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Psychologists and Civil Society Leaders due to Meet to Urgently Address AI and Mental Health

First of its kind convening marks a watershed moment in AI research, expressing a shared commitment not to repeat the mistakes of social media.

On October 19th and 20th, psychologists from around the world will convene at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill to urgently address the psychological effects of AI. Over 75 academics from 45 universities, including Harvard, Oxford, Stanford, MIT, Carnegie Mellon, and Columbia University will be engaged in a series of working groups with leaders spanning advocacy, policy, media and philanthropy seeking to effect policy change at local levels, in Washington, and internationally. Brought together by the AI Psychological Research Coalition (AIPRC) and the Winston Center for Technology and Brain Development at UNC in partnership with the Human Change Foundation and the Future of Life Institute, this gathering is intended to supercharge coordination across sectors.

> ***"We are in a public health emergency,"* said Dalia Hashad, Chief State Affairs Officer at the Future of Life Institute.** ***"AI is fueling devastating real-world harms for children, families, and entire communities, and not even the companies building it understand the psychological damage their products can cause. So it falls to us to find solutions. This convening unites experts from across disciplines to do what industry won't."***

Notable speakers include former Surgeon General of the United States, Vivek Murthy, and MIT Initiative for Technology & Self Founder and professor, Sherry Turkle, NYT bestselling author and leading figure in the field of human machine interaction. Also in attendance will be Baroness Joanna Shields, OBE, UK's first Minister for Internet Safety, representatives from NYU sociologist, Jonathan Haidt's advocacy group, The Anxious Generation, and national child safety advocate and founder of Blessed Mother Foundation, Megan Garcia, recognized for her advocacy against chatbot harms in TIME100 AI 2025 following the loss of her son Sewell.

In preparation for the conference, AIPRC convened a scientific advisory committee, led by Dr. Annie Maheux, Winston Fellow of Psychology and Neuroscience and a member of the Winston Center on Technology and Brain Development, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This group has created the most comprehensive literature synthesis to date set to be released at this gathering, identifying at least seven areas where research is needed to assure AI can be safely integrated into social life. Over the course of the 2 day conference, scholars and stakeholders will address urgent needs for research on how AI use is involved with:

- Mental Illness: Acute Risks, Crisis States, and Fatalities
- Cognitive Functioning: Learning, Executive Functions, and Regulation
- Social Functioning: Attachment and Relationships
- Intrapersonal Processes: Emotion Regulation and Identity
- Overreliance and Dependency: 'Addictive-like' Use
- Epistemology and Information
- Human Development: Implications for Children and Adolescents

Among leading psychologists and AI researchers are representatives joining from nationally recognized civil society groups including JED Foundation, Child Mind Institute, Trevor Project, American Psychological Association, National Institute of Health, Pew Research Center, Brookings Institute. These legacy groups are represented alongside advocacy groups recently playing a key role in the fight over social media, including Fairplay for Kids, Social Media Victim's Law Center, Mothers Against Media Addiction (MAMA), and Tech Justice Law Project. Also present are leaders taking on AI safety advocacy, including Fathom, American Security Fund, Alliance for Secure AI, and the Alliance for a Better Future.

This growing coalition of experts seeks to establish a collective front calling for more research and greater caution concerning the psychological impacts of AI, especially in the replacement of human relationships, like therapists, teachers, friends, and parents. Researchers also express a desire to foster better understanding around how everyday AI use in schools impacts learning in cognition and AI companions, which negatively affects social relationships, identity, and emotion regulation. Like social media, AI use can result in addiction and dependence, and its use as a news and research source has implications for what we take as true about the world. Childhood and human development are the overall focus of the coalition, although many researchers focus on the whole lifespan, including work and aging.

> ***"The psychological science is clear: our happiness, our life purpose, and even our lifespans are tied directly to the quality of our human relationships,"* said Mitch Prinstein of UNC Winston Center on Technology & Brain Development.** ***"This is a moment like no other in our history when we are rapidly outsourcing so many of our interpersonal relationships to robots. We need the study of human behavior more than ever before and the AIPRC will ensure that our emerging science can be used to help shape this critical dialogue at a real turning point for our species"***

Tristan Harris, a founding advisor to the AIPRC and co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, "the conscience of Silicon Valley," had this to say about the conference: "Never before has a field come together so rapidly to take responsibility for understanding a new technology in the interest of assuming its safe adoption. We didn't do this when social media began, perhaps if we had, it might not have taken over a decade to begin to really address the problem."

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