

MAHA' is moving into Trump's White House. Here's who RFK Jr. could bring along for the ride

Entrepreneurs, lawmakers and media personalities support a new approach to chronic disease

The "Make America Healthy Again" movement, led by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., top, includes a wide cast including, clockwise, Vani Hari, blogger, Sen. Ron Johnson, and Mark Hyman, a doctor entrepreneur. *Christine Kao/STAT; Photos: Getty*



By Isabella Cueto

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Chronic Disease Reporter

WASHINGTON — MAGA, meet MAHA.

The sweeping election victory for President-elect Donald Trump this week also marks the start of an ambitious anti-chronic disease campaign, "Make America Healthy Again," that has become central to Trump's health agenda.

The leading MAHA man is Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the lawyer, environmentalist, and anti-vaccine advocate whom Trump has vowed to unleash upon federal health care agencies in his next term. Among Kennedy's list of policy proposals are banning direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising, cracking down on ultra-processed foods, and rooting out scientists and health advisers with ties to the food and pharmaceutical industries.

A rotating cast of other characters — old and new; influencers, entrepreneurs, and lawmakers — has amplified Kennedy's arguments, pushing them harder and to more people (including on the most popular podcast in the world). Some are old faces, made visible by opposing Covid-era rules or vaccines. Others are newer to the political realm but have provocatively framed the chronic disease problem, helping MAHA

gain traction. All of these figures could become even more influential as Trump assembles his team of loyalists for a second administration.

Here are 10 people to know in the world of MAHA.

Nicole Shanahan

Lawyer and entrepreneur

Shanahan was relatively unknown before Kennedy chose her — a Democrat-turned-Independent — as his vice-presidential running mate last spring before he aborted his presidential run. Since then, she's become a vocal MAHA advocate, playing on her long-standing skepticism of health care, including vaccines and in vitro fertilization. As a lawyer, tech entrepreneur, and founder of the private foundation Bia-Echo, she has bankrolled research into alternative therapies for fertility, such as sunlight exposure, after her struggle to conceive using IVF. She also sponsored a bipartisan summit on hunger, nutrition, and health before the White House's 2022 nutrition conference.

Shanahan's line has been promoting "unity" between MAGA and MAHA. During a live show with right-wing pundits in September, she offered media personality Tucker Carlson a "Make America Healthy Again" cap as a symbol of the crossover. In her emerging persona as a Trumpworld darling and "warrior mom," and with vast wealth at her disposal, Shanahan is poised to be a MAHA staple.

Casey Means

Physician and entrepreneur

Like Shanahan, Stanford-trained doctor Casey Means came to wellness because she was disillusioned. Instead of continuing on the white coat track, Means dropped out of her residency program to become a functional medicine doctor and start the health technology company Levels. In the years since, Means has steadily grown her profile. She gained a following with her colorful social media presence, promoting a healthful diet as a form of disease prevention. This year, she published a self-help and diet book, "Good Energy," with her brother, Calley.

And then, interviews with Carlson and ultra-popular podcaster Joe Rogan blasted her into the mainstream. Her medical degree boosted her credibility as she ran through a litany of concerns and statistics about U.S. fertility rates, medical school education, nutrition guidance, corporate greed, and children's health. She was, according to Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), the inspiration for a hot-tempered Senate roundtable on chronic disease. In a public appearance earlier this year, Kennedy said he'd consider people like her to lead the nation's health agencies if given his pick. Means is considered to be on the short list for a role atop the FDA, The Washington Post reported.

Calley Means

Entrepreneur

Calley Means, older brother to Casey, is an entrepreneur with a history in conservative politics. His main job, as co-founder of the startup Truemed, squares nicely with the MAHA agenda — the company helps people with health savings and flexible spending accounts get reimbursed for wellness products, such as gym memberships and supplements. And after spreading the prevention gospel in right-wing media for a while, Means formed a relationship with Kennedy and appeared on his podcast. Once Kennedy dropped out of the race and endorsed Trump, his MAHA message started getting airtime on the campaign trail. Means saw how “electrifying” the chronic disease focus was, started spending more time in Washington, and activated his knack for producing blistering soundbites. He's become a top spokesman for MAHA on the social media site X, where he often shares troubling data points about disease prevalence, confronts researchers about their conflicts of interest, and reposts video clips of the MAHA crew (including himself) in action.

Vani Hari

Influencer

Vani Hari has over 2 million Instagram followers and a robust blog about food additives and chemicals under her more recognizable nickname, “Food Babe.” For years she has railed against companies like Kellogg's

for including ingredients in U.S. foods that aren't allowed in other countries. Her speech at the Senate roundtable elicited vocal reactions from attendees. Hari flashed side-by-side comparisons of ingredient lists on popular products in the U.S. and in European countries. She fired up the crowd over artificial food dyes and preservatives in kids' cereal, and then invited them to storm the Kellogg's headquarters with her in Battle Creek, Mich. There, she delivered a petition with over 400,00 signatures asking the company to remove the ingredients. People in the crowd chanted and carried MAHA signs.

