

## MEMO

TO: Interested Parties  
FROM: Senate Finance Committee Democrats  
DATE: September 26, 2025

### **RE: The Trump-Kennedy War on Americans with Cancer**

Donald Trump and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert Kennedy, along with the Republicans blindly supporting their agenda, are waging a *war on people with cancer*. For the past half-century, Democratic and Republican presidents alike have supported America's fight against cancer. Republicans' actions amount to the most destructive assault on cancer research, access to care, and the affordability of life-sustaining treatments in history.

This memorandum summarizes these actions and the immediate and long-term harms caused by Republicans' policies. The case studies throughout this memo are illustrative, representing just a handful of the many labs, hospitals, patients, and communities already experiencing the consequences of Republicans' agenda. These stories are playing out nationwide, compounding into a crisis that touches every corner of cancer research and care.

### **Republican Actions Reversing Decades of Progress to Fight Cancer**

**Trump and Republicans Enacted Historic Cuts to Health Care:** Trump spearheaded Republicans' successful effort to enact the largest cuts to health care in U.S. history. Access to health insurance coverage is a key factor in the prevention, timely diagnosis, and treatment of cancer. Currently, Medicaid covers [1 in 10 adults](#) with a history of cancer and [1 in 3 children](#) diagnosed with cancer. The Affordable Care Act's (ACA's) enhanced premium tax credits support over [500,000 adults with cancer](#). If Republicans fail to act soon, these patients will face catastrophic premium spikes, putting affordable coverage and care out of reach.

Republicans' reckless legislation cuts [more than \\$1 trillion](#) from Medicaid and the ACA, terminating health insurance for [over 15 million Americans](#). The impact of the Republicans' budget bill on hospitals will be devastating. [Over 330 rural hospitals](#) are at immediate risk of having to cut services, like cancer care, or shut down altogether as a direct result of Trumpcare.

**Trump and Republicans Bailed Out Big Pharma:** Republicans' budget bill blocks or delays Kennedy's ability to use Medicare drug price negotiation to lower the price of certain blockbuster cancer drugs. Some of the drugs impacted by this change include the top-selling cancer drugs in the world, such as Keytruda, Opdivo, Darzalex, and more. Many of these drugs, including Keytruda, would have been selected for negotiation early next year had Republicans not stealthily delayed these negotiations to line Big Pharma's pockets. As a result, seniors will have to pay more for their cancer drugs.

**Trump and Republicans Defunded Planned Parenthood:** Nearly [200 Planned Parenthood health centers](#) in 24 states are at risk of closing, and more than 1 million patients could lose access to care due to the provision in the Republican budget bill that prohibits certain providers that provide family planning services, including all Planned Parenthood clinics, from receiving Medicaid funding. Already, clinics across the country are closing, from [Ohio](#) to [California](#) to [Texas](#). One in three women and one in 10 men across the U.S. rely on these clinics for primary and preventive care, like breast cancer screenings, pap smears, and HPV vaccines. A [majority](#) of the clinics that will be forced to close are in medically underserved areas, primary care health professional shortage areas, or rural areas, leaving Americans in these areas without access to life-saving cancer screenings and treatment. A Guttmacher Institute [report](#) finds that Federally Qualified Health Centers will be unable to serve the millions of people who will lose access to care due to this reckless defunding.

**Trump and Kennedy Proposed Record Cuts to the National Institutes of Health (NIH):** Trump's [FY2026 budget](#) calls for a 40% cut to NIH's discretionary budget and a 37% cut to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the world's largest cancer research funder. Adjusted for inflation, NCI's budget would fall to levels not seen in more than [30 years](#).

**Trump and Kennedy Cancelled Cancer Grants and Froze Funds:** Between February 2025 and April 2025, Kennedy cancelled or froze more than [\\$180 million in NCI grants](#). Between January 20, 2025, and August 20, 2025, the NCI paid out [\\$842 million](#) less in grants than it did in the same period the previous year. The [cancelled grants](#) range from studies into new screening modalities for cervical cancer, to strategies to reduce cancer in the Arkansas Delta, to targeting mechanisms that control and prevent cancer cell division. As a result of these cuts, the NCI has [announced](#) that it will fund only 4 percent of new grant applications this year, less than half of what was funded last year.

Kennedy also cancelled [\\$783 million in NIH grants](#) as part of Trump's anti-DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) witch hunt. These grants supported research projects, many of which had been ongoing for years, that aimed to improve care for individuals at the highest risk of cancer, like women, people of color, and children.

**Trump and Kennedy Defunded Promising Research:** Kennedy single-handedly cancelled \$500 million in mRNA projects and started a "coordinated wind-down of its mRNA vaccine development activities." This move is catastrophic for the promising work of researchers, such as those at the [University of Florida](#), who are conducting studies on an mRNA vaccine's ability to boost the tumor-fighting effects of immunotherapy.

**Trump and Kennedy Fired Renowned Cancer Researchers:** This year, more than 1,200 NIH employees, including more than [200 at NCI](#), were fired. Entire offices, including the [communications branch](#), were eliminated. Trump also [ended](#) the NCI's Outstanding Investigator Award, a seven-year grant that gave leading scientists the freedom to pursue bold breakthroughs, including in cancer diagnosis and treatment.

In addition, [3,500 people](#) were laid off from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The mass layoffs at the FDA removed career experts and rare disease champions who have shepherded promising therapies through the regulatory process. With capacity down and institutional knowledge lost, reviews of cancer therapeutics will slow, halting innovation.

