

FEBRUARY 2026



## Executive Summary

### WHO Departure

Over the past several weeks, a series of pivotal U.S. federal developments have altered the U.S. global health and domestic science funding trajectories. The United States finalized its exit from the World Health Organization, reflecting a broader shift in international public health policy. President Trump noted his intention to leave WHO during his first term and then gave official notice through an executive order on his first day in office in January 2025. The withdrawal from WHO gives many critics cause for concern. In the January 28, 2025 episode of the [Public Health On Call show](#), Dr. Judd Walson identifies major negative impacts on U.S. health research and infectious disease outbreaks. Read more on the WHO departure [here](#).

### Partial Government Shutdown Ends

Domestically, a brief partial government shutdown concluded with a bipartisan spending agreement [signed by President Trump](#) that restored funding to federal agencies until the fiscal year ends on September 30, 2026. This development brought stability to federal functions and staved off further health and research related funding cuts proposed by the Trump administration including the suggested over 50% budget cut to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (more on U.S. federal funding updates below). The final funding package secured CDC's funding consistent with previous years. Learn more about the end to the partial shutdown [here](#).



## Policy & Regulatory Updates

### Research Funding Relief

In a significant win for the research community, Congress pushed back against drastic budget cuts to federal research funding proposed by the Trump administration. Congressional Bill H.R. 7148 enacted a funding measure that secured NIH funding at just under a 1% increase from the previous year's budget, a far cry from Trump's proposed 40% reduction. The National Science Foundation (NSF) was also under threat of budget cuts (nearly 57% in cuts to NSF funding), but the FY26 appropriations package limited the decrease to a 3.8%. Read the official press release from the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation [here](#). Read more on the prevented budget cuts [here](#).

### NIH Eliminates Paylines Across All Institutes/Centers

Beginning with the January 2026 council round, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has shifted away from using traditional paylines (score cutoffs) as the primary mechanism for funding decisions across all institutes and centers. Paylines are no longer the default method for award decisions. Instead, funding will be based on a broader set of factors including scientific peer review, alignment with NIH and individual institute/center priorities, investigator career stage, geographic distribution of awards, and an applicant's existing NIH funding portfolio (read complete meeting minutes [here](#)). This change is designed to promote strategic funding decisions that support mission-relevant research, though it may increase uncertainty for applicants accustomed to clear score thresholds. Read more from the Consortium of Social Science Associations [here](#).

### Fetal Tissue Ban and the Impacts on Research

The NIH recently announced that "NIH funds will no longer be used to support research involving human fetal tissue from elective abortions." ([NIH](#), 2026). This update applies to all grants, extramural research, research & development contracts, and other transaction awards. Many scientists note this ban could inhibit disease studies, developing treatments, and even vaccine and drug research. This announcement is a clear shift to align the NIH and grantees with the administration's ethical priorities. Read more on the impacts of the fetal tissue research ban [here](#).

## 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 member

### March Federal Policy Members Roundtable

**March 23, 2026, 1:00 PM ET (Virtual)**

2025 brought many federal policy concerns for biomedical research funders. The 2026 budget has been approved, avoiding some concerning proposed cuts to science funding, but continuing threats to research remain. HRA invites all members to come together for a Members Roundtable on "Navigating a New Year." We want to hear from our members: What has changed in your organization in the last year? What has remained the same? What are your plans for 2026? Please come prepared to share and collaborate!

[REGISTER HERE](#)

## Other Events of Interest

- **February 24, 2026 (10:00 AM – 5:00 PM ET):** [In Person] [Tennessee Nonprofit Network – 2026 Nonprofit Advocacy Summit](#)
- **February 25, 2026 (2:00 – 3:00 PM ET):** [Virtual] Alliance for Justice - [Public Webinar: Building Nonpartisan Partnerships with 501\(c\)\(3\)s, 501\(c\)\(4\)s, Unions and Political Organizations](#)
- **March 3, 2026 (2:00 - 3:00 PM ET):** [Virtual] Alliance for Justice - [Public Webinar: How Your Nonprofit Can Influence Policy Through Ballot Measure Campaigns](#)
- **March 1, 2026 – March 3, 2026:** [In-Person] Melanoma Research Foundation - [2026 Melanoma Research Foundation \(MRF\) Advocacy Days](#)
- **March 5 – 6, 2026 (9:00 AM – 5:00 PM ET):** [In Person Training] [North Carolina Civic Voices Strategic Advocacy for Nonprofits](#)

## Resources & Tools

- [Research!America] [Advocacy Tools for Nonprofits](#)
- [The Association of Public Health Nurses] [Public Health Policy Advocacy Guidebook and Toolkit](#)
- [American Association for the Advancement of Science] [Take Action Toolkit](#)
- [Research!America] [August Recess Toolkit](#)
  - *Note: This toolkit was originally created for the August 2025 U.S. government recess but has a variety of helpful tips and actionable steps you can take to advocate for your organization.*

## Research Organization Highlight

**This February, we are spotlighting the [Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research \(FSR\)](#), the leading international organization dedicated to finding a cure for sarcoidosis and improving care for sarcoidosis patients through research, education, and support. This month, FSR was awarded the [RareVoice Award](#) for the initiatives below! Watch the 5-minute [announcement video here](#) featuring FSR's Mary McGowan and other recipients.**

In August of 2023, FSR submitted a Request for Opinion Letter on Clinical Trials and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). After a year of advocacy, the launch of a 27-member coalition, and over 40 Capitol Hill visits garnering bi-partisan support, FSR received a letter of clarification from the DOL that ensures employee access to FMLA benefits when participating in clinical trials. This groundbreaking clarification, sent November 8, 2024, extends job-protected leave to eligible clinical trial participants and their family members, benefiting over 60 million employees nationwide and marking a significant step forward in supporting patient access to life-changing treatments.

To learn more about this work and the Coalition for Transforming Clinical Trial Engagement, visit FSR's webpage here <https://www.stopsarcoidosis.org/FMLA/> or reach out to Khaleelah Cohen, [khaleelah@stopsarcoidosis.org](mailto:khaleelah@stopsarcoidosis.org).



### WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Have questions, suggestions, or need assistance? Melissa Lena is your primary point of contact for:

- Event registration assistance
- General HRA questions and resources

✉ **Contact:** [melissa@healthra.org](mailto:melissa@healthra.org)

Dr. Christine Riordan is your primary point of contact for:

- Federal Policy Newsletter feedback and content suggestions
- Membership inquiries and support

✉ **Contact:** [christine@healthra.org](mailto:christine@healthra.org)

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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](#).