

MARCH 2026



Executive Summary

Surgeon General Nominee Senate Hearing

During President Trump's nominee for U.S. Surgeon General confirmation hearing before the Senate, Dr. Casey Means said she supports vaccination but stopped short of clearly recommending specific vaccines, for preventing serious illness or death, stressing that patients should talk with their doctors about immunizations. Means, who has a medical degree but does not hold an active medical license, was pressed by senators on vaccine effectiveness and other public health questions. Her responses reflected a more cautious stance that aligned with broader administration skepticism around some vaccine policies. If confirmed, she would lead the U.S. Public Health Service as the nation's top public health official. Her approach to vaccine guidance and public health messaging could influence federal research priorities, particularly in areas such as immunization, chronic disease prevention, and public health communications. A shift in tone or emphasis from the Surgeon General's office could also shape funding streams and partnerships, affecting how research organizations compete for grants, frame their work, and align with evolving federal health priorities. Read more on the Senate hearing [here](#).

Could state governments help replace lost federal funding?

Many research institutions have reported concerns about lost funding from federal agencies, especially the National Institutes of Health (NIH). With uncertainty around federal research dollars, several states are debating or proposing new science funding initiatives to help fill gaps left by stalled or reduced NIH support, though state budgets are far smaller than federal ones and likely cannot fully replace federal grants. States such as Massachusetts are considering investments to help universities provide bridge funding and support to early-career researchers while awaiting federal awards, a strategy that could help sustain local research systems. However, this strategy carries risk that reliance on state funding may shift priorities and the overall landscape of U.S. science funding. Read more on federal research funding shifts and state's role in supporting research [here](#).

Policy & Regulatory Updates

NIH Director Bhattacharya: Scrutiny of NIH-China Funding Policy

As of early 2026, NIH Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya is enforcing strict oversight of NIH foreign funding, aiming to end foreign subawards to "countries of concern", specifically China (read more on the NIH policy on funding foreign scientists [here](#)). This policy shift, driven by national security and transparency concerns, has halted new funding for collaborations with Chinese institutions and aims to prevent future "pandemic-related" risks. These updates have drawn sharp criticism from scientists who say it could disrupt long-standing global research collaborations and complicate funding for multinational projects. Watch the NIH Director testify before the Senate Health Committee [here](#).

NIH Lacks Permanent Leaders in Top Posts

Despite avoiding the previously proposed 40% budget cut under President Trump, NIH is facing a significant leadership vacuum with direct implications for HRA members. Since the administration transition, 15 of 27 institute and center director positions are now filled only on a temporary basis following a wave of departures and terminations. For organizations relying on NIH funding, interim leadership typically means slower programmatic decisions, delayed funding opportunity announcements, and limited internal advocacy for research priorities that may not align with current administration preferences. As Ryan Quin of *Inside Higher Ed* noted, the absence of permanent directors could serve as either a vulnerability or a temporary buffer, permanent appointees selected by the Trump administration may shift NIH more decisively toward the administration's priorities, reshaping which research areas receive emphasis and funding. HRA members should monitor appointment announcements closely, as director selections will be an early signal of where NIH funding priorities are headed. Read more on the state of NIH leadership [here](#).

Vaccine Policy in Court

Reuters recently reported on the [ongoing lawsuit](#) involving RFKs "unreviewable" authority over federal vaccine policy. The lawsuit, brought by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other medical groups, challenges sweeping changes to vaccine recommendations including reductions in childhood immunizations and removal of COVID-19 guidance for certain groups, contending they lack scientific basis and could harm public health. This month, a federal judge blocked key parts of those changes, paused a reconstituted vaccine advisory committee, and signaled he would rule on the broader legal questions soon. The case is expected to go before the U.S. Supreme Court in the near future. Read Reuters report by Nate Raymond [here](#) and an overview of the court ruling [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](#)

HRA Spring 2026 Members Meeting April 13 - 16, 2026 (Virtual)

Spring 2026 HRA Members Meeting will be held entirely virtually! Sessions will be scheduled across multiple days during the week of April 13, 2026. Speakers and sessions will be announced shortly. Stay tuned for more updates and registration information in the coming weeks.

[Coming Soon](#)

Other Events of Interest

- **March 23 - 24, 2026 (Washington, D.C.): [In Person]** [American Society for Association Executives \(ASAE\) Legislative Fly in](#)
- **June 8 - 11, 2026 (Baltimore, MD): [In Person]** [2026 Grantmakers In Health Annual Conference on Health Philanthropy](#)
- **September 17, 2026 (Washington, D.C.): [In Person]** 14th Annual "Rally for Medical Research Hill Day". Keep up with latest Rally for Medical Research announcements [here](#).

Resources & Tools

- [Rutgers International for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights] [Developing an Advocacy Strategy](#)
- [National Bleeding Disorders Foundation] [6 Steps for Grassroots Advocacy](#)
- [American Medical Association Advocacy Insights] Webinar Recording - [What will the health policy landscape look like this year, and how is AMA shaping it?](#)
- [National Council of Nonprofits] Webinar Recording - [National Webinar: Executive Actions and their Impact on Charitable Nonprofits](#)
- [National Council of Nonprofits] [A Nonprofit Checklist: What to do When Your Federal Grant or Contract is Terminated](#)

Research Organization Highlight

AACR

American Association
for Cancer Research®

This March, HRA is highlighting the [American Association for Cancer Research \(AACR\)](#)! AACR is dedicated to advancing research to prevent and cure cancer. As the world's oldest and largest professional organization dedicated to advancing cancer research, AACR is accelerating discoveries that improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for patients worldwide.

As the founding organizer and lead sponsor of the annual [Rally for Medical Research Hill Day](#) taking place on September 17, 2026 the AACR stands alongside a nationwide coalition of more than 400 organizations on Capitol Hill. Together, they advocate for a significant funding increase for the NIH to safeguard the future of lifesaving medical research.

We're grateful for AACR's partnership and continued commitment to strengthening collaborative health research across the HRA network and beyond.

*Want to elevate your organization's impact? Nominate your organization for an **HRA Spotlight** to be featured on HRA's social media and federal policy newsletters! Share any federal policy or advocacy related updates, upcoming activities, or events open to the HRA community. Submissions should be sent via email to melissa@healthra.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

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

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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](#).