



Editorial

America's Retreat from Reliance on Public Health Science Hurts Us All

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The United States has long been considered an innovator and global scientific community leader, probably the premier country in health research, infectious disease surveillance, objective scientific advisory groups, and the development of new vaccines and medicines. Unfortunately, coupled with Trump Administration actions to eliminate or withhold support for cutting-edge research, the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services policies, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a person deeply suspicious of established health science, have placed this “exceptionalism” in severe jeopardy. His broad advocacy pronouncement, “Making America Great Again,” (1) has far broader implications for public health beyond America’s borders. And it is unclear if the damage can readily be repaired in the future.

There is much indication in the public domain to shed light on what is happening. In July 2025, the Union of Concerned Scientists documented over 400 attacks on science in actions, statements, or decisions that originated from an elected official or political appointee in a federal agency. These actions have resulted in the censoring, manipulation, forging, or misinforming of scientific data and results, or misguided conclusions. And all of which has been within the government or with federal funds (2).

This flies in the face of the core ethical values of the American Public Health Association, which emphasizes professionalism and trust, social justice, equity, and respect for individuals' rights while promoting health for all communities. (3)

Most recently, in September 2025, an Executive Branch Commission report, “Making Our Children Healthy Again”, despite RFK Jr’s frequent expressions of great concern for the wellbeing of children, provided few concrete statements about how to turn policy priorities into regulatory action and failed to mention how to address gun violence and firearms, the leading cause of death among U.S. teens and children, a unique American health threat among countries in the Global North. (4)

Closer Look at Some Damage Areas

Budget cuts to the various scientific research programs, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), along with staff reductions, disregard of expertise, and manipulation of objective reporting, have undermined trust in these institutions. Political considerations have overridden existing and new vaccine research and distribution and are contrary to objective scientific recommendations. The limited good news is that some Republicans are beginning to speak out both in Congress and outside; former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, a major political figure, described RFK Jr. as “a foolish man, full of foolish and vapid ideas”, “wholly unqualified” to oversee a department that handles a quarter of all government spending. (5)



Moreover, there are signs that bad publicity over vaccines and the CDC has created tensions with President Trump and others in the Cabinet, and this, in due course, might result in RFK Jr.'s departure. (6)

Another instance of attack on objective health science has been with aggressive and deliberate disbanding or sidelining of scientific advisory committees that provided respected expertise on healthcare, environmental protection, and public policy. And even when such panels were continued, the replacements were often ideological appointees, undermining health professional national and international trust in future committee decisions.

Implications for Global Health

This suite of actions described above, compounded with the disregard for environmental risks to health, the undermining of measures to limit infectious disease transmission, drastically reducing funds for research on critical new issues such as micro and nano plastics (7), or failing to take up as a priority One Health (the interface of human, animal, plant, and ecosystem health), are clearly flashing red danger signs, assuredly for the United States. But it goes beyond: a descent into anti-science attitudes could happen in other countries, the U.S. having shown just how easily and quickly anti-science attitudes can spread to every corner of society, even in the most modern and advanced countries, whether in Europe, Asia, or virtually anywhere such attitudes take hold.

What to Do

Articles in the Journal of Global, Public, and One Health speak to growing attack on the value of public health knowledge and its benefits to the individual, Evelyne de Leeuw's excellent critique "*The planet in our backyard: Public health should step up*", (7) calls upon the global public health community to actively engage in the political process, "connect like-minded civil society actors and institutions more meaningfully." This is echoed in "*Geopolitical health: A new imperative for understanding the health of people we serve*," by John Middleton, (8) which views the present situation in the U.S. as threatening the existence of a public health profession, and the need to understand better "the geopolitical forces which are shaping our health". A third piece, by Frank Houghton "*Communication Communitarianism and Courage in Public Health: A Response to De Leeuw (and the Trump II Regime)*" (9), highlights the extent media messaging by those opposed to sound public health has taken control of the public space, and stresses the need for public health expert voices be heard across all media platforms, and often.

Wisdom from a non-public health professional

At the 2024 Nobel Prize Banquet Dinner, Professor Geoffrey Hinton, winner of the prize in physics, spoke specifically about new science either being good or a grave threat to mankind. His



words implicitly make the case that objective assessments of risks and benefits are needed, not unfounded policies, or those that fail to postulate what may be coming in our uncharted future. Hinton's brief statement, in part, is worth reading:

“Unfortunately, the rapid progress in AI (*Artificial Intelligence*) comes with many short-term risks. It has already created divisive echo-chambers by offering people content that makes them indignant. It is already being used by authoritarian governments for massive surveillance and by cyber criminals for phishing attacks. In the near future, AI may be used to create terrible new viruses and horrendous lethal weapons that decide by themselves who to kill or maim. All such short-term risks require urgent and forceful attention from governments and international organizations.

There is also a longer-term existential threat that will arise when we create digital beings that are more intelligent than ourselves. We have no idea whether we can stay in control. But we now have evidence that if they are created by companies motivated by short-term profits, our safety will not be the top priority. We urgently need research on how to prevent these new beings from wanting to take control. They are no longer science fiction.” (10)

Only Time will Tell

When the United States, a leader of health science in the past, chooses to disregard what good science has to offer, it opens prospects that the bad and harmful can fill the vacuum. Voices by the public health community advocating for sound public health actions could hopefully garner global public support and greater prospects for a better common future. But we need many, loud, clear, and often...

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