

Trump's War on Science

I. Executive Summary

Since January, Trump has launched an unprecedented and illegal attack on science and scientists. Trump is not only denying scientific truth but actively seeking to undermine it. This is part of the aggressive movement toward authoritarianism that the Trump administration is pursuing.

As of April 2025, the Trump administration has terminated at least \$13.5 billion in health funding, including 1,660 grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and arbitrarily fired thousands of workers who ran America's scientific infrastructure.¹

In this first-of-its-kind analysis, the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Minority Staff documented the far-reaching scope of Trump's attacks on science and their impact on public health. In search of more power, the Trump administration has attacked science by defunding research, silencing scientists, sowing chaos, and spreading misinformation.

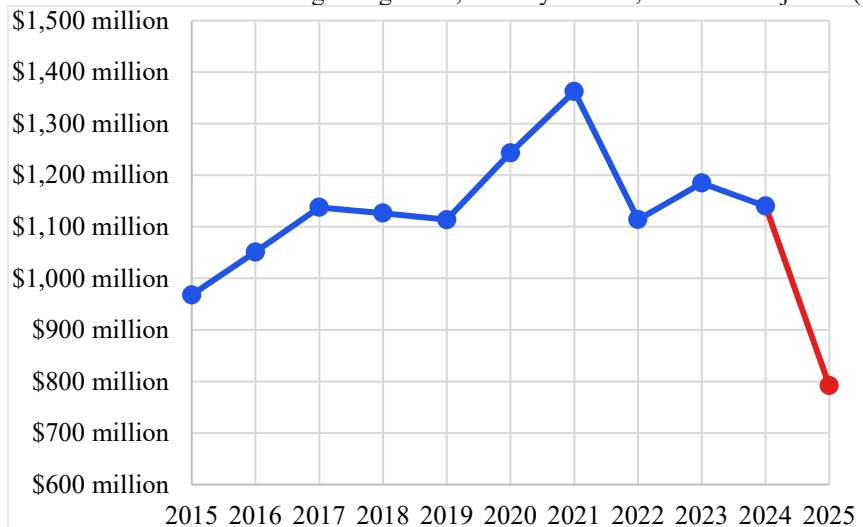
Key Findings

- **Defunding Research**

- **Trump officials effectively cut \$2.7 billion in National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding in the first three months of 2025.** For example, Trump cut cancer research by 31 percent through March, compared to the same timeframe last year.²

Figure 1: Trump Has Slashed Cancer Research Funding by 31%

National Cancer Institute Grant Funding Obligations, January–March, Inflation-Adjusted (2015-2025)



- **Trump officials are weaponizing medical research for unrelated policy objectives.** Over 715 NIH grants worth \$815 million have been terminated.³

¹ HELP Minority staff analysis of terminated HHS grants posted as of April 4, 2025.

² HELP Minority staff analysis of National Cancer Institute grant funding obligations, inflation-adjusted, 2015-2025.

³ HELP Minority staff analysis of terminated HHS grants posted as of April 4, 2025. See Section II.

- **Silencing Scientists**
 - **Trump officials are suppressing what scientists can say.** One HHS official told HELP Minority Staff: “We get requests from the media to provide scientific expertise. Normally, [political appointees] would never get involved in this type of non-high-profile stuff but now they have to approve every single media request.”⁴
 - **Trump officials are controlling how scientists work together and make decisions.** At least 108 scientific meetings have been cancelled or delayed.⁵ For example, HHS terminated the Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children—a decision a patient group said “risks the preventable death and suffering of children with treatable rare disorders.”⁶
 - **Trump officials are erasing scientific data.** At least 175 public health datasets from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website and 135 datasets from a central HHS data repository were deleted.⁷ According to one doctor, “purging public health agency websites of data” has left physicians “without vetted guidance on how to treat patients.”⁸
- **Sowing Chaos**
 - **Trump officials are arbitrarily firing thousands of workers.** The agency in charge of the health and well-being of all Americans, including tens of millions of seniors, children, and working families, may have its workforce cut down to less than half the size of Tesla, a car company, and less than one-sixth the size of UnitedHealth Group, a company HHS is charged with regulating.⁹
 - **Trump officials have not provided HELP Minority Staff with any details in writing about the mass firings at the agency level and the functions the employees served, despite repeated requests.**
- **Spreading Misinformation**
 - **Trump officials have undermined the important role that vaccines play in preventing disease during the single largest measles outbreak in over 25 years¹⁰ – with 1,001 cases reported, 126 hospitalizations, and 3 deaths as of May 2nd.** They have also spread false information regarding treatment options.
 - **Trump officials have lied about the consequences of their actions.** Elon Musk says “no one” has died from the foreign aid freeze. But researchers estimate nearly 200,000 people have already died, and a global vaccine program estimates 1.2 million children – equivalent to 60,000 classrooms of kids – will die because of cuts that will save taxpayers 0.005 percent of the federal budget.¹¹

Trump’s war on science is not making America healthy again. It is making Americans and people throughout the world sicker.

⁴ Interview with HHS official, April 3, 2025.

⁵ HELP Minority staff analysis of canceled or delayed advisory committee meetings and study sections.

⁶ National Organization for Rare Disorders (2025). <http://rarediseases.org/ceo-statement-on-termination-of-achdnc/>

⁷ HELP Minority staff analysis of HHS and CDC grants using the Internet Archive. *See* Section III.

⁸ Interview with physician, April 2, 2025.

⁹ HELP Minority staff analysis of HHS press release, and company financial filings. *See* Section IV.