Better food regulation, including the oversight of additives, is one of the MAHA movement's priorities. And while the FDA is planning to improve its screening process for food additives, Kennedy's group is likely to push for a deeper reform of the agency and the way it handles food. Hari could help build public support for such an overhaul, or even help identify targets for the new administration's crackdown.

Marty Makary

Surgeon and author

Marty Makary, a Johns Hopkins surgeon and author, became a go-to commentator during Covid for his critiques of vaccine mandates, school closures, and the CDC's transparency during the pandemic. He's now a mainstay on social media. He is a MAHA fan, using the hashtag to promote his book on "medical groupthink," and is reportedly being considered for a role leading the FDA — one of the agencies he slammed during the pandemic for sluggish drug approval process.

Del Bigtree

Television producer

If there is a man behind the MAHA machine, it's Bigtree, the former communications director for Kennedy's presidential campaign and CEO of the MAHA Alliance super PAC. The PAC spent \$4.5 million on the 2024 election, both backing Trump and opposing Vice President Kamala Harris. In the weeks leading up to Election Day, the MAHA Alliance

launched over a dozen different ads on Facebook and Instagram, garnering millions of impressions.

Bigtree is a former television producer who worked on “Dr. Phil” and created films for Kennedy’s anti-vaccine advocacy group, Children’s Health Defense, before pivoting directly into the policy world. In 2016, Bigtree founded the Informed Consent Action Network, which has sowed skepticism about vaccines and pharmaceutical interventions. The group’s revenue grew from \$1.4 million in 2017 to \$13.4 million in 2022, according to tax documents. Bigtree was also tapped by Kennedy to be part of a “vaccine safety delegation” arranged by Trump in 2017 at the National Institutes of Health. As a Kennedy megaphone, he is able to spread the MAHA message far and wide.

Jessica Reed Kraus

Blogger

On the eve of Election Day in 2016, Jessica Reed Kraus was hoping for a Hillary Clinton victory. This week she spent the night in Palm Beach with Kennedy’s friends and family, posing for a picture with Kennedy’s wife, Cheryl Hines. In a short time, Kraus has become an influencer with special access to the Trump-Kennedy inner orbit. As a “mommy blogger” with over 1 million Instagram followers and a profitable newsletter, she holds particular sway with a group Trump has struggled to reach this cycle: women.

While Kraus’ role is more promotional — she’s a Kennedy supporter — than political, she was featured this month alongside Casey Means, Shanahan, and Trump surrogate Tulsi Gabbard on billboard trucks in Pennsylvania as part of a women-focused ad campaign paid for by American Values 2024.

Chip Roy

Congressman

House Republican Chip Roy (Texas) was a Trump critic who memorably went against his party as one of just a few Republicans to vote to certify

the 2020 election results. Now, he's adopting MAHA. Roy, a cancer survivor and member of the far-right House Freedom Caucus, wrote an op-ed supporting policies out of Kennedy's notebook. "First, we must break the grip of the cronyism that feeds us poisoned food and makes a quick buck off the 'cure.' Then, we must free the system using direct primary care and HSAs — among other things — to destroy the third-party paper pushers' power to deny us an affordable and personalized relationship with the health care provider of our choice," Roy's piece in *The Hill* said. Kennedy and Calley Means gave it their stamp of approval on X. Roy has since carried the MAHA mantle on the platform (run by Trump ally Elon Musk), posting a long and winding explanation of his position and his mistrust in health experts and government institutions.

Mark Hyman

Physician and influencer

Mark Hyman became a familiar face with regular appearances on "The Katie Couric Show" long before Trump's first presidency. In the years since, he's expanded his empire to include books, social media influencing, podcasting, and a startup company, Function Health. The company, which is often name-dropped by MAHA folk, sells extensive lab tests and analysis of the results for just under \$500.

While quieter on the MAHA-promotion front, Hyman is seemingly friendly with Kennedy, embarking on a hike of the Santa Monica Mountains earlier this year. It's a valuable connection. Hyman is one of a generation of wellness entrepreneurs that stand to benefit from a turn toward functional medicine and alternative therapies. In 2023, Hyman interviewed Kennedy for his Youtube channel, which has 1.3 million subscribers. Hyman also went on Kennedy's podcast.

Function Health already had a cult following before the MAHA movement gathered force: the company's investors include the actors Zac Efron and Matt Damon, comedian Kevin Hart and basketball player Joel Embiid, as well as Casey Means. He's returned the favor, too, by investing in the Means' companies.

Ron Johnson

Senator

The Republican senator from Wisconsin hosted the standing-room-only roundtable on chronic disease in Washington earlier this year — a mind-melding of many prominent online health and wellness influencers, in real life. He later published an op-ed supporting MAHA priorities. While Johnson is a ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and a member of the budget and finance committees, he's remained on the outskirts of influence in Congress.

With the backing of the Trump White House, that could change.

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