

A HISTORY OF HEALTHY MINDS

1984 > 2026



1984

Dr. Richard J. Davidson joins the faculty at UW–Madison and establishes the University’s first lab focused on emotion and the brain, called the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience. Early research in the lab focuses on mood and emotion in children and adults, concentrating on how variations in mood and emotion relate to wellbeing and mental health disorders.

1992

In Dharamsala, India, Dr. Richard J. Davidson meets the Dalai Lama. “His Holiness challenged me and asked me why we were not using the tools of modern neuroscience to study qualities such as kindness and compassion rather than negative qualities of mind such as depression and anxiety. I had no good answer, and on that day, I made a commitment to His Holiness and to myself that I would do everything in my power to help place these positive qualities on the scientific map.”

1995

The Birth of Affective Neuroscience: Along with colleague Steve Sutton, Dr. Richard J. Davidson publishes a review paper in the journal *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, calling on the scientific community to support and increase collaborations in the growing field of affective neuroscience, an area that examines how the neural structure and activity in the brain influences a person’s emotion and mood.

1996

The Roots of Emotion: Dr. Richard J. Davidson’s lab and collaborators are the first to use MRI technology to show activation of the amygdala—the part of the brain linked to fear and anger—in response to emotional pictures and cues in the lab. Davidson receives the prestigious MERIT award from the National Institute of Mental Health, providing critical funding to continue work in the neuroscience of emotion, that same year.

2001

Mind of the Meditator: The lab welcomes Tibetan Buddhist monk and long-term meditator Matthieu Ricard and leads the first experiment in the world to use fMRI imaging and EEG techniques to look at meditation’s impact on the brain in long-term meditation practitioners.

2006

Dr. Richard J. Davidson is named one of TIME Magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world.

2009-10


The Center for Healthy Minds, first called The Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, is founded at UW—Madison’s Waisman Center. With the support of generous donors and community members, the Center expands the Lab of Affective Neuroscience’s scope to include applied research on wellbeing outside the lab in classrooms and the workplace.

2014

Humin, (called Healthy Minds Innovations until 2026), is formed as the external affiliated nonprofit dedicated to extending the mission of the Center for Healthy Minds, taking the discoveries and insights gleaned from CHM research and transforming them into tools to help people learn the skills for wellbeing.

2015-17

In response to the crisis in college student mental health, faculty from UW–Madison, Penn State and University of Virginia came together in 2015 to develop The Art and Science of Human Flourishing (ASHF), a 3 credit, semester-long academic course, which combines the sciences and the



humanities, and seeks to support university students in their mental health and overall flourishing. Since the pilot offering in 2017, nearly 1500 students have taken the course at UW–Madison, which is currently open to all undergrads.

2016

The Healthy Minds framework is conceived as part of Dr. Cortland Dahl’s doctoral dissertation. In it, Dahl proposed four groups of trainable skills as crucial for wellbeing: awareness, connection, insight and purpose. This idea is foundational for wellbeing research at CHM as well as the innovation of wellbeing practices and tools at Humin.

2017

The Kindness Curriculum is created and released for free to the public. More than 25,000 people have signed up to receive it globally. The mindfulness-based curriculum was developed over two years by expert Laura Pinger, following a 2015 study by Dr. Lisa Flook. The study’s findings, focusing on preschool students, suggested that positive qualities of mind can be taught at a young age and such training can yield increases in grades and pro-social behavior such as kindness and sharing.

2019

Humin launches the free Healthy Minds Program mobile app based on the Healthy Minds Framework, reaching people across 140 countries, and earning multiple accolades for “best meditation app.”

CHM launches the Loka Initiative to support faith-led environmental and climate efforts locally and around the world by helping build capacity of faith leaders and culture keepers of Indigenous traditions, and by creating new opportunities for projects, partnerships, and public outreach.

2020-21

Healthy Minds on Campus is created by students who took The Art & Science of Human Flourishing course. The organization is student-led, with the purpose of providing a space for all students to discuss and learn about evidence-based practices that support wellbeing and to integrate habits, behaviors and activities into their lives that promote flourishing. The student organization is open to all UW–Madison students.

2024

CHM and Humin receive a prestigious grant from Templeton World Charity Foundation, driving wellbeing personalization, enhancing workforce-focused interventions, and exploring new populations to expand its research. In addition, CHM secures a contract worth up to \$14 million from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency of the US Department of Defense (DARPA). The funding supports a highly novel, multi-phase study, aiming to identify hybrid interventions based on neuroscience and clinical science to increase wellbeing, with an ultimate goal of suicide prevention.

2025

CHM and Humin, celebrate their respective 15th and 10th anniversaries. In reflection, few if any partnerships like theirs exist, where two organizations with a shared vision and collaborative missions, work together with the goal to make wellbeing accessible to everyone. The MUSE Initiative (Music for Universal Social and Emotional Wellbeing) launches at CHM, led by neuroscientist and artist Dr. Dalal Abu Amneh, alongside CHM Founder and Director Dr. Richard J. Davidson. MUSE is a collaborative research and practice-based initiative aimed at exploring and harnessing the healing power of music and the arts.

2026

The Center for Black Excellence and Culture and the Center for Healthy Minds, sign a Memorandum of Understanding to unite, expand knowledge, and increase opportunities for Black members of communities to flourish in Madison and throughout the state of Wisconsin.

Humin completes a major organizational rebrand. The transition to Humin reflects the organization’s evolution from a wellbeing tools provider to a global nonprofit enterprise, building science-based tools, programs, and services that can scale wellbeing for millions of people across workplaces, schools, and communities.