

TCR 2025: Pathways to Well-being: The Power of Policy Advocacy

A working mother struggles to care for her disabled son. She earns too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to afford health insurance. Who will care for him if she gets sick? School breakfast and lunch programs help to fill the gap for families that struggle with hunger but how will they feed everyone during summer without school meal support? A woman who is 18 weeks pregnant rushes to the hospital when she wakes up cramping and bleeding. The ER doctor cannot follow the recommended care for this woman who is suffering a miscarriage. The patient's blood pressure is rising, and the doctor is worried she may die but must wait for the legal department to authorize care.

These are not hypothetical stories. For millions of Americans, they reflect the reality faced when politics take precedence over people's well-being. Ten states have decided to opt out of Medicaid expansion leaving many families in medical limbo (McCarthy 2024). Many states have opted out of a new federal nutrition program intended to provide direct support for summer meals to feed children when school is out (Hiltzik 2024). In states where abortion bans put both women and doctors at risk of prosecution, women's healthcare is suffering, and doctors are being forced to put politics before patient safety (Westwood 2024).

When politicians make policy along a partisan divide, the well-being of their constituents is not their top priority. Who has the power to amplify the voices of the people harmed by these political fights? Nonprofit organizations often provide direct care and support for the people hurt by policies that undermine their well-being by offering free clinics that provide care to the uninsured, feeding families that struggle with hunger, and helping women get the care they need no matter where they live. But these organizations are also in a position of power to advocate for policy change by helping community members and leaders see and understand the direct harm that results from policy decisions. In our current environment, **advocacy for policy change is a moral imperative**. However, nonprofit leaders fear losing their nonprofit tax status if they advocate for policy change (Libby 2024).

One definition of advocacy is to "represent and advance [people's] interests within a particular system" (Libby 2024, p.23). Nonprofits offer essential services through programming and initiatives but "policy advocacy has the potential to bring about long-term positive societal impact" in ways that transform the system (Bublitz et al., 2024). If we only treat the symptoms of a disease, a person will continue to suffer chronic illness. Similarly, if we do not address the root cause issues that trap people in poverty and perpetuate systemic inequality, people will continue to suffer. Policy advocacy has the power to address the root causes of inequity and uplift people's well-being. **In this TRACK 2 TCR session, we explore the vital role of advocacy in creating social change.**

Organization and Plan of Work for TCR 2025:

Prior to TCR 2025 our team will use a relational engagement approach to investigate the role of nonprofits in advocating for policy and social change. [Midwest Academy](#) is an organization that provides training in advocacy, organizing, and movement-building. They offer customized training to help nonprofit organizations embrace their important role to advocate for racial, economic, and social justice. Our team will complete custom training with Midwest Academy to better understand the power of and methods for advocating for social change. Then, we plan to conduct qualitative research with nonprofit organizations and philanthropic leaders to better understand their hesitations and concerns about stepping into the role of advocate. Finally, our team will conduct a robust literature review to explore advocacy in a marketing context. We plan to arrive at the 2025 TCR Conference armed with literature, experiences, and data to collaboratively outline a conceptual framework for advocacy as a path to policy change to advance societal well-being.

Timeline and Activity Plan for TCR 2025:

November 2024	Team Kick-off and planning
January 2025	Advocacy Training with Midwest Academy
January 2025	Interview Planning/IRB
Feb-March 2025	Interviews
April 2025	Literature gathering, preliminary theme identification
May 2025	Conceptualizing, iterative team discussions
June 2025	TCR June 12-15, 2025, on site in Washington DC
July 2025	Writing in teams: literature review, conceptual model
August 2025	Writing in teams: conceptual model, discussion ideas
September 2025	<i>Journal Target, dates TBD</i>
October 2025	
November 2025	

Team: Track chairs **Melissa Bublitz & Laura Peracchio** will lead a team of researchers to collaboratively develop a conceptual framework for understanding the diverse pathways for advocacy to support well-being and create social change. Together the team will write a conceptual framework paper to be submitted to an academic journal.

Lauren Block (Professor)	Camryn Cobb (PhD Student)	Jennifer Escalas (Professor)
Elizabeth Miller (Professor)	Gia Nardini (Assistant)	Beth Vallen (Professor)
Dee Warmath (Associate)	Hillary Wiener (Assistant)	<i>Non-profit/Advocacy Partner</i>

References:

Bublitz, M.G., Peracchio, L.A., Davis, B., Du, K., Escalas, J. E., Gloukhovtsev, A., Hansen, J., Lindsey-Warren, T., Miller, E.G., Wiener, H. (2024) “We’ll Stand by You: Supporting Grassroots Nonprofits,” (working paper)

Hiltzik, M. (2024, Jan 2), [The GOP war on children's health - Los Angeles Times \(Business\)](#)

Libby, P. (2024) “Advocacy as a Moral Imperative” in Technology, Activism, and Social Justice, J. G. McNutt (ed), pp 22-35.

McCarthy, R. (2024, Mar 22), [Florida advocates want the state to be the next to expand Medicaid: NPR](#)

Westwood, R. (2024, Mar 19), [Pregnancy care has changed in alarming ways since Louisiana banned abortion: Shots - Health News : NPR](#)