Trump Commands HHS to Terminate Advisory Committee on Long COVID

The executive order contradicts Robert F. Kennedy Jr's recent commitment to prioritize long COVID research.

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A new executive order from the Trump Administration commands the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to terminate the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Long COVID.

The order, "Commencing the reduction of the federal bureaucracy," was issued late on Wednesday, February 19, and included the termination of other advisory committees and councils like the Health Equity Advisory Committee for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Others included councils and committees from other agencies concerning community banks, credit unions, academic research, and voluntary foreign aid.

The order stated that "reducing the size of the Federal Government will minimize Government waste and abuse, reduce inflation, and promote American freedom and innovation."

According to a charter from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH), the purpose of the long COVID committee is to bring perspectives from outside of the government to help inform actions of the executive branch on the disease and other infection-associated chronic conditions (IACCs).

The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Long COVID includes 14 members, composed of patient advocates, physicians, researchers, and others, some with lived experience of the disease. Despite being classified as special government employees, the committee members are unpaid volunteers.

"This advisory committee had the chance to meaningfully shape what policy would look like as we drive towards approved tests and treatments for long COVID," said Todd Davenport, a professor of physical therapy at University of the Pacific and chair of Long COVID Physio.
"With one presidential order," he said, "[Trump] flushed that."

Committee members were sworn in in early January, 2025, after more than a year-long process that began in the fall of 2023. The committee had an orientation in January, but had not yet had an official meeting before the executive order was directed.

The order demanded the committee be terminated within 14 days. When reached for comment, OASH, wrote that "the HHS will comply with the executive order." OASH did not answer a list of questions sent by The Sick Times.

The executive order follows removal of important long COVID information and data from federal websites since the Trump Administration took office this year. These include government resources about long COVID as a disability, the Pulse Household Survey, as well as important COVID-19 data.

It also follows a broader attack on research in the National Institutes of Health (NIH), diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and reproductive healthcare.

"The Biden administration had its own softer version of COVID erasure in terms of taking down the need for a lot of disease mitigation for this drive to 'go back to normal,'" Davenport said. "I think Trump is just being much more explicit about erasing COVID."

Numerous sources who spoke with The Sick Times expressed concern about the termination of the committee, who they said could help educate the executive branch on the overlooked disease of long COVID that affects over 20 million Americans and more than 400 million people globally. Many said the committee would help keep the government accountable on the disease.

"I had hoped the committee would uplift the importance of long COVID as a health equity and disability justice issue across the administration's agencies and initiatives," said Angela Vázquez, the vice chair of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Long COVID. "My hope had been that long COVID within the federal government would be seen as not just a healthcare issue, but a workforce issue and an education issue."

Vázquez looked forward to working with high level officials within the administration to inform them about the impacts of the disease and how it was relevant to their agencies.

The order is a part of the Trump Administration's dismantling of vital government services, Vázquez said, including potential cuts to Medicaid, that millions of Americans rely on. "I think that this is also a continuation of rewriting history," Vázquez said. "[They are] trying to manufacture consent for not responding to the ongoing pandemic."

Other members of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Long COVID include chair Eric Hernan, Cynthia Adinig, Malachy Clancy, Linda Geng, Rachel Herlihy, Sarah Jolley, Netia McCray, Kate Murray, Marcie Roth, Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, Tiffany Walker, Andrew Wylam, and Alexandra Yonts.

The executive order is reminiscent of a 2018 termination of a separate HHS advisory committee on myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), that was called the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Advisory Committee. Under the first Trump Administration, the committee was also disbanded without warning. ME advocates responded with protest letters and

other calls to action that were unmet by the federal government.

Still, some experts said the executive order contradicts HHS Secretary Kennedy's recent confirmation hearing response to a question on long COVID from Sen. Todd Young (R-Ind.).

When asked by Young if Kennedy would "collaborate with healthcare providers, researches, and affected communities to better understand and mitigate long COVID's impact?", Kennedy said he would. He also responded to a follow-up question stating that he would prioritize long COVID research and integrate it into broader healthcare policies.

"We need answers of why this specific committee was targeted in light of the commitment made to long COVID [in Kennedy's hearing]," said Lisa McCorkell, the co-founder of Patient-Led Research Collaborative. She explained how the executive order's intention of "increasing accountability" by eliminating the committee is contradictory: the committee increases accountability for the American people by bringing in expert perspectives the government could miss.

McCorkell said that the long COVID advisory committee, and others that would have an impact on healthcare, are a vital part of this collaboration between the federal government, healthcare providers, researchers, and communities affected by the disease. "I hope that the Secretary pushes back on his boss," she said, "And communicates the importance of both this committee and from getting input from outside the federal government."

Since long COVID and COVID-19 may have a bullseye on them, some advocates have stated the importance of expanding advocacy movements to counteract Trump's attacks on healthcare and research that will also heavily impact people with long COVID. Others have highlighted the importance of mutual aid and grassroots efforts.

"I really encourage the long COVID community and healthcare advocates to link up in this fight and combat all the ways that this administration is dismantling essential health care and economic programs that support all Americans," Vázquez said. "We are stronger together."

Editor's note: Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, a member of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Long COVID, is an advisor of The Sick Times. The Patient-Led Research Collaborative, like The Sick Times, has received support from the Balvi and Kanro funds. Our newsroom operates independently of financial supporters.

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