identified barriers to care tend to land in two camps: 1) stigma related to personal or community identity and 2) access & affordability.

IDENTITY & STIGMA

"Being a man, I feel embarrassed when I am struggling, and I find it difficult to reach out."

— 22-year-old

"I second guess a lot of my mental issues, which may stem from being female and never really being taken as seriously by male figures (doctors, teachers, etc.)."

— 18-year-old

"Sometimes I feel like because I am stable and do not suffer from discrimination I should not be suffering from anxiety/ depression."

— 24-year-old

"As a Black man, culturally I'm expected to not express my emotions outwardly, except for anger and disdain."

— 23-year-old

"Being who I am means there can't be weaknesses."

— 23-year-old

"Society makes it seem like a man should just man up and not talk about it but all that does is bottle up a lot of stuff."

— 24-year-old

"I'm a fluid, Latina, woman. So it's hard feeling accepted everywhere."

— 23-year-old

"As a female, sometimes I think that if I bring up a mental health concern people will think that I am overreacting."

— 24-year-old

ACCESSIBILITY

"I had tried to schedule some therapy sessions and have always found it falling through. Appointments would take two months minimum and by the time an availability came around, the time didn't work for me or I was feeling better mentally."

— 24-year-old

"It's hard to find a therapist that relates to me and I'm comfortable talking to about issues around race and sexuality."

— 23-year-old

"Seeing a provider or therapist for mental health requires much more than a quick visit, it requires a referral, a lot of money, and other loops to jump through. For someone without health insurance and a primary care provider, it is not readily available to seek care for mental health needs."

— 23-year-old

"Finding resources that are affordable or free to take care of mental health are a barrier."

— 24-year-old

"Being in a working-class household, I don't think we had the time nor money to talk to a professional about our mental wellbeing. Your bills don't really stop when you're having a bad time, so it's hard to give yourself a break when you can just make ends meet."

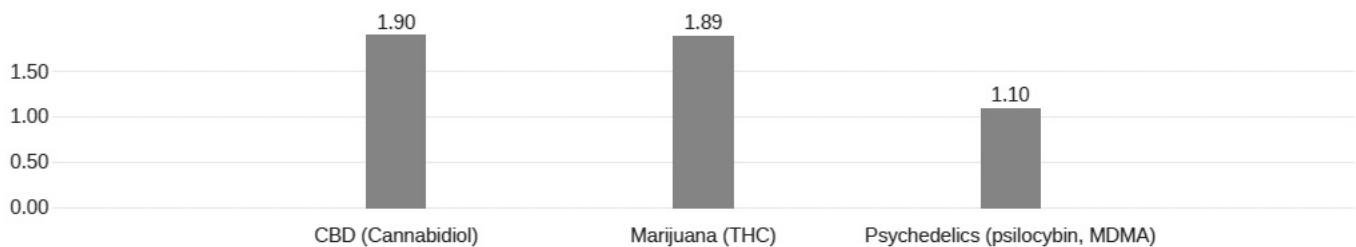
— 22-year-old

NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED TREATMENT METHODS

While alternative methods for mental health care aren't widely embraced by Gen Z today, this generation will lead the charge in normalizing CBD and marijuana care methods as they continue to age.

GEN Z EXPRESSES LOW TRUST IN CBD, MARIJUANA, AND PSYCHEDELICS AS VALID TREATMENTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH TODAY

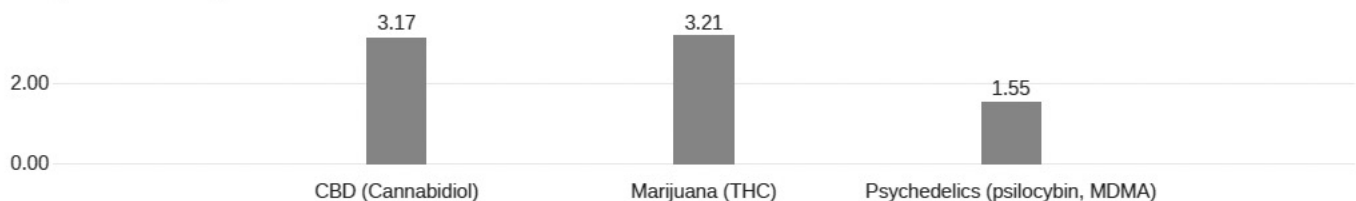
2.13 - How much trust do you have in the below substance treatment methods? (Scale: 1-5)



YET, THEY HAVE HIGH CONFIDENCE THAT CBD AND MARIJUANA WILL BECOME WIDELY ACCEPTED WITHIN THEIR LIFETIME

Gen Z remains unsure about psychedelics as a future treatment method, but they're confident that CBD and marijuana will become more normalized in mental health care.

2.14 - How confident are you that the below substance treatment methods will become widely accepted within your lifetime? (Scale: 1-5)



I think more research is needed on the effects of psychedelics on long term mental health. But for the rest [CBD and marijuana], I think they already have started to become more accepted and will continue to do so.

— 23-year-old

FLUIDITY IN MEDICINE



IN THEIR
OWN
WORDS

As the most diverse generation yet, Gen Z embraces a much more fluid (meaning polycultural, inclusive) approach to mental health care and treatment methods, not only with a greater openness to non-institutionalized approaches, but in their definition of “care” entirely.

