

# Federal Policy Newsletter

JANUARY 2026



## Executive Summary

### Continuing Resolution Ends January 30, 2026 – What next?

The Continuing Resolution (CR) passed in November 2025 kept agencies operating after FY2026 began without a finalized budget, extending funding for most programs until January 30, 2026. Three full-year appropriations bills (Agriculture, Military Construction–VA, and Legislative Branch) were passed simultaneously, but funding levels for health research agencies remain unresolved. This prolonged budget uncertainty has created significant planning challenges for federally supported research, making it harder for institutions to project staffing needs, plan equipment purchases, and commit to long-term studies. National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Jay Bhattacharya's [congressional justification](#) outlines the agency's budget priorities and operational plans, but actual appropriations may differ significantly from this request, and operating under CR restrictions creates additional constraints even at current funding levels. The [Endocrine Society](#) notes that CR cycles disrupt scientific progress by delaying grant awards, restricting project scope, and forcing some labs to pause or slow NIH-funded research, ultimately impacting workforce stability, clinical research timelines, and the pace of U.S. health innovation.

Beyond CR impacts, recent budget cuts are already affecting health research infrastructure. [AP News](#) reported on the American Academy of Pediatrics' ongoing lawsuit challenging HHS's \$12 million in funding cuts, which forced the organization to halt efforts related to pediatric rural care, mental health, and sudden unexpected infant death research. As the January 30, 2026, deadline for the CR approaches, health research nonprofits must prepare for ongoing budget uncertainty and consider both mitigation strategies and advocacy efforts to ensure research continuity and workforce stability. Access the [HRA U.S. Federal Budget Guide](#) for more information on the federal funding process and read on for upcoming advocacy opportunities.

## NIH Pushes Grant Reviewers to Align with Trump Administration Priorities

Sources report the NIH has issued new guidance for grant reviewers to ensure alignment with the priorities of the White House and the Trump Administration. An official NIH memo titled "Reviewing Grants for Priority Alignment" has been released, directing program officers to explicitly evaluate whether grant proposals align with the White House's declared research priorities. The memo states that if a proposal is not directly connected to the administration's ongoing focus, NIH program officers may take steps toward potential grant termination. This guidance follows a [public memo](#) from NIH Director Jay Bhattacharya and outlines specific procedures for reviewers and program staff to assess alignment with the administration's priorities as part of NIH's approximately \$39 billion research portfolio. This marks a significant shift toward integrating political considerations into the scientific funding process.

After lawsuits by researchers and Democratic officials in late 2025, the Trump administration agreed to review NIH grant applications previously frozen over presumed ties to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion priorities, though lawsuits have not guaranteed renewed funding. Read more [here](#). Researchers applying for NIH funding are encouraged to frame their applications in ways that align with administration goals. Supporters argue this approach could reduce arbitrary terminations by creating clearer criteria for grant approval. However, critics warn that it risks politicizing the peer review process and narrowing the scope of federally funded research. Read an excerpt from Stat News [here](#) or access the full article [here](#).

## Policy & Regulatory Updates

### New Rural Health Funding, Controversy Over Conditions

The Trump administration has announced a new \$50 billion Rural Health Transformation Program, which will provide funding over five years, including approximately \$10 billion for 2026. This program aims to improve access to healthcare, increase workforce capacity, and enhance care delivery in rural areas across all states. However, the administration noted plans to "claw back" funds if state leaders fail to implement promised policies ([PBS, 2025](#)). While the program could create new opportunities for health services and implementation research, such as evaluating models for strengthening rural providers and reducing chronic disease disparities, it also risks shifting research focus and funding priorities away from broader biomedical research. Read more [here](#).



