Stanford



Nina Vasan, MD, MBA

Clinical Assistant Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Bio

BIO

Nina Vasan, MD, MBA'18 is a practicing psychiatrist and pioneer in digital well-being and AI safety. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford University and the Founder and Director of Brainstorm: The Stanford Lab for Mental Health Innovation. Her work bridges academic rigor with product strategy, translating clinical and public health insights into scalable features and psychological safeguards for some of the world's most widely used platforms.

Dr. Vasan has advised global technology companies on embedding mental health into product design, including helping Pinterest develop the well-being platform "Compassionate Search," guiding TikTok on healthy screen-time practices, and partnering with ML Commons to establish the first mental health safety benchmarks for large language models (LLMs).

As the digital landscape expands to include emotionally responsive technologies, Dr. Vasan's work addresses a vital question: What does it mean to have a healthy digital relationship? She developed the Stanford Social Media Safety Plan, featured in The New York Times, to guide healthier user engagement with social platforms. She conducted research on the ethics and efficacy of LLMs in mental health contexts. She is the architect of the Framework for Healthy AI, which redefines how AI products are built. She is currently leading the development of the Stanford GenAI Psychological Safety Plan, offering a blueprint for users navigating the emerging terrain of generative AI with psychological safety at its core.

Her work extends across public, private, and global sectors. She has advised major international campaigns such as Dove's Self-Esteem Project and Real Beauty Prompt Playbook, which explored AI's influence on body image and helped set new industry standards for digital representation. She has served as a scientific advisor to NGOs, including Common Sense Media, The Kevin Love Fund, and The Tupac Shakur Foundation. She also created and taught the first university course on mental health innovation.

A nationally recognized leader in psychiatry and technology, Dr. Vasan founded the American Psychiatric Association's Innovation Lab and served as Chair of its first Committee on Innovation. Her background includes advising two US presidential campaigns, consulting for the United Nations, and working in the Office of the Director-General at the World Health Organization. In the private sector, she worked as a management consultant at McKinsey & Company in Silicon Valley.

Previously, Dr. Vasan served as the Chief Medical Officer of Real, a company reimagining mental health care by providing on-demand digital services for under $1/day. Real's clinical trial demonstrated superior outcomes to traditional therapy across diverse populations, significantly improving depression and anxiety, advancing mental health literacy, and delivering outsized impact for underserved communities.

She is the co-author of the Amazon #1 bestselling book Do Good Well: Your Guide to Leadership, Action, and Social Innovation, praised by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Muhammad Yunus as "the primer for social innovation." She translates insights from patient care and research for the public through thought leadership, with over 150 bylines and quotes in outlets including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Politico, Fortune, Wired, and TechCrunch; over 100 keynotes, lectures, and peer-reviewed presentations at conferences; and has been a guest on The TODAY Show, Armchair Expert, and GOOP with Gwyneth Paltrow.

A graduate of Harvard College, Harvard Medical School, and Stanford's psychiatry residency and MBA programs, Dr. Vasan is helping define the next era of artificial intelligence, ensuring the systems we build are not only technically advanced, but also emotionally intelligent, inclusive, and safe for society.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Clinical Assistant Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

BOARDS, ADVISORY COMMITTEES, PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Chair, Committee on Innovation, American Psychiatric Association (2019 - present)
- Advisory Board Member, HackMentalHealth (2018 - present)
- National Leadership Council, Society for Science and the Public (2017 - present)
- Founder and Chair, Psychiatry Innovation Lab, American Psychiatric Association (2015 - present)
- Committee on Mental Heath Information Technology, American Psychiatric Association (2017 - 2019)
- Presidential Board of Trustees Workgroup on Access & Innovation in Psychiatric Care, American Psychiatric Association (2017 - 2018)
- Joint Reference Committee, American Psychiatric Association (2016 - 2017)
- Council on Quality Care, American Psychiatric Association (2015 - 2017)
- National Advisory Board, Cogito.org (2005 - 2015)
- Health Policy Advisory Committee, Co-Leader of Battleground State Outreach, Obama for America (2008 - 2009)
- Committee on Publications of the Massachusetts Medical Society, The New England Journal of Medicine (2008 - 2009)

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- Board Certification, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology , Psychiatry (2018)
- MBA, Stanford Graduate School of Business , Business (2018)
- MD, Harvard Medical School , Medicine (2013)
- AB, Harvard College , Government (2006)

COMMUNITY AND INTERNATIONAL WORK

- Brainstorm: The Stanford Lab for Mental Health Innovation

LINKS

- LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/in/ninavasan
- Stanford Lab for Mental Health Innovation: http://www.stanfordbrainstorm.com

Research & Scholarship

CURRENT RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY INTERESTS

At Brainstorm: The Stanford Lab for Mental Health Innovation, we lead the way in digital well-being: translating cutting-edge research into practical solutions for healthier tech use.

We are first and foremost practicing physicians; we treat patients and families. Then, grounded by the foundational oath in medicine to “do no harm,” we help companies build products that prioritize user health with responsibility and care. Our work has shaped platforms used by millions—helping Pinterest design "compassionate search", guiding TikTok in healthy screen-time management, and partnering with ML Commons to establish the first mental health safety benchmarks for large language models (LLMs).

Brainstorm is further committed to “do good” by leveraging these technologies to build a healthier digital world. We advised Dove’s Self-Esteem Project and Real Beauty Prompt Playbook, which studied AI’s impact on beauty and set new digital standards of representation. Additionally, after sharing the results of research conducted with the Stanford Center for AI Safety on the ethics, efficacy, and safety of LLMs providing mental health support, we developed the “Framework for Healthy AI” to guide industry best practices in AI product innovation.

As we apply this expertise to improve users' daily lives, it’s clear that addressing digital intimacy presents unique challenges compared to traditional human relationships. This technology is still emerging, and we are all adapting to it in real-time as it evolves. The big question is: How can we help users cultivate healthy, safe digital relationships?

After seeing success with the Stanford Social Media Safety Plan, which reduced harmful digital behaviors among users, we are now designing the Stanford GenAI Psychological Safety Plan (GPS). The Stanford GPS is a tool to help individuals, tech developers, and policymakers navigate this new terrain and make informed decisions about AI’s role in mental health.

Check out the start of the Stanford GPS in Fortune: This 4-question quiz from Stanford psychiatrists can help protect from the dangers of AI.

PROJECTS

- Building "Compassionate Search" with Pinterest

Publications

PUBLICATIONS

- **Do Good Well: Your Guide to Leadership, Action, and Social Innovation**
  Vasan, N., Przybylo, J.
  Wiley/Jossey-Bass.2013
- **Phenomenological Description of the Experiences of Teenagers With Critically Ill Parents.** *The journal of nursing research : JNR*
  Barr, M., Thakur, A., Thvar, V. K., Dupee, D., Vasan, N.
  2025; 33 (1): e370
- **Risks from Language Models for Automated Mental Healthcare: Ethics and Structure for Implementation (Extended Abstract)**
  Grabb, D., Lamparth, M., Vasan, N., Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence
  ASSOC COMPUTING MACHINERY.2024: 519
- **Incorporating Digital Interventions into Mental Health Clinical Practice: a Pilot Survey of How Use Patterns, Barriers, and Opportunities Shifted for Clinicians in the COVID-19 Pandemic.** *Journal of technology in behavioral science*

Johansen, S. L., Olmert, T., Chaudhary, N., Vasan, N., Aragam, G. G.
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