

TAG Fiercely Condemns the New Administration's War on Science

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Treatment Action Group (TAG) is disgusted and appalled by the new presidential administration's flagrant attack on science. Recent actions taken by the executive branch — from decimating vital research, to gutting scientific workforces, to obstructing and concealing public treatment guidelines and scientific data — take a wrecking ball to the vital scientific processes that deliver lifesaving tools to prevent, diagnose, treat, and cure disease, domestically and globally. These hostile and reckless actions will hobble the fight against HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and hepatitis C virus (HCV), worsen human health, and weaken communities for decades to come.

TAG was founded by activists at the height of the AIDS crisis with the goal of accelerating HIV treatment research — a mission that has since expanded to include TB and HCV. Science has always been at the heart of TAG's strategy.

"We envision the end of the HIV, TB, and HCV pandemics through effective and universally accessible tools for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment," said TAG cofounder and Executive Director Mark Harrington. "Ending HIV, TB, and HCV as pandemics relies on a rigorous and well-funded scientific ecosystem accountable to affected communities and strongly supported by investments from the American people. Science is what ultimately changed the trajectory of the AIDS pandemic beginning in the late 1990s, when increased investment in and reforms to speed up research on protease inhibitors helped deliver treatments that have saved and are saving millions of lives."

And yet, the new administration seems intent on seriously damaging the institutions, funding structures, professions, and collective knowledge that sustain a robust scientific process. Such destructive actions include:

- The confirmation of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) places a fringe crank at the helm of the country's entire health portfolio. Kennedy is an AIDS denialist and conspiracy theorist shunned by the entirety of mainstream

medicine and science, and has signaled intent to use his perch to flout scientific consensus on things like vaccine policy.

- The [mass firings of approximately 5,200 employees](#) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and other agencies under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will vastly impede the U.S.'s ability to assess and fund medical research, surveille and respond to emerging public health threats with evidence-based interventions, and evaluate and regulate the safety and applications of medical and consumer products.
- The NIH's recent move to slash "indirect costs" – which cover overhead by institutions receiving NIH awards – by billions of dollars per year will deprive academic research institutions of resources necessary to support their projects, compromising important activities like lab, facility, and equipment upkeep, and staffing.
- The chaotic and illegal obliteration of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) — the world's [third largest funder of TB research](#) and development — has interrupted valuable clinical trials, disrupted the work of community-based organizations that advise clinical research and build local demand for health innovations, and limited global access to evidence-based treatments for HIV and deeply damaged health infrastructure in hundreds of countries around the world.
- The indiscriminate removal (and reinstatement, in some cases, following court orders,) of public data on health and disease impedes research drawing on these public sources, and precludes public health officials and communities from developing evidence-based programming.
- The dehumanizing, scientifically illiterate attempt to deny the existence of transgender, non-binary, and intersex people, which has extended to adding brazenly false claims to government websites restored as a result of court orders.
- The vile assault against anything seen as related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) stands to [undermine recent progress](#) toward representative demographic participation in medical research, triggering deletion of relevant guidelines and protocols from the FDA and Office of AIDS Research (OAR).

Taken altogether, this administration appears to be feeding science as we know it [“into the wood chipper,”](#) in the words of an unelected oligarch. At stake is scientific capacity and expertise that took decades to build. It cannot and will not be supplanted by private industry, which has proven itself incapable and unwilling to invest in the kind of long-term research that doesn’t yield short-term profits, but which makes up the cornerstone of practically every key medical breakthrough. Antiretroviral therapy for HIV, shorter, safer regimens for TB, and direct-acting antivirals for HCV all relied heavily on U.S. government-supported research; so too will future tools needed to end these conditions and all other pandemics.

“The White House’s attack on every step of the research, development, implementation, and policymaking processes violates the universal right to science, codified in international human rights law,” said Mike Frick, TB Project Co-Director at TAG. “This administration’s war on science harms everyone, everywhere who stands to benefit from science and its applications.”

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