

Promoting Flourishing Policy Brief  
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The U.S. Constitution, its [Preamble](#) informs us, was instituted, among other reasons, “to promote the General Welfare,” a concept with considerable overlap with “human flourishing,” understood as “a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives” ([Lomas, Pawelski, & VanderWeele, 2024](#)). Flourishing arguably consists at least in the enjoyment of mental and physical health, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships, with material security an important means to sustained flourishing ([VanderWeele, 2017](#)).

Notwithstanding our steady growth in GDP per capita and other measures of economic success, the United States has unfortunately experienced declines in recent decades in many domains of flourishing, including social connection ([Murthy, 2023](#)), subjective well-being ([Chen et al., 2022](#)), and aspects of mental and physical health ([Case & Deaton, 2020](#)). We urgently need a reorientation of public policy away from near-exclusive focus on economic goals and toward the promotion of the “General Welfare” or individual and collective flourishing ([Oishi & Diener, 2014](#); [Helliwell, 2021](#)), following both the urging of the Framers and the example of nations, such as [New Zealand](#) and [Bhutan](#), which have begun to place national well-being at the heart of their policy agendas.

The first step in this regard might be to implement an annual, nationally representative assessment of flourishing, on analogy with federal efforts to assess GDP. One approach would be to embed VanderWeele’s (2017) [12-item measure of individual flourishing](#) in the Census Bureau’s [Household Pulse Survey](#). It should be emphasized that measurement is not a neutral act, but arguably constitutes an important intervention in its own right; these data would provide an invaluable resource to policymakers and researchers, but would also potentially provide a spur to address key deficits in national flourishing and a rallying point around areas of real strength.

Furthermore, the White House and federal health agencies should actively disseminate readily-scalable, evidence-based tools for promoting flourishing, such as those catalogued in [VanderWeele \(2020\)](#). These might include regular campaigns to disseminate tools to encourage gratitude ([Emmons & McCullough, 2003](#)), imagining one’s best possible self ([Layous, Nelson, and Lyubomirsky, 2013](#)), or acts of kindness ([Kerr, O’Donovan, & Pepping, 2015](#)). One practice that is particularly ripe for dissemination is forgiveness. Both being wronged and wronging others are common human experiences which negatively affect flourishing, and thus is cause for public health concern ([VanderWeele, 2018](#)). A recent large randomized-controlled trial found that a 2-3 hour, self-directed workbook intervention, based on Worthington’s “REACH” model of forgiveness, proved to be effective in facilitating forgiveness, reducing anxiety and depression, and promoting flourishing ([Ho et al., 2024](#)). The White House and federal health officials would be justified in launching a national campaign to promote forgiveness, particularly through the widespread dissemination of the self-directed [REACH Forgiveness Workbook](#).

Efforts should also be made to strengthen institutional pathways that promote flourishing such as family, work, education, and religious community ([VanderWeele, 2017](#)). Special attention could also be given to fostering greater social connection, particularly through healthier marriages and greater engagement in religious communities. (For further discussion, see our policy briefs on “Social Connection” and “Religious Participation.”)