¹⁰ “Measles Surge in Southwest Is Now the Largest Single Outbreak Since 2000” Teddy Rosenbluth (2025) *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/22/health/measles-southwest-outbreak.html>

¹¹ Stephanie Nolen. “U.S. to End Vaccine Funds for Poor Countries.” *New York Times* (2025).

II. Defunding Research

The Trump administration has undermined the federal scientific research infrastructure. Nowhere is this more visible than at NIH, the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world.

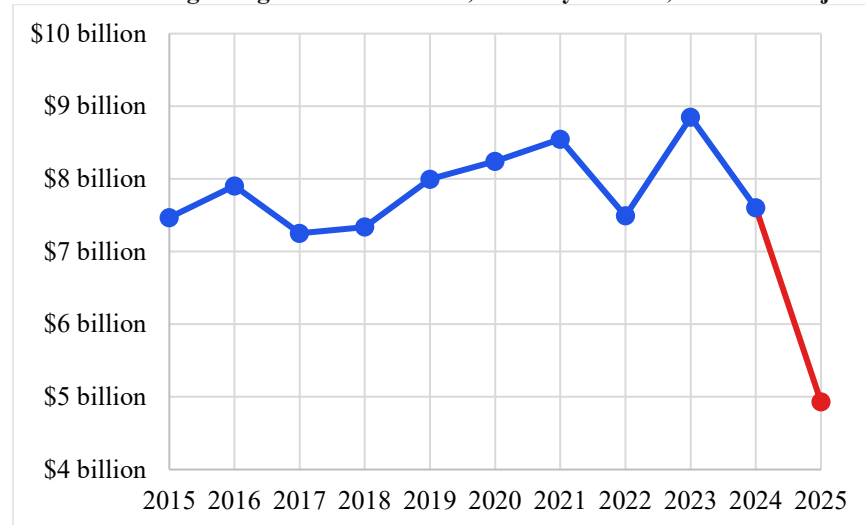
To quantify the impact of Trump’s attacks on NIH, HELP Minority Staff analyzed NIH grant funding data from the NIH RePORTER and ExPORTER databases.¹² To understand the impact of grant terminations, HELP Minority Staff used HHS’s self-reported spreadsheet, which is updated weekly.¹³ In addition, HELP Minority Staff used the latest indirect cost data available (FY2023) from the NIH RePORTER together with the proposed 15 percent indirect cost cap to estimate the potential losses if the indirect cost proposal were instituted.

The administration has effectively cut NIH funding, terminated federal research grants, slashed indirect research support, and shut down NIH labs.

Effectively Cutting NIH Funding

NIH funding commitments in the first three months of 2025 dropped dramatically from previous years – reversing over a decade of investment in medical research. The agency has committed \$2.7 billion less to researchers searching for new cures through March, compared to the same timeframe last year, representing a 35 percent cut.¹⁴ This sudden collapse in funding is the clearest sign of the Trump administration’s effort to defund science.

Figure 2: NIH Grant Funding Obligations in Millions, January–March, Inflation-Adjusted (2015-2025)



In addition, the number of new research grants fell to its lowest level in more than a decade. These cuts halt the discovery of future cures and force early-career scientists out of the field. However, the Trump administration’s funding freeze did not just affect new research. Renewals of existing

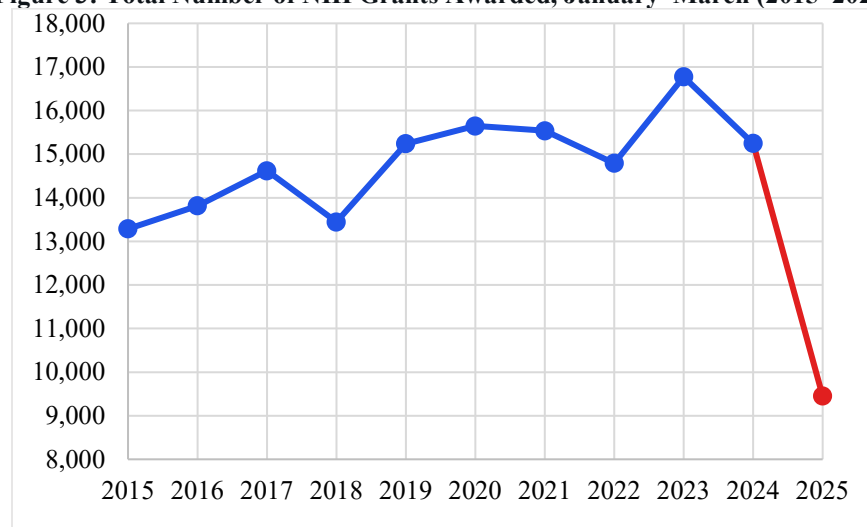
¹² We considered every grant awarded by the NIH in the January-March period from 2014-2025, and staff computed the total number of grants and the total obligated funding for those grants. We then filtered for grants administered by the National Cancer Institute, as well as new (Type 1) and competitive (Type 2) grants, and then computed aggregate statistics of the total amount of funding obligated, and the total numbers of grants awarded.

¹³ HELP Minority staff analysis of terminated HHS grants posted as of April 4, 2025.

¹⁴ HELP Minority staff analysis of NIH grants 2014-2025.

grants also plummeted, disrupting studies that had already gone through peer review, some of which had already started to produce results.

