



March 31, 2025

By Electronic Mail

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
United States Senate
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Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Members of the United States Senate
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Members of the United States
House of Representatives
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Congress Must Act to Address Massive Cuts to HHS, CDC, and Public Health Infrastructure

Dear Congressional Leaders and Members of Congress,

As public health leaders who have served in a variety of capacities and agencies, including former leaders and professional staff at HHS including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as in state and local health departments, we urgently call on you to take immediate action to protect and strengthen the American public health infrastructure. Recent executive actions and proposed workforce reductions demonstrate a stunning disregard for science, public health, and what America needs to be healthy. Last week, Sec. Kennedy announced that HHS would implement cuts and restructuring. These cuts and reorganization include the claw back of over \$11 billion in funding to state and local health departments, nonprofits, and community-based organizations, as well as taking \$1.8 billion annually through a new reduction of 10,000 full-time employees (FTE)—on top of staffing cuts taken through calls for early retirement, and the transfer of other critical positions from the CDC to other centralized agencies.

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CDC provides essential expertise, funding, and technical support to state and local health departments--currently allocating over 70% of its budget to these critical public health efforts. Cuts to federal public health funding will shift these program costs to states, forcing them to shoulder an impossible burden at the expense of their citizens' safety and significantly weaken CDC's ability to support states and safeguard the nation's health.

The U.S. faces multiple escalating public health threats, including an avian influenza outbreak affecting livestock. This outbreak has severe economic repercussions, driving up egg prices and threatening farmers' livelihoods. CDC staff, with their expertise and dedication, work tirelessly alongside the USDA and state health departments to contain this crisis. Yet, Secretary Kennedy recklessly suggested to "let the animals develop natural immunity" which would be catastrophic. His refusal to listen to leading veterinarians and animal health researchers delays necessary interventions and puts workers who handle these animals at serious risk.

At the same time, CDC is fighting to combat a rapidly spreading measles epidemic fueled by plummeting vaccination rates and the spread of dangerous misinformation. Once declared eliminated, measles is now surging in communities with insufficient vaccine coverage, leading to entirely preventable infections, hospitalizations, and deaths. Secretary Kennedy's focus on vitamin A has led to cases of children suffering from vitamin A toxicity, which can cause liver disease and other ailments. Rather than investing in evidence-based vaccination campaigns to protect at-risk populations, the Trump administration is deliberately turning its back on public health.

Recent administrative actions, combined with proposed funding cuts to public health infrastructure, have contributed to increased vaccine skepticism, drained expert talent from front-line agencies through mass layoffs, and politicized life-saving public health guidance. We cannot afford to weaken our nation's disease surveillance capacity and leave ourselves dangerously unprepared for the next health crisis.

Moreover, CDC is central to addressing the epidemic of chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity. These conditions cumulatively account for over 75% of healthcare costs and significantly reduce quality of life for millions of Americans. Non-communicable disease prevention programs, including violence and injury prevention and environmental health threats, led by the CDC save lives, reduce healthcare expenses, and strengthen the productivity and resilience of our communities. Reducing the

workforce for these vital programs would worsen these health crises and impose staggering economic costs on families, businesses, and the healthcare system.

Congress must act now. We call for immediate oversight hearings to address the Trump Administration's actions and swift legislative action to:

- Identify what programs are lost in restructuring HHS agencies and programs, including those in CDC, and the proposals for the new Administration for a Healthy America (AHA).
- Reinstatement of funding for public health agencies until there is an orderly plan for vital programs.
- Strengthen vaccine recommendations and messaging supporting vaccine use to curb outbreaks.
- Combat misinformation that undermines science and public trust.
- Bolster pandemic preparedness efforts to protect Americans from future threats.
- Protect the noncommunicable disease prevention programs developed through the knowledge and leadership at CDC that help keep America healthy.

Public health is not a partisan issue—it is a core responsibility of the government and essential to our nation's security, stability, and prosperity. HHS and CDC play an irreplaceable role in safeguarding American lives, yet their mission is sabotaged by neglect and misinformation at the highest levels. Failure to act now will result in preventable suffering, deaths, and the further deterioration of our nation's standing as a global leader in health and innovation.

The time for bold action is now.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Sebelius, MPA
Former United States Secretary of Health and
Human Services (2009-2014)
Former Governor of Kansas (2003-2009)

John Kitzhaber, MD
Former Governor of Oregon (1995-2003 and
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Operating as an initiative of the American Public Health Association, For Our Health (www.forourhealth.org) brings together prominent experts and senior leaders in public health, health care, health sciences and social services to speak in support of public health and against policies that undermine evidence-based health initiatives, weaken scientific institutions and endanger public health protections.