



**Prepared Written Testimony
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Officer
National Health Council
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies
May 14, 2025**

The National Health Council (NHC) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record as the House Committee on Appropriations reviews the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget for the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Secretary Kennedy's plans for reorganizing the Department.

For more than 100 years, the NHC has brought together diverse organizations to drive patient-centered health policies and practices that increase access to affordable, high-value, and sustainable health care for all Americans. The NHC's membership includes 181 national health-related organizations, with the majority comprised of the nation's leading patient organizations. Other members include health-related associations and nonprofit organizations representing the provider, research, and family caregiver communities; and businesses representing biopharmaceutical, device, diagnostic, generic drug, and payer organizations.

We are encouraged that Secretary Kennedy's submitted testimony recognizes the urgent need to address chronic disease, promote nutrition and preventive care, and invest in programs that improve the health and well-being of Americans. These are priorities patients share and have been requesting attention for many years. We also support efforts to increase transparency, enhance accountability, and reduce duplication of programs, provided these reforms are implemented in ways that do not compromise access to essential services or undermine the effectiveness of the public health infrastructure.

At the same time, it is essential that the Department's reorganization plan and proposed budget continue to prioritize the needs of individuals with chronic conditions and disabilities and caregivers, including family and professional caregivers. As Secretary Kennedy acknowledged, the United States needs to address chronic illness. Strategic investment in care, prevention, and research is key to reversing this trend. The NHC urges HHS to preserve and strengthen the agencies and programs that are foundational to this work.

Concerns with Restructuring of HHS

The restructuring of HHS, including staff reductions within key health agencies, raises significant concerns. While we understand the need for departmental efficiency and responsiveness, we urge Secretary Kennedy to approach any restructuring with great

care to ensure that critical public health functions are not compromised. Reducing or eliminating the capacity of key federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the Office of Minority Health (OMH) would not only hinder scientific progress but also significantly undermine the delivery of care and services to vulnerable populations. We are also concerned that this reduction in force may lead to the loss of some of the best and brightest minds at the federal level. To mitigate these risks, we recommend that the restructuring process:

- Preserve or enhance staffing levels in key areas that support people with disabilities and chronic diseases.
- Maintain transparency in the restructuring process, particularly about the impact on patient-centered programs and services.
- Maintain the important partnership between nonprofit organizations and the federal government to provide information, education, services, and support to people with chronic diseases and disabilities.
- Engage stakeholders, including patient advocacy groups and health organizations, to provide input into decisions that could affect critical services and support.

Preserve the Federal Research Infrastructure

Research is central to addressing the needs of people with chronic diseases and disabilities. Agencies such as the NIH, the CDC, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are instrumental in advancing medical research, improving public health, and ensuring the safety and effectiveness of treatments.

We support Secretary Kennedy's recognition of the importance of biomedical research to national security and scientific leadership. To strengthen this work, we recommend that HHS:

- Sustain and increase funding for NIH, with a focus on rare diseases, chronic conditions, and underrepresented populations
- Enhance the FDA's regulatory capacity to support timely approval of safe and effective treatments
- Expand the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health with full transparency and robust patient engagement to ensure that investments align with public needs

While the proposed restructuring calls for workforce reductions and program consolidation, it is imperative that the capacity of NIH, CDC, and FDA is preserved to maintain progress in science and innovation.

Protecting and Strengthening Medicaid

Medicaid is a vital source of coverage for millions of Americans with chronic conditions, disabilities, and limited incomes. We agree with the Department's commitment to preserving core services and encourage Secretary Kennedy to maintain that

commitment by protecting Medicaid from harmful proposals such as block grants or per capita caps, which would reduce access to care.

Maintaining Medicaid's operational capacity during the restructuring process is critical to ensuring continued access to care for Americans, particularly for those with chronic conditions and disabilities.

Conclusion

The National Health Council appreciates Secretary Kennedy's stated commitment to tackling chronic illness, supporting medical innovation, and making the health system more responsive. We urge the Committee to ensure that the proposed budget and restructuring plan reflect these goals without sacrificing the programs that millions of Americans depend on.

We look forward to working with Congress and leaders across HHS to advance these priorities and to ensure that every individual, especially those living with chronic diseases and disabilities, receives the care, research, and support they need to live healthier lives.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Please contact Kimberly Beer, Senior Vice President, Policy & External Affairs at kbeer@nhcouncil.org or 202-557-9146 with any questions or requests for additional information.