Figure 3: Total Number of NIH Grants Awarded, January–March (2015–2025)



Terminating Federal Research Grants

As of April 4, 2025, the Trump administration has formally canceled at least 715 NIH research grants worth \$815 million, cutting off funding to researchers at universities, hospitals, and nonprofit institutions across the country as the administration weaponizes medical research for unrelated policy objectives.¹⁵ Among the canceled NIH grants:

- **\$5.3 million Cancer Center Support Grant** for the *Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center at Columbia University*, which funds cancer prevention, treatment, and clinical trial infrastructure for thousands of patients annually.
- **Approximately \$100,000 for two Alzheimer’s disease research grants**, one studying how pathways impacting immune proteins in the body could help clear brain plaques, and another examining how to identify genetic pathways to preserve memory.
- **\$900,800 postdoctoral training grant in cardiovascular disease** – the leading cause of death in the United States – supporting clinical research on heart failure, stroke, and high blood pressure.
- **\$260,000 pediatric endocrinology and diabetes research training grant**, which prepared new investigators to address rising rates of childhood obesity.
- **\$4.2 million for the Infectious Diseases Clinical Research Consortium Leadership Group**, which led national clinical trials on vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics for emerging infectious diseases including influenza, malaria, and tuberculosis.

HELP Minority Staff analysis shows that the Trump administration’s terminations of grant programs affected research on urgent health challenges. Cancelled grants include those focused on infectious disease, mental health, maternal and reproductive health, cancer, and aging. These five categories alone account for almost \$700 million in lost NIH research funding.

¹⁵ HELP Minority staff analysis of terminated HHS grants posted as of April 4, 2025.

Table 1: Terminated NIH Grants by Research Category (Top 5 Impact Areas)

Category	Funding Lost	Number of Grants Affected
Infectious Disease	\$533.8 million	272
Mental and Behavioral Health	\$68.8 million	150
Neurology and Aging	\$54.0 million	37
Maternal, Child, Reproductive, and Gender Health	\$26.6 million	59
Cancer	\$15.1 million	32

Slashing Indirect Research Support

In February 2025, the Trump administration proposed a 15 percent cap on NIH “indirect” cost reimbursements.¹⁶ These reimbursements support the infrastructure behind federally funded research: utilities, lab security, IT, animal care, biosafety, biological sample storage, and more. Historically, institutions have negotiated indirect rates averaging 27 to 28 percent, with major research centers sometimes exceeding 60 percent.¹⁷ If this proposal were to be enacted, it would result in over \$4 billion in annual losses to scientific research.¹⁸ Researchers have warned that the indirect cost cap would make certain types of scientific research – especially long-term studies in Alzheimer’s disease and other degenerative diseases – impossible to sustain. One Alzheimer’s disease researcher said:

The private sector, and in particular, pharmaceutical companies, rarely invest in this type of lifesaving research because it requires decades of steady work and is therefore cost-prohibitive... It is not an exaggeration to say that the true cost of the NIH’s decision may be that thousands of American lives are needlessly degraded or sacrificed.¹⁹

Universities and disease advocacy groups have warned that this policy, if enacted, would force layoffs, facility closures, and a reduction in the scientific workforce. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the cap will have a “devastating impact” and “impede critical scientific advances that patients need.”²⁰

HELP Minority Staff analysis of FY2023 NIH funding found that the Trump administration’s proposed 15 percent cap on indirect costs, had it been in place in previous years, would have removed billions in support for critical disease research – affecting over 150,000 grants.²¹

¹⁶ “Supplemental Guidance to the 2024 NIH Grants Policy Statement: Indirect Cost Rates.” Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health (2025). <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-25-068.html>

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ HELP Minority staff analysis of NIH indirect costs funding. See also: NIH announces it is slashing funding for indirect research costs. Alexandra Marquez and Evan Bush. *NBC News* (2025). <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/nih-announces-slashing-funding-indirect-research-costs-rcna191337>

¹⁹ Declaration of Ken A. Dill. *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. National Institutes of Health* (1:25-cv-10338). <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mad.280590/gov.uscourts.mad.280590.6.7.pdf>

²⁰ CF Foundation Responds to the National Institutes of Health Announcement to Limit Funding for Indirect Costs.” Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (2025). <http://www.cff.org/press-releases/2025-02/response-to-nih-announcement-limit-funding>

²¹ HELP Minority staff analysis of NIH indirect costs funding.

Table 2: Modeled Effects of The Trump Administration’s Indirect Cost Proposal Using FY2023 Data (Top 5 Impact Areas)

Category	Funding Lost	Number of Grants Affected
Neurology and Aging	\$1.63 billion	11,175
Mental Health and Substance Use	\$1.26 billion	11,152
Infectious and Emerging Diseases	\$1.19 billion	10,998
Cancer	\$1.01 billion	9,884
Maternal, Child, Reproductive, and Gender Health	\$796 million	7,464

Shutting Down NIH Labs

In addition to cutting grants to outside researchers, the Trump administration has taken unprecedented steps to shut down labs run by federal scientists across NIH campuses. Among the terminated or frozen intramural programs:²²

- A lab advancing prenatal and fetal medicine to understand fetal development and working toward future prenatal therapies for Down syndrome.
- A team leading one of NIH’s few clinical studies on sickle cell disease. The study focused on leg ulcers and pain crises affecting hundreds of patients nationwide.
- A nationally recognized intramural program focused on Alzheimer’s disease and aging, which tracked biological and social drivers of dementia and helped develop predictive tools for long-term decline and disability.

Shutting down these programs discards decades of taxpayer investment and jeopardizes significant medical progress.

