

Healthcare Reimagined:
*The VA's Whole Health Revolution as a
Blueprint for a Purpose-Driven Paradigm Shift in Healthcare*

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What is Whole Health?

Whole Health is a **transformative approach** to health and healthcare that **re-orientes the system's purpose** from primarily managing disease to **cultivating multidimensional well-being rooted in what matters most to the individual.**

This definition draws on the Veterans Health Administration's Whole Health System of Care and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Whole Health framework, situating Whole Health as both a **person-centered philosophy and an operational system model**, not merely a term applied loosely to individual services or wellness offerings.

Within the VA, Whole Health is defined as an approach that ***“supports health and well-being, centered around what matters to the person, not just what is the matter with them.”*** The Whole Health System of care begins by understanding an individual's life mission, aspiration, and purpose, and then collaboratively develops a ***Personal Health Plan*** that aligns clinical care with personal goals, values, and the individual's broader context. The system integrates peer-led exploration of mission and purpose, personalized health planning, and well-being programs alongside both conventional medical care and evidence-informed complementary and integrative health approaches.

Shifting the Question: From “What's the Matter?” to “What Matters?”

For decades, healthcare reform has focused on identifying problems: rising costs, fragmented delivery, inequities, chronic disease, clinician burnout. We have asked, “What is the matter with the system?” and designed solutions to fix deficiencies. Yet, despite tremendous effort, the system largely reproduces the outcomes it was designed to produce—managing illness rather than generating health.

This blueprint proposes a different starting point: we begin with what matters to people.

We do not define health merely by the absence of disease or by whether a clinician can intervene in crisis. *We define it through the lens of our lives:*

- The ability to live fully with purpose and connection
- Access to care that aligns with values and priorities
- Support for physical, emotional, and social well-being
- Opportunities to thrive within our families, communities, and environments

By centering the question on “What matters to people regarding the healthcare system?”, we shift from a reactive, problem-focused mindset to a proactive, person-centered orientation.

The Seven-Domain Framework for Whole Health System Transformation

Domain	Description
1. Foundational Philosophy	Establishes a shared purpose-driven vision centered on meaning, values, healing, and whole-person care.
2. Evidence & Rationale	Builds the scientific, economic, and organizational case for Whole Health transformation.
3. System Design & Infrastructure	Develops operational structures, workflows, staffing models, and environments that support Whole Health.
4. Payment & Policy Alignment	Aligns incentives, reimbursement structures, and organizational policies with Whole Health principles.
5. Implementation Pathway	Provides a structured roadmap for introducing, piloting, scaling, and sustaining transformation.
6. Measurement & Learning	Uses meaningful outcomes, continuous learning, and real-time feedback to guide improvement.
7. Communication & Culture Change	Supports culture transformation through storytelling, leadership modeling, trust-building, and shared language.

Core Leverage Points

- *Purpose-Centered Care* – reconnecting healthcare to meaning and what matters most.
- *Leadership Humility* – fostering listening, curiosity, and shared leadership.
- *Trust-Building* – strengthening relationships with patients, teams, and communities.
- *Cultural Coherence* – aligning culture with compassion, belonging, and healing.

- *Value Alignment* – ensuring policies, incentives, and resources support Whole Health goals.

Implementation Pathway

The framework operationalizes Whole Health transformation through five progressive phases:

1. *Discover*: Assess needs, engage stakeholders, and define purpose.
2. *Design*: Co-create models aligned with values and context.
3. *Pilot*: Test innovations, refine processes, and build momentum.
4. *Scale*: Expand successful models and align infrastructure and policy.
5. *Sustain*: Embed practices into organizational systems and culture.

The blueprint is designed to structure the system around these priorities:

- *Listens first, treats second* — care begins with understanding what matters to the individual, not the diagnosis.
- *Integrates across domains* — clinical care, behavioral health, social supports, community services, and self-care pathways are coordinated around personal goals.
- *Measures what matters* — outcomes are defined by well-being, function, connection, and resilience, not solely by disease metrics or utilization.
- *Supports sustainable transformation* — by aligning incentives, workforce, and infrastructure with what truly matters, the system is designed to reproduce health rather than illness.

The blueprint is not just about reforming what is broken—it is about redesigning for what matters. It asks a radically human-centered question:

“If we built healthcare around the lives, values, and aspirations of the people it serves, what would it look like?”

Thank you

for visiting the poster presentation! -Emily Larsen
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