

Trump's \$40 billion Health and Human Services cuts: A prescription for social devastation

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The Trump administration's plans to cut \$40 billion from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—a staggering reduction of roughly one-third of its discretionary budget—marks an inflection point in the deepening assault on science, public health and the social rights of the working class in the United States and internationally.

This unprecedented attack on programs which affect the health and well-being of virtually the entire world's population is a critical component of the fascist program that Trump and his health secretary, the anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr., seek to implement. It is a conscious effort to roll back more than a century of social progress and scientific achievement and will have catastrophic consequences.

The cuts, detailed in an internal memorandum obtained by the *Washington Post* and published Wednesday night, include the following:

- **National Institutes of Health (NIH):** Budget slashed from \$47 billion to \$27 billion—a 40 percent reduction. The number of NIH institutes and centers is to be cut from 27 to eight, with the elimination of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities and the National Institute of Nursing Research. Hundreds of research grants, including those on vaccine hesitancy, transgender health and COVID-19, are to be canceled. Thousands of scientists will be laid off, accelerating a mass exodus of expertise from the US.

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** Budget cut by 44 percent, from \$9.2 billion to \$5.2 billion. All chronic disease programs—including those targeting heart disease, obesity, diabetes, domestic HIV care, and smoking cessation—are to be eliminated, exposing Kennedy's claims to be fighting "America's chronic disease epidemic" as nothing but hot air. Staff working on drowning prevention, gun violence, worker safety and STD testing have already been laid off.

- **Head Start:** Complete elimination of federal funding, cutting off early childhood education and care for 750,000 low-income children. This will devastate working families, particularly in rural areas where Head Start is often the only non-family childcare provider, forcing parents out of the workforce and

deepening social inequality. This cut by itself will outrage tens of millions of people whose children have benefited or are benefiting from the program.

- **Rural health programs:** Elimination of grants for rural hospitals, residency developments and state offices of rural health, threatening to shutter critical access points for millions in rural America. Trump ran up huge vote margins in rural areas during the 2024 election, thanks to the long record of neglect and austerity on the part of Democratic Party administrations. Now he is seeking to outdo all previous administrations in the destruction of rural infrastructure.

- **Food and Drug Administration (FDA):** Funding set at the bare minimum to allow continued collection of industry fees, threatening the agency's ability to regulate drug and device safety. The agency is one of those turned over to the control of a right-wing opponent of public health measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, Martin Makary.

Coinciding with these massive cuts, which will directly worsen the health of millions of Americans, Kennedy is creating a new \$20 billion agency with the Orwellian title "Administration for a Healthy America." The central purpose of this new agency is to consolidate and eliminate numerous prevention-focused programs, including those for childhood lead poisoning, healthcare workforce development and ALS patient registries. Funding for policy and research will be tightly controlled by Kennedy, who is launching initiatives that will serve as vehicles for anti-scientific, eugenicist policies.

These cuts are not "cost-saving" measures, as claimed by the White House. They represent a deliberate, fascistic effort to destroy the infrastructure of scientific research and public health that underpins modern society. The aim is to return the working class to conditions of social misery and industrial exploitation not seen since the 19th century.

The HHS cuts were revealed just two weeks after Kennedy imposed the layoffs of over 20,000 HHS workers, roughly a quarter of the federal public health workforce. These included 80 percent of staff at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which is responsible for workplace safety and disease monitoring, and the gutting of agencies

tracking infectious diseases, monitoring chemical exposures, enforcing food and drug safety, and more.

At the same time, the administration has imposed gag orders on scientific agencies, erased public health data from thousands of government websites and elevated anti-science quacks like Jay Bhattacharya to positions of power. The CDC and NIH, once global leaders in disease prevention, have been crippled. The US has withdrawn from the World Health Organization (WHO), and the PEPFAR program—which provides life-saving HIV/AIDS treatment to over 20 million people in low-income countries—faces elimination.

On the same day that the HHS cuts were revealed, *Nature* published the results of recent modeling which underscores the vast global ramifications of these policies. The study found that if the United States were to end all global health funding—including for HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, and maternal and child health programs—an estimated 25 million people would die preventable deaths over the next 15 years. These include 15 million from HIV/AIDS alone, due to the cutoff of PEPFAR funding, and over 7 million child deaths from other causes.

The model projects that by 2040, HIV deaths would surge by over 50 percent and tuberculosis infections would rise by 69 million worldwide. Even partial cuts, such as maintaining only HIV treatment programs, would still result in millions of additional deaths and a catastrophic reversal of decades of public health progress.

Furthermore, the dismantling of pandemic surveillance and response programs, including the CDC's Global Health Center and the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, means that the US and world population are now flying blind in the face of growing threats like H5N1 "bird flu." Both Kennedy and USDA head Brooke Rollins have openly floated a proposal to allow bird flu to spread unchecked on poultry farms, risking the emergence of a strain capable of human-to-human transmission.

The Trump-Kennedy war on science represents a continuation and deepening of the criminal policies of the Biden administration, which normalized mass infection and the abandonment of public health during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Both capitalist parties have subordinated science and social needs to the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy, paving the way for today's unbridled social counterrevolution.

The trade union bureaucracies, in particular the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), have done nothing to oppose these attacks on science and the working class. Instead they have stifled the enormous opposition of rank-and-file public health workers, isolating them and allowing them to be fired *en masse*. The defense of science, public health and social rights cannot be entrusted to these reactionary bureaucrats.

Public health workers across all HHS agencies must organize independently, building rank-and-file committees to unite with

workers globally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Such committees would serve as a democratic center of opposition to the Trump-Kennedy war on science, fighting for the following demands and more:

- For an immediate reversal of all cuts to HHS and the expansion of funding for NIH, CDC, Head Start, rural health programs and all public health agencies!
- For the immediate rehiring of all fired scientists and public health workers, with expanded hiring to meet the needs of society!
- For guaranteed free, universal access to healthcare, early childhood education and preventive medicine as basic social rights!
- For an end to all gag orders and censorship of scientific research, and the restoration and expansion of public access to health data!

For the initiation of a global program to eliminate COVID-19, H5N1 and other infectious diseases through mass testing, vaccination, infrastructure renovation to provide clean air and other basic public health measures!

- For the establishment of democratic workers' oversight of public health and scientific institutions, breaking the stranglehold of the corporate elite and anti-science ideologues!

The defense of science and public health is inseparable from the fight for socialism. The international working class is the only force capable of defeating the fascist danger represented by Trump, Kennedy, and the capitalist oligarchy they serve. Workers must unite across national borders, industries and professions to build a mass socialist movement, in alliance with scientists and progressive layers of the middle class.

We urge public health workers and scientists to join and build the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). Attend and participate in the upcoming International May Day Online Rally, where workers and youth from around the world will chart a path forward in the struggle for socialism, science and human progress.



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