Case Study: President Trump Cuts Cancer Research

Cancer remains the second leading cause of death in the United States.²³ Trump campaigned on a promise to “cure cancer.”²⁴ Yet, the Trump administration’s actions have threatened to reverse decades of progress at the National Cancer Institute (NCI). A HELP Committee Minority Staff analysis shows a 31 percent decline in cancer research grant funding in the first three months of 2025, compared to the same time frame in the previous year.²⁵

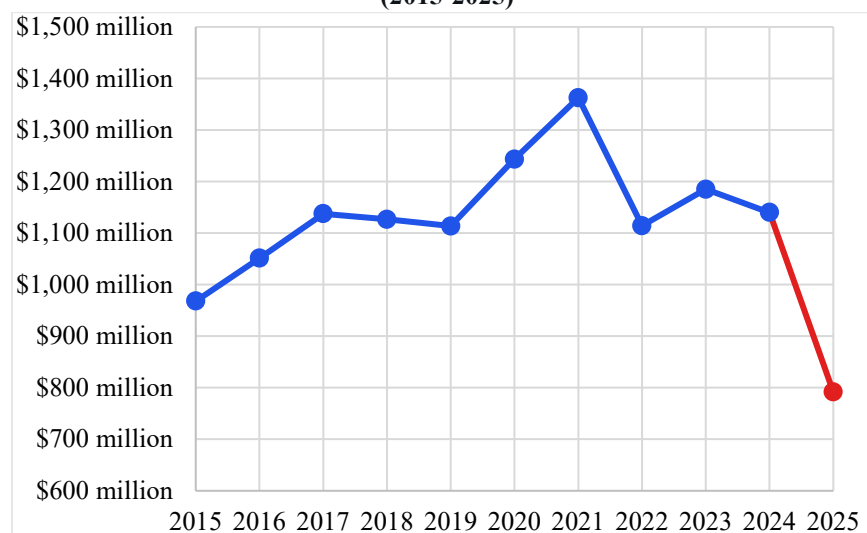
²² Interviews with NIH officials, April 2025.

²³ Chronic Disease Indicators: Cancer. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024). <https://www.cdc.gov/cdi/indicator-definitions/cancer.html>

²⁴ “Trump vows to cure cancer and eradicate AIDS as he kicks off reelection campaign.” Christopher Brito. *CBS News* (2025). <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-cure-cancer-aids-joe-biden-orlando-campaign-rally/>

²⁵ HELP Minority staff analysis of NCI grants 2014-2025.

Figure 4: National Cancer Institute Grant Funding Obligations, January–March, Inflation-Adjusted (2015–2025)



According to the American Association for Cancer Research, “the weakening of NIH threatens to halt momentum in cancer research, delaying the development of new therapies and limiting access to lifesaving clinical trials for patients across the country.”²⁶

III. Silencing Scientists

Despite promising “radical transparency,” the Trump administration has radically restricted scientific speech. HELP Minority Staff reviewed public records and spoke with federal workers to understand the restrictions. HELP Minority Staff also reviewed the Federal Register, advisory committee agendas, and other records to assess the impact of Trump policies on scientific decision-making. In addition, HELP Minority Staff used the Internet Archive to compare the number of scientific datasets available to the public before and after Trump’s inauguration.²⁷

The Trump administration has moved to suppress scientific communication, impose political control over the work of federal scientists, and erase scientific data.

Suppressing Scientific Communication

Since January 20, 2025, scientific staff at NIH, CDC, and other health agencies have been subject to restrictions requiring all public-facing communication to be cleared by political appointees. This includes responses to media inquiries, scientific presentations, journal submissions, and conference attendance.

One HHS official said:

We get requests from the media to provide scientific expertise. Normally, [political appointees] would never get involved in this

²⁶ “AACR Statement and Call to Action Regarding the Administration’s Recent Actions Affecting NIH and the American People.” American Association for Cancer Research (2025).

²⁷ This uses the methodology of the paper: “Disappearing Data at the U.S. Federal Government.” Freilich, et al. *NEJM* (2025). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/abs/10.1056/NEJMp2502567>

type of non-high-profile stuff but now they have to approve every single media request.²⁸

Examples include:

- A federally-funded researcher was prohibited from attending a national conference and responding to a journalist because their study's conclusions did not align with the administration's views.²⁹
- A former CDC employee reported that during the administration's first weeks, all scientific publications in process – including those already peer-reviewed – were frozen. Topics perceived as inconsistent with executive orders were blocked entirely.³⁰
- Multiple officials confirmed that scientific communication with the World Health Organization has also been severely restricted.³¹

In addition to broad clearance requirements, researchers across the federal science agencies report that certain scientific topics now trigger heightened scrutiny or political review before publication, presentation, or grant consideration. Internal communications guidance at the National Cancer Institute, for example, requires political clearance for materials referencing “vaccines,” “peanut allergies,” “obesity,” and even “Cancer Moonshot.”³² Meanwhile at the National Science Foundation, internal lists show that grant proposals using words like “trauma,” “diversity,” or “women” are flagged for additional internal review.³³ This restriction on the flow of ideas will slow new discoveries.

Shutting Down Scientific Decision-Making

The Trump administration has also imposed political control over how federal scientists work together and make decisions. Since January 20, 2025, at least 108 scientific meetings have been canceled, delayed, or significantly altered, including 78 NIH grant review panels and 30 advisory council meetings that guide federal research priorities.³⁴ These disruptions have delayed clinical trials, stalled thousands of research proposals, and eliminated expert committees like the Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children, which helps update screening guidelines for 14,000 babies born with serious conditions each year.³⁵ The National Organization for Rare Disorders, a patient group, noted that eliminating the Committee “risks the preventable death and suffering of children with treatable rare disorders.”³⁶

Additionally, the administration has postponed and cancelled advisory committee meetings with vaccine experts. In February, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)

²⁸ Interview with HHS official, April 3, 2025.

²⁹ Interview with HHS official, April 3, 2025.

³⁰ Interview with former CDC official, March 25, 2025.

