

With a Glitzy Hollywood Event and a Big Fundraising Goal, Selena Gomez Takes on Mental Health

Ade Adeniji | October 12, 2023



THE RARE IMPACT FUND HOSTS A PRIVATE SCREENING OF "SELENA GOMEZ: MY MIND AND ME" CREDIT: CINDY ORD/GETTY IMAGES FOR RARE IMPACT FUND

With nearly a half-billion followers between Instagram and Twitter, Selena Gomez has one of the biggest platforms around. The 31-year-old Hollywood superstar got her start in the biz at age nine with "Barney & Friends," and then rose to fame on the Disney Channel. These days, she's drawing rave reviews in "Only Murders in the Building," which she also executive produces. Then there's her music career and her massive cosmetics brand, Rare Beauty, which was inspired by her third studio album, "Rare." The beauty brand's stated aim is to "break down unrealistic standards

of perfection" by promoting inclusivity and addressing mental health initiatives and education.

Gomez is not alone in her dedication to mental health. Celebrities and athletes are speaking up about their own challenges, and other stars like Ryan Reynolds and Meghan Markle have been vocal about these issues. And for Gomez, this cause is taking the spotlight in many of her ventures. Gomez is one of three founders of [Wondermind](#), a platform premised on the idea that mental wellness requires the same daily effort as physical fitness does. The company raised \$5 million last year from Serena Williams' venture capital firm Serena Ventures.

Gomez is also now in a position to do a lot more on the cause — aside from her popularity, her net worth seems to have soared in recent months, pegged at \$800 million by [Celebrity Net Worth](#) — and mental health is at the core of her philanthropy. Founded in 2020, her [Rare Impact Fund](#) aims to raise \$100 million in the next 10 years to expand access to mental health services and education for young people around the world. Last week, Rare Impact Fund held its inaugural fundraiser in Hollywood. A day prior, I was able to catch up with Selena Gomez and Rare Impact Fund President Elyse Cohen to ask them a few questions, and then attended the star-studded event to find out more about how her mental health mission is playing out.

In our coverage of celebrities and athletes, we've hammered home the truly unique position these figures are in through the combined power of their wealth and platforms. But it was only when I fired off a quick Instagram reel of the star-studded benefit event, receiving more engagement in 30 minutes than any of my charming childhood photos did in a week, that this power really hit home. When someone like Selena Gomez speaks out, millions listen.

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A Hollywood superstar speaks

Selena Gomez was born in Grand Prairie, Texas, outside of Dallas, to a Mexican father and a mother with Italian ancestry. “I was raised by a single mom in Texas with a humble background,” Gomez told me. In 2020, she revealed that she had bipolar disorder, which spurred her resolve to focus on mental health in her early philanthropy, including supporting communities like the one she came from.

When she launched Rare Impact Fund, Gomez picked an ambitious \$100 million fundraising goal because she wanted to come out of the gates with something big and bold. And 1% of all Rare Beauty sales will go back into the foundation. Gomez and Cohen both acknowledge that the [mental health space is underfunded](#), and these resources are especially critical, particularly for young people. “We want to reach people that may feel not heard. I just want to get down into all of those areas and break down the stigma as much as I can and continue to share my platform,” Gomez said.

Elyse Cohen pointed out that even before the brand’s nonprofit arm was started, Rare Beauty itself was founded with a social impact mission in mind. Before the brand launched, Rare Beauty convened a Mental Health Council made up of figures including Scott L. Rauch, psychiatrist in chief at Mass General Brigham McLean; Marc Brackett, founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence; and Lindsay Peoples, editor in chief of The Cut. And the brand and foundation continue to lean on experts to do their work.

“Every day we share content and resources with Selena’s community and the brand’s community. They’re vetted information and content for young people. Young people don’t know these organizations, but they turn to platforms like Selena and brands that they love as a source of support. So we’ve positioned ourselves to be that place that can disseminate information,” Cohen told me.

Rare Impact Fund works across three priority areas: social and emotional education; communities of practice and practitioner pipelines; and suicide prevention and crisis support. In 2023, the charity made grants to organizations including UCLA Friends of Semel Institute, Trans Lifeline, Black Teacher Project, and Batyr, an Australian youth and mental health charity. Close to 66% of Rare Impact Fund’s grantees are steered by BIPOC leaders, which Gomez and Cohen are both proud of. “It’s been a big angle of our philanthropy and our giving to support organizations like that,” Cohen added.

So far, Rare Impact Fund has given \$3.3 million toward mental health organizations around the world.

Raising funds in style

The inaugural Rare Impact Fund: A Night of Radiance & Reflection in Los Angeles was held in Hollywood at Nya Studios on Cahuenga Boulevard. When I arrived, there was a throng of fans buzzing near the entrance, waiting for Selena Gomez’s arrival. Just before sunset in the comfortable fall air, I first landed on a velvet red carpet that spanned an entire patio, passing a TikTok booth, an open bar, food trucks and fashion booths. Face fans with Selena Gomez’s likeness were handed out to all guests and while I pondered on the double meaning, I later realized it was also a clever way to get a headcount. Then we were all beckoned inside an auditorium, where Martin Short, Selena Gomez’s “Only Murders in the Building” costar, handled MC duties.

It wasn’t long before Gomez herself took the stage and said, “To be honest, I threw up this morning.... This has been the culmination of a lifelong dream for me, but it has also stemmed from some of the darkest moments in my life.” Once the ice was broken, she spoke powerfully

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about what inspired her to start Rare Impact Fund and how excited she was about the foundation’s next chapter.

The night also involved an auction led by the wisecracking Short, including a movie night with Paul Rudd, lunch with Camila Cabello, and Taylor Swift concert tickets, which ultimately sold for \$15,000. Celebrity guests included Taylor Lautner, rapper Tyga, Sofia Carson and longtime friend Francia Raisa, who spoke about the importance of mental health, having been inspired by Gomez’s own leadership.

“She’s a brown woman, and there’s such a stigma within Latinx households about mental health and seeking help, and she has such a big platform and such a big voice, so if this could help a little girl talk to her parent about mental health and they can hear that Selena Gomez is advocating for it, then it’s worth it,” Raisa said.

Selena face fan in tow, when I circled back with the Rare Impact team after the event, they told me that they were still working through the totals from benefit. But the event sold out with 350 people in attendance. Even pre-benefit, Rare Impact Fund had raised \$8 million in funds.

The charity engages in a handful of fundraising campaigns throughout the year, always done in partnership. “It’s very small convenings, but mostly one-on-one collaborations with corporate partners, high-net-worth individuals focused on youth mental health, [and] a lot of next-generation philanthropists that care very much about that work,” said Cohen, adding that most of their supporters are with them for the long haul.

Looking ahead, Gomez, Cohen and the rest of Rare Impact Fund will continue to push towards their \$100 million fundraising goal. Cohen, who once worked for former First Lady Michelle Obama, notes that there’s a lot of discussion around the proper role of celebrities like Selena Gomez in philanthropy and social impact. But the key, she says, is that these stars stay authentic and pick an issue that they truly care about. For Selena Gomez, that’s mental health and her rising charity.

“We want to continue doing what we've been doing, but triple it, and do it a zillion times more. That's the goal,” Gomez said.

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