**Trump and Kennedy Stifled Cancer Communications:** Cancer.gov was once viewed as a [trusted source of information](#), but with the mass layoffs of communications staff at NCI, the public will no longer have a routinely updated resource. By firing communications professionals, Trump and Kennedy eliminated the staff who produce plain-language, patient-facing resources. Without trusted communication, recruitment into clinical studies will falter, and patients will lose access to information on treatment options, clinical trial opportunities, and prevention.

**Kennedy Made it Impossible for People with Cancer to get the COVID-19 Vaccine:** People living with cancer are at higher risk of serious illness if they get COVID-19. On August 27, Kennedy altered FDA COVID vaccine guidance, throwing the entire vaccine system into chaos and making it so that people living with cancer are [unable to get their vaccine](#).

### **Immediate Harms Caused by Republicans' Actions:**

**Harms to Patients:** At NCI, senior surgeon Steven Rosenberg [lost staff](#) who produced the cell therapies used to treat his sickest cancer patients. In May, Dr. Rosenberg also [shared](#) that all patients in clinical trials at NCI are “getting delayed by about a month,” and they are turning away more patients.

**Harms to Children:** The Pediatric Brain Tumor Consortium, an association of academic centers and children’s hospitals dedicated to trials of novel treatments for pediatric brain cancer, will [stop enrolling new patients](#) after losing federal funding. Dr. Rachael Sirianni at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School was forced to [suspend her study](#) into an aggressive form of pediatric brain cancer and lay off staff after NIH froze her grants.

**Harms to Veterans:** Internal emails from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, [obtained by ProPublica](#), confirmed that over 1,000 veterans in clinical trials would lose access to treatment for diseases such as cancer because of the Trump administration's layoffs.

**Harms to 9/11 First Responders and Survivors:** Over [140,000 responders and survivors](#) rely on the World Trade Center (WTC) Health Program to get treatment and monitor illnesses related to the 9/11 attacks. Trump gutted the CDC and, with that, fired critical staff running the WTC Health Program, leaving survivors and first responders with illnesses like cancer to deal with life-threatening care delays.

**Harms to Immigrants:** Trump rescinded a policy that protected health care facilities from ICE enforcement. A recent [survey of clinicians](#) across the U.S. found that patients fear ICE, and those fears result in them skipping care. These fears came true for [two families of children with cancer](#) who were deported due to the parents' undocumented status.

**Harms to Research:** Trump and Kennedy [terminated](#) many NIH grants focused on screening, early detection, and new therapies for cervical cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer, and more. In addition, programs or grants that supported early-career researchers from diverse backgrounds were [cancelled](#).

**Harms to Universities and Cancer Centers:** Leading institutions for cancer research froze [hiring, furloughed staff](#), and [cut graduate admissions](#) after losing millions in expected funding.

**Harms to Public Health:** Cancer outcomes depend on public health, from HPV vaccination to monitoring environmental risks. Trump has pulled the U.S. back from global partnerships like the [World Health Organization](#) that identify preventable cancer risks and coordinate international research, weakening efforts to stop cancer before it starts. Two cancer registries vital for understanding cancer incidence in [veterans](#) and [firefighters](#) had to shut down due to contract terminations and layoffs.

### **Longer-Term Consequences Caused by Republicans' Actions:**

**Lost Coverage:** Without health care coverage through Medicaid or the ACA, Americans with cancer will face [delayed diagnosis](#), [financial distress](#), and [higher mortality](#). Coverage losses caused by Republicans' budget bill will exacerbate the damage from research cuts, ensuring that even when new treatments emerge, fewer Americans will be able to access them.

**Lost Savings for Patients and Taxpayers:** Delaying or blocking Medicare drug price negotiations on blockbuster cancer medications means lost savings to taxpayers and higher prices for seniors on Medicare who take these high-priced medications. Early estimates from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) find this policy cost the federal government billions—that's billions in lost savings to the Medicare program.

**Lost Treatments:** [CBO found](#) that just a 10 percent permanent cut in NIH funding would lead to long-term impacts on drug approvals. By the third decade, the U.S. would approve 20 fewer drugs each decade. These numbers represent real delays in progress, missed chances to discover cures, and prolonged suffering for millions waiting for therapies to slow or cure diseases, such as cancer.

**Lost Scientists:** “We could lose a generation of scientists in a very short time,” [warned](#) UMass Chan Chancellor Michael Collins. A poll of over 1,600 US scientists found that [two-thirds](#) of them are considering leaving the United States due to the disruptions caused by Trump.

**Lost Progress:** Former NIH deputy director Michael Lauer [called](#) Trump's actions “an unmitigated disaster,” warning it could take decades to recover. This will inevitably halt progress on cancer research.

**Lost Leadership:** For [80 years](#), America led the world in biomedical research. For over [50 years](#), it has led the global fight against cancer. This leadership saved American lives. Trump is putting that legacy in jeopardy.

**Bottom Line: Trump is Surrendering the War on Cancer**

Trump's assault on people with cancer is a betrayal of America's bipartisan, decades-long commitment to curing this devastating disease and saving lives. Republican cuts have already shuttered labs, derailed trials, and forced patients out of treatment. And by dismantling Medicaid and the ACA, Republicans will force millions to go without the health insurance they need to prevent, detect, and fight cancer.