³¹ Interviews with current and former HHS officials, March and April 2025.

³² Annie Waldman and Lisa Song. “National Cancer Institute Employees Can’t Publish Information on These Topics Without Special Approval.” ProPublica (2025). <http://www.propublica.org/article/national-cancer-institute-flagged-topics-vaccines-autism-rfk-jr>

³³ Carolyn Johnson, Scott Dance, and Joel Achenbach. “Here are the words putting science in the crosshairs of Trump’s orders.” Washington Post (2025). <http://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2025/02/04/national-science-foundation-trump-executive-orders-words/>

³⁴ HELP Minority staff analysis of canceled or delayed advisory committee meetings and study sections.

³⁵ “NORD CEO Statement on the Termination of the Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children.” National Organization for Rare Disorders (2025). <http://rarediseases.org/ceo-statement-on-termination-of-achdnc/>

³⁶ *Id.*

postponed its triannual meeting a week before it was set to occur.³⁷ The draft agenda for the meeting included determining whether a recently approved meningitis vaccine should be recommended and details on a program that provides free shots to low-income children.³⁸ The meeting was eventually rescheduled in April with agenda items removed. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also canceled a meeting to decide on the composition of next season's flu vaccine without explanation.³⁹

Erasing Scientific Data

The Trump administration has also revoked public access to important public health information. Since January 20, 2025, at least 175 public health datasets from the CDC's website and 135 datasets from a central HHS data portal have been deleted.⁴⁰ The Trump administration has also removed websites and public health tools used daily by scientists, clinicians, and state health departments. In February, *The New York Times* reported that over 8,000 HHS websites were offline.⁴¹ After a lawsuit, some data were later restored but Trump officials added a disclaimer falsely suggesting the datasets are inaccurate.⁴²

Among the datasets the administration initially removed was the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index, a tool used by state and local governments, emergency management personnel, and others for disaster preparedness and planning. The administration also removed datasets on chronic disease, injury, disability, HIV, and adolescent health which providers and researchers used "to conduct groundbreaking research" to prevent and treat diseases and other conditions, and inform public health officials at every level of government.⁴³

Removing data will make it harder to understand how the health of different populations has changed with time, and whether programs focused on improving the health of Americans are actually working.

Former HHS officials characterized taking down the datasets as an "erasure of science," noting that the datasets were the products of years of work to study the health of Americans.⁴⁴ A former HHS official told HELP Minority Staff: "People have paid for and relied on this information and expertise to protect themselves and their families and now it's going away."⁴⁵ According to one doctor, "purging public health agency websites of data" would leave health care workers "without

³⁷ "CDC vaccination committee meeting postponed days after RFK Jr. took over at HHS." Devna Bose. *Associated Press* (2025). <https://apnews.com/article/vaccines-cdc-rfk-trump-acip-74ad20e0a5430bfd6b48d35900c34d13>

³⁸ Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2025). <https://www.cdc.gov/acip/downloads/agendas/agenda-2025-02-26-28-508.pdf>

³⁹ "F.D.A. Cancels Meeting of Vaccine Experts Scheduled to Advise on Flu Shots."

⁴⁰ HELP Minority staff analysis of HHS and CDC grants using the Internet Archive. <https://healthdata.gov/browse>, <https://data.cdc.gov/browse>. See also: "Disappearing Data at the U.S. Federal Government. Freilich, et al. *NEJM* (2025). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/abs/10.1056/NEJMp2502567>

⁴¹ "Thousands of U.S. Government Web Pages Have Been Taken Down Since Friday." Ethan Singer. *New York Times* (2025). <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/02/upshot/trump-government-websites-missing-pages.html>

⁴² *Doctors for America v. Office of Personnel Management, et al.* (1:25-cv-00322) <https://www.citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/1-Complaint-8.pdf>.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Interviews with former HHS officials, March and April 2025.

⁴⁵ Interview with former HHS official, April 7, 2025.

vetted guidance on how to treat patients.”⁴⁶ Another researcher noted the Trump administration’s “deletion of invaluable datasets was akin to 21st century book-burning.”⁴⁷

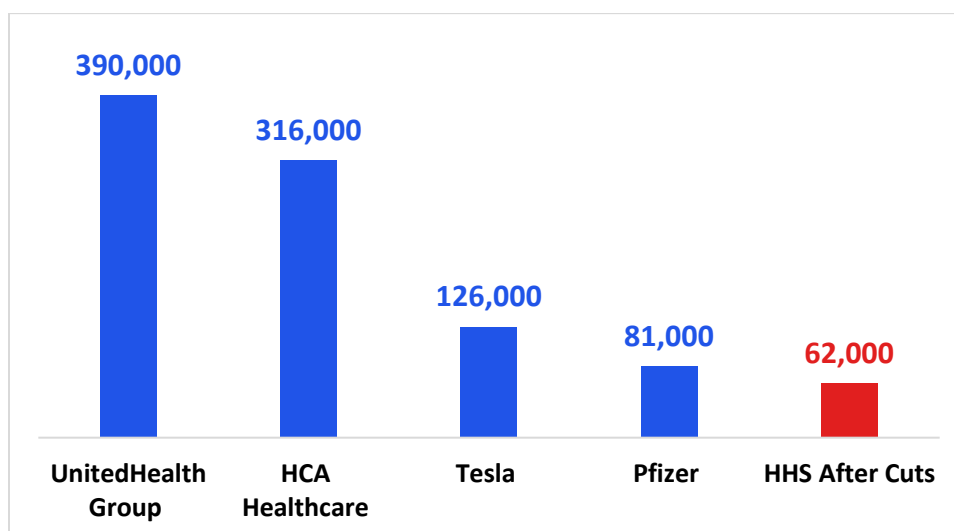
IV. Sowing Chaos

The Trump administration has arbitrarily fired thousands of workers. HELP Minority Staff reviewed public records and spoke with former federal workers, industry officials, and experts to understand the impact of the firings. HELP Minority Staff also repeatedly requested information from HHS on the cuts, firings, and reorganization.