Do you think non-institutionalized methods of mental health care (such as marijuana, CBD, psychedelics, healing circles) will be more widely accepted as healthcare methods within your lifetime? Why or why not?

“ There’s more than one way to do medicine.
— 24-year-old

“ I think our generation has proved to be more open to previously unconventional methods of support and non-judgmental in the need to receive support.
— 23-year-old

“ I strongly believe in CBD and specific treatments of marijuana. I also really enjoy taking ashawaganda. I am open to any non-institutionalized methods. I think as time goes on these things will be more widely accepted as studies continue to prove that these things really do help.
— 22-year-old

“ I just know that people are going to try things outside of traditional health care (because of the cost) in order to feel better. I would rather drugs be available so that they can be tested and safe for use, instead of just hoping for the best.
— 22-year-old

“ Not every mental health issue needs a pill. Pills are more so of a last resort to help someone in my view, and if any of the following can help them, in a safe way, before resorting to pills, then I think its worthwhile.
— 18-year-old



A RESILIENT FUTURE

GEN Z'S EXPECTATIONS AND CALLS FOR CHANGE



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Gen Z doesn't just care about mental health empathy and investment at a personal level — they expect it from peers, brands, employers, and cultural leaders.

What would you like to see changed in the current way we talk about mental health?

GENUINE ALLYSHIP OVER PERFORMATIVE ACTIONS



People seem to be comfortable with preaching about how you should take care of your mental health but then burden students and employees with a workload beyond their capacity. I'd love more actionable conversations about what organizations are doing to support individuals rather than just saying 'don't forget self-care!'
— 23-year-old

NORMALIZE THE CONVERSATION



Normalizing the universality of [mental health] is key. Until we can begin to use language that truly shows how mental health affects all and is something to be worked on consistently, the barriers to seeking help when needed persist.
— 21-year-old

CONSIDER FLUID SOLUTIONS



I would like health care professionals to be more open to other options to help mental health issues.
— 22-year-old



The solution is different for everyone. There's no perfect formula. Nobody's issues should be grouped in with somebody else's.
— 23-year-old

KEY TAKEAWAYS

HOW SHOULD BRANDS ACT?

As brands to adapt and respond to Gen Z's ever-changing realities and space in the world, their mental health needs and concerns, we must create a culture of belonging rather than just react to it. Here are 5 tangible actions brands and employers can embrace to be allies and conveners of the next generation's mental wellbeing:

1. **Inspire** Gen Z's optimism and hope when painting a vision of your organization's future. What role can your brand play in solving Gen Z's cultural tensions and shaping the world they want to create?
2. **Create** pathways that clearly, actively listen to Gen Z's challenges and needs. Demonstrate empathy and take Gen Z's perspectives to heart when creating solutions.
3. **Act proactively** in meeting Gen Z-ers where they are in their mental health journeys and tangibly responding to what they need. Put words into actions to earn their trust.
4. **Speak** to Gen Z and their mental health in ways that genuinely align with your company's purpose. How does your brand need to evolve or change to create space for the next generation's openness and fluidity?
5. **Invest** in platforms, touchpoints, and organizational behavior that normalizes mental health as a priority. Consider ways in which your brand or company culture can add genuine value to Gen Z's care and wellbeing in their day-to-day.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



NATALIE
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Strategist

Natalie is a brand planner with experience supporting a variety of clients in CPG, health, and B2B, including Pernod Ricard, Sargento Foods, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

With a background in digital strategy and her passion for youth and polycultural audiences, Natalie helps clients uncover insights and strategic directions that translate to bold positionings and creative campaigns.

Natalie started at Ogilvy as a member of the 2019-2020 Associates Class.

Outside of her day-to-day role, she enjoys facilitating events for Ogilvy's Women's Leadership Professional Network, mentoring students, and serving as an equity, inclusion, and belonging consultant in her hometown community.



SIMONE
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Simone Pratt is a Brand Strategist with over 2 decades of experience, specializing in brand storytelling by uncovering deep consumer-centric insights, and pairing them with a comprehensive understanding of culture and market trends in order to create simple, creative strategic solutions to complex business problems across traditional and digital platforms.

An Effie Award winning Strategist, she's been the voice of the consumer at GreyNY, Saatchi Wellness, Campbell Ewald, at McCann in the DEI space and multicultural agencies

Uniworld, SpikeDDB, GlobalHue servicing Pfizer, HUMIRA, Walmart, Ford, Chrysler and Verizon accounts.

At Ogilvy DC, Simone serves as a Brand Strategy Director having worked on USAID, Tata Consulting Services, USDA Rural Development and Poland Springs accounts. She is currently the DEI Strategy Director for FEMA CERC.

From Long Island NY by way of Connecticut, Simone currently resides in Brooklyn, NY with her husband and teen and tween sons.



SIDDHANTH
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Siddhanth Sequeira is an Associate at Ogilvy working on the Business Development team in DC.

After 6 months at Ogilvy, Siddhanth has been able to engage with a wide variety of disciplines from new business pitches, to brand planning, to creative strategy amongst others.

As a recent graduate from Brown University, Siddhanth's interests and expertise fall between the intersections of social justice and the creative arts. He is a strong proponent in using art, whether it's creative writing, visual art or music as a means of driving social change.



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