## Ongoing HHS Shake-Ups

If you are a frequent reader of the HRA Federal Policy newsletter, this topic will not be news to you. The [Washington Post](#) reports that HHS Secretary RFK Jr. has pushed sweeping revisions to vaccine policy and other public health standards, prompting resignations and deep concern among scientists and public health experts. In January 2026, the administration announced an unprecedented overhaul of the childhood vaccine schedule, reducing universal recommendations from 18 diseases to 11 and moving vaccines for flu, rotavirus, hepatitis A and B, meningococcal disease, RSV, and COVID to recommendations for high-risk groups only or shared clinical decision-making. Kennedy, who previously led a prominent anti-vaccine advocacy group, has [dismantled or reconstituted key advisory panels such as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#), rolling back the decades-long recommendation for hepatitis B vaccination at birth, and directing changes to CDC communications regarding vaccines and autism. These policy shifts have led to the departure of numerous senior CDC and public health officials, including former CDC Director Susan Monarez, and prompted concern from medical and scientific organizations about the direction of vaccine policy. His leadership has also emphasized a broader "Make America Healthy Again" agenda focused on nutrition and chronic disease, but critics argue that elevating vaccine skepticism and altering long-accepted public health guidance risks undermining disease prevention efforts and destabilizing institutions such as the CDC and NIH. More changes propelled by RFK are expected in early 2026 including further causes of autism research, safety of childhood vaccinations, required food and drink labels, and more.

## Upcoming HRA Federal Policy Events and Resources

Stay connected through HRA's upcoming Federal policy focused programs and gatherings. These events are designed to spark collaboration, share knowledge, and strengthen our community. Please note that registration for most HRA-hosted events is open exclusively to members.

### Federal Policy Series: Advocacy Training for HRA Members

**January 22, 2026, 1:00 PM ET (Virtual)**

Presented by [Research!America](#) staff Erin Darbouze, MPH, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy, and Savannah Sims, PhD, Director, Global Health R&D Advocacy. The session will cover advocacy fundamentals, communicating effectively with lawmakers, and practical ways to make an impact to help ensure medical and health research remains a national priority.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

### US Policy Impact on Cancer Research and Medical Science

**February 19, 2026, 1:00 PM ET (Virtual)**

Presented by [American Association for Cancer Research](#) (AACR) Chief Policy officer, Jon G. Retzlaff. This session will provide an overview of AACR's ongoing advocacy efforts, highlighting the importance of strong and sustained federal funding. AACR will also discuss opportunities for HRA members to engage with AACR's activities or start their own initiatives.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

## Other Events of Interest

- January 27: [Grant Makers in Health] [Roundtable Discussion: Health Funders Communication and Policy Staff](#)
- January 29: [EveryLife Foundation for Rare Diseases] [Year End Landscape for the Rare Disease Community](#)
- February 10-12: [National Rural Health Association] [Rural Health Policy Institute](#)
- May 30 - June 2: [Academy Health] [2026 Annual Research Meeting](#)



## Resources & Tools

- [National Academies] [Symposium on Understanding and Addressing Misinformation About Science \(Recording\)](#)
- [Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy] [Public Trust in Transition \(Blog\)](#)
- [EveryLife Foundation for Rare Diseases] Advocacy Tools including [Tip Sheets](#), [Policy Primers](#) and [How To Find Your Representative](#).

## Research Organization Highlight

**This January, we are spotlighting the [Arthritis National Research Foundation \(ANRF\)](#).** ANRF is a dedicated leader in funding innovative research to advance the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of arthritis and related autoimmune diseases. With a mission centered on improving quality of life for patients, ANRF continues to drive scientific discovery with meaningful, patient-focused impact.

We are especially pleased to share that ANRF will host the HRA Annual Members Meeting in California this Fall, bringing our national network together for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and strategic engagement. Their leadership and partnership reflect a shared commitment to strengthening the future of nonprofit-supported health research. Stay tuned for more information on the HRA Annual Members Meeting to be announced in Spring 2026.



## WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Have questions, suggestions, or need assistance? Dr. Christine Riordan is your primary point of contact for:

- Federal Policy Newsletter feedback and content suggestions
- Membership inquiries and support
- Event registration assistance
- General HRA questions and resources

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We're committed to supporting our members and welcome your input on how we can continue to enhance our services and communications. If you know an organization that could benefit from HRA membership, encourage them to learn more [here](#).