Federal workers warn that loss of public capacity will translate into greater private power. One former HHS official told HELP Minority staff, “I chose to go into federal service because I care about people. I want to be able to answer to the taxpayer, not the shareholder.”⁴⁸

According to public reports, at least 10,000 employees at HHS agencies have been terminated and an additional 10,000 have retired, quit, or been forced out by the administration.⁴⁹ In other words, the agency in charge of the health and well-being of all Americans including tens of millions of seniors, children, and working families may be cut down to less than one-half the size of Tesla, a car company, and less than one-fifth the size of the for-profit hospital corporation HCA Healthcare and less than one-sixth the size of UnitedHealth Group.^{50,51,52} Pfizer, a single drug company, is poised to be larger than all of HHS.⁵³

Figure 5: Number of Employees Across Organizations



⁴⁶ Interview with physician, April 2, 2025.

⁴⁷ Interview with researcher, April 2, 2025.

⁴⁸ Interview with former HHS official, March 17, 2025.

⁴⁹ “HHS Announces Transformation to Make America Healthy Again.” The White House (2025).

⁵⁰ <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restructuring-doge.html>

⁵¹ Tesla, Inc. Form 10-K, United States Securities and Exchange Commission (2024).

⁵² <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1318605/000162828025003063/tsla-20241231.htm>

⁵³ HCA Healthcare, Inc. Form 10-K, United States Securities and Exchange Commission (2024).

<https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0000860730/000095017025020134/hca-20241231.htm>

⁵² UnitedHealth Group (2025). <https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/uhg/people-and-culture.html>

⁵³ Pfizer, Inc. Form 10-K, United States Securities and Exchange Commission (2024).

<https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0000078003/000007800325000054/pfe-20241231.htm>

HHS has not provided HELP Minority Staff with any details in writing about the mass firings at the agency level and the functions the employees served. Nor has HHS provided a full accounting of the branches and divisions at HHS eliminated in the agency’s restructuring.

On March 27, 2025, HHS publicly announced that the March reduction in workforce would impact “about 10,000 full-time employees.”⁵⁴ On April 15, 2025, HHS told HELP Minority Staff that the total reduction in workforce would impact 8,421 employees. (These figures do not include probationary employees terminated in February 2025.)

Table 3: HHS Employees Terminated under March 27 Reduction in Force as provided by HHS on April 15

Division	Number of terminated employees
Food and Drug Administration	2,519
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response	2,473
National Institutes of Health	1,312
Office of the Secretary	516
Health Resources and Services Administration	400
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services	322
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration	197
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality	123
Administration for Community Living	90

Trump’s arbitrary firings of HHS workers is already threatening the health and well-being of tens of millions of seniors, children, and working families. For example, HHS has fired:

- A division at FDA that helped millions of Americans get faster access to low-cost generic prescription drugs;
- A team at CDC that supported states responding to environmental health threats like pollution, wildfires, and lead in drinking water; and
- Critical staff in NIH’s clinical cell-therapy program, delaying cancer treatment for patients with advanced cancer.

A 43-year-old woman told HELP Minority Staff about her journey after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer.⁵⁵ She was recently accepted into an NIH T-cell receptor trial after having gone through surgery to remove her tumor, radiation, three liver surgeries, and 48 rounds of chemotherapy. She sees the NIH trial as her last hope for treatment. She recently went through a 6-hour appointment at the NIH Clinical Center to harvest her T-cells, but was told that her infusion of these cells would have to be delayed by at least a month, because there are fewer scientists now. She told HELP Minority Staff: “The reality is that by reducing money and staff, the NIH will not be able to produce my treatment and it might cost me my life. That does not sound like an administration that cares about its people.”

These mass firings have led to chaos across HHS. Additional consequences include paralyzing the public health response, gutting scientific infrastructure, and raising prescription drug prices.

⁵⁴ “HHS Announces Transformation to Make America Healthy Again.” The White House (2025). <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restructuring-doge.html>

⁵⁵ Interview with cancer patient, April 2025.

Paralyzing Public Health Response

The chaos at federal agencies has impacted public health at every level. Multiple former HHS officials described how mass terminations and unclear guidance from the administration had made it nearly impossible for local, state, national, and international partners to plan activities that rely on federal support. Data collection and public health programs have been plunged into uncertainty.⁵⁶

For example, Trump officials terminated the entire CDC team that supported state and local initiatives to monitor and respond to a range of environmental health threats that directly impact residents, including pollution, wildfires, radon, harmful algal blooms, and lead in drinking water. This will undermine how states understand and respond to these threats, making Americans sicker.

Additionally, the administration rescinded over \$12 billion in public health and mental health funding for states that was provided by Congress to support COVID response and recovery activities as well as infectious disease and mental health programs.⁵⁷ The decision to claw back funding from states has led to layoffs of public health department staff and cuts to funding in local communities.

Gutting Scientific Infrastructure

This disruption has been severe at NIH, where the administration's hiring freeze and termination of key personnel has halted core scientific operations. These impacts go beyond grant terminations. In conversations with HELP Minority staff, NIH staff reported:⁵⁸

- "Initially, we had whole labs full of people that were fired. Complete chaos. Nobody had any idea if their tests were being run," said staff at the NIH Clinical Center—the nation's largest hospital devoted entirely to clinical research. Staff explained how clinical care had been abruptly stopped or interrupted. "This administration has a lot of blood on their hands. We're not political people. We just want to take care of people."
- Without the ability to onboard new fellows, some labs are shrinking to two or fewer staff. One postdoctoral fellow warned that her lab – focused on brain function and disorders like autism – "will collapse" if the freeze continues. "This isn't just a loss of momentum," she said. "It's wasted taxpayer dollars, lost discoveries, lost training opportunities, and missed opportunities for treatments that could save and improve lives. Americans will die."
- Labs relying on central resources do not have the necessary reagents or equipment to conduct studies. A fellow who helps process donated human brains for Alzheimer's research reported that funding freezes "have critically disrupted our work," threatening decades of collaborative studies. "Thousands of studies are under threat."
- One recent Ph.D. graduate, who was set to study a rare pediatric kidney disease, had his fellowship frozen days before starting. "The freeze on my research has stalled critical research that could help uncover new treatment strategies."

⁵⁶ Interviews with former HHS officials, April 2025.

⁵⁷ "States sue administration for rescinding billions in health funding." Devna Bose and Lindsey Whitehurst. *Associated Press* (2025). <https://apnews.com/article/trump-covid-federal-money-lawsuit-e2fcacccfda994500ce92be94d1ada7d>

⁵⁸ Interviews with NIH researchers, fellows and staff, April and May 2025.

Raising Prescription Drug Prices

At a time when one out of four Americans cannot afford the prescriptions they are prescribed, cuts at FDA will further raise prescription drug prices by making it harder for low-cost generics to enter the market. According to one generic drug manufacturer:

These RIFs are likely to have a profound impact on the ability of manufacturers to continue providing cost-effective essential medicines to Americans. Staff that were subject to RIFs included technical experts who write critical scientific and regulatory documents that provide roadmaps for product development. The lack of clarity that will result without these documents will undermine the efficiency and transparency of the drug development and approval process. This will directly result in longer, much more costly development plans for both brand and generic/biosimilar drug products, and raises the serious risk of fewer therapies on the market for American patients.⁵⁹

Cuts will also mean Americans will have to rely more on Big Pharma and Big Food's claims about what is safe – instead of the judgment of independent public scientists. According to Friends of Cancer Research, “weakening [FDA] capacity puts American lives at greater risk.”⁶⁰

V. Spreading Misinformation

The Trump administration has spread misinformation during the measles outbreak and made false statements about their actions. HELP Minority Staff reviewed public records and spoke with experts to assess these claims.

Measles

Trump nominated Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to serve as HHS Secretary. Kennedy has focused on undermining the important role that vaccines play in preventing disease during a growing measles outbreak and spread false information regarding treatment options for measles. The U.S. is experiencing the single largest measles outbreak in over 25 years⁶¹ – with 1,001 cases reported, 126 hospitalizations, and 3 deaths as of May 2nd. Several cases of liver damage in children were reported in Texas after Secretary Kennedy promoted vitamin A, specifically in the form of cod liver oil, as a cure for measles.^{62,63}

HHS appears more intent on fueling vaccine hesitancy than increasing vaccine uptake:

- On multiple occasions, Secretary Kennedy has spread false information specifically about the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine that is highly effective in preventing measles infection. In a March 11 interview, Secretary Kennedy made more false and

⁵⁹ HELP Minority staff interview with generic drug company, April 8, 2025.

⁶⁰ “A Weakened FDA and NIH Will Hurt Patients, Science, and the Economy.” Friends of Cancer Research (2025). <http://friendsofcancerresearch.org/news/weakened-fda-nih-will-hurt-patients-science-and-the-economy/>

⁶¹ “Measles Surge in Southwest Is Now the Largest Single Outbreak Since 2000” Teddy Rosenbluth and Apoorva Mandavilli (2025) *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/22/health/measles-southwest-outbreak.html>

⁶² Neha Mukherjee. “Some measles patients in West Texas show signs of vitamin A toxicity, doctors say, raising concerns about misinformation.” CNN (2025). <http://www.cnn.com/2025/03/26/health/texas-measles-vitamin-a-toxicity/index.html>

⁶³ “Measles Cases and Outbreaks.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2025). <http://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>

dangerous statements, including that the measles vaccine “causes all the illnesses that measles itself causes” and “it has caused deaths every year.”⁶⁴

- According to ProPublica, leaders at CDC ordered staff not to release their experts’ assessment that found that the risk of catching measles is high in areas near outbreaks where vaccination rates are lagging.⁶⁵
- Meanwhile, NIH has canceled more than 40 grants focused on vaccine hesitancy and how to increase vaccine uptake: The email noticing these terminations stated that “It is the policy of NIH not to prioritize research activities that focuses gaining [sic] scientific knowledge on why individuals are hesitant to be vaccinated and/or explore ways to improve vaccine interest and commitment.”⁶⁶
- In addition, HHS is reportedly planning a large study into potential connections between vaccines and autism, despite the dozens of studies looking at tens of thousands of people over decades that have found no link between vaccines and autism.⁶⁷
- Secretary Kennedy hired David Geier, a vaccine critic and conspiracy theorist, to lead safety studies into a connection between autism and vaccines. Geier has publicly supported the debunked link between autism and vaccines for decades. In 2011, the Maryland Board of Physicians disciplined him for practicing medicine without a license (he has no medical training) for testing experimental and unproven drugs on children with autism.⁶⁸

Impact of Global Funding Freeze

The Trump administration has also made false statements about its actions on the global funding freeze. Elon Musk said “no one” has died from the illegal freeze on foreign aid.⁶⁹ Secretary of State Marco Rubio claimed that “essential lifesaving programs” will continue.⁷⁰ The Trump administration also said that cuts to USAID and essential global health programs do not include “life-saving humanitarian assistance” and that these life-saving programs can apply for waivers to continue work and aid.⁷¹

Yet independent researchers estimate more than 63,000 adults and nearly 132,000 children have already died due to cuts in foreign assistance.⁷² Cuts to PEPFAR alone have likely contributed to the deaths of over 35,000 adults and nearly 4,000 children.⁷³ The Trump administration intends to eliminate aid to a global vaccine program, GAVI, that delivers life-saving vaccinations to children in poor countries.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ “Hannity.” *Fox News* (2025). <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6369907937112>

⁶⁵ “The CDC Buried a Measles Forecast That Stressed the Need for Vaccinations.” Patricia Callahan. *ProPublica* (2025). <https://www.propublica.org/article/measles-vaccine-rfk-cdc-report>

⁶⁶ “NIH cuts funding for vaccine-hesitancy research. mRNA research may be next.” Rob Stein and Will Stone. *NPR* (2025). <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/12/nx-s1-5325863/nih-trump-vaccine-hesitancy-mrna-research>

⁶⁷ “Vaccines and Autism: A Tale of Shifting Hypotheses.” Jeffrey Gerber and Paul Offit. *Clinical Infectious Diseases* (2010). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2908388/>

⁶⁸ Vaccine critic’s apparent selection to head HHS autism study shocks experts. Helen Branswell. *STAT* (2025). <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/26/rfk-jr-vaccine-study-of-autism-links-led-by-vaccine-critic-scientists-shocked/>

⁶⁹ Elon Musk. X (2025). <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1896616928988324143>

⁷⁰ Final Cuts Will Eliminate U.S. Aid Agency in All but Name. Karoun Demirjian, Stephanie Nolen, Michael Crowley, and Elizabeth Dias. *New York Times* (2025). <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/28/us/politics/usaaid-trump-doge-cuts.html>

⁷¹ Emergency Humanitarian Waiver to Foreign Assistance Pause. The Secretary of State (2025). <https://www.state.gov/emergency-humanitarian-waiver-to-foreign-assistance-pause/>

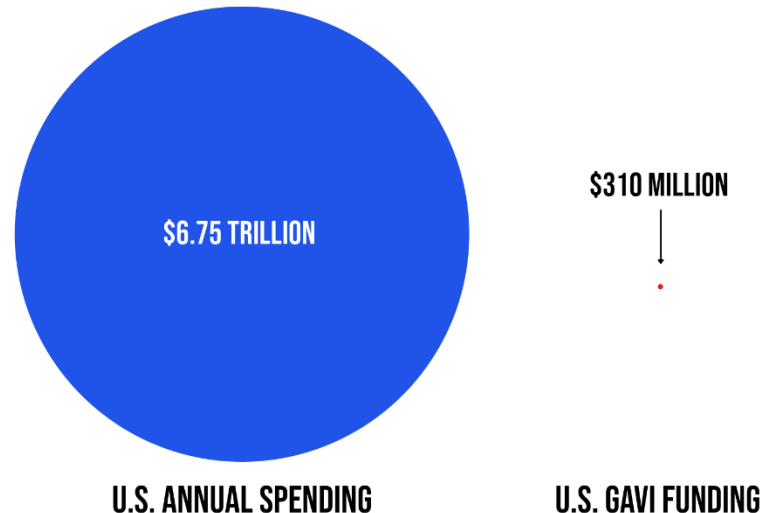
⁷² Impact Metrics Dashboard (2025). <https://www.impactcounter.com/dashboard?view=table&sort=title&order=asc>

⁷³ PEPFAR Program Impact Tracker (2025). <https://pepfar.impactcounter.com/>

⁷⁴ “Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has its billion dollar grant cut by Trump administration.” Fran Kritz. *NPR* (2025). <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/03/28/g-s1-56881/vaccines-gavi-usaid-rubio>

GAVI estimates that 1.2 million children – equivalent to 60,000 classrooms of kids – will die because of cuts that will save taxpayers 0.005 percent of the federal budget.⁷⁵

Figure 6: Total U.S. Annual Spending and Annual U.S. Grant Funding to GAVI, 2024



Former USAID employees and humanitarian workers on the ground dispute the availability of waivers to continue their work. One USAID employee said:

Elon Musk lied about waivers for life-saving activities. Those have never worked. We jumped through every hoop and there are no waivers.⁷⁶

Instead, the administration has decimated USAID operations and federal global health capacity, directly resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of people worldwide. In dismantling these programs, the administration is throwing away years of investment to improve basic health care capacity, disease surveillance, and health research in countries around the world.

VI. Conclusion

Trump officials have framed attacks on science as attacks against elites. But the truth is that undermining science will have devastating consequences for working class people who will be the hardest hit by the dismantling of critical health infrastructure.

Trump's war on science will lead to preventable suffering, needless loss of life, and an erosion of truth. Some consequences will be felt immediately. Other effects may be less apparent but no less devastating. Trump's attacks will lead to fewer breakthroughs for diseases like cancer, a weaker public health response against future infectious disease threats, and a continued decline in trust in public institutions. Far from making Americans healthier, Trump's attacks will only make people and our democracy sicker. This must end. Congress, the scientific community, and the American people must stand up and fight back.

⁷⁵ HELP Committee analysis of federal spending compared to GAVI funding. Assumed 20 children per classroom.

⁷⁶ Interview with former USAID worker, April 2, 2025.