

Public health under attack, in the US and beyond

The scale and speed of the drastic changes brought about in the first few months of the second Trump presidency, in the US and around the world, have taken observers aback. Considerable damage has already been done in the public health sphere, and more is set to come. In Europe, these drastic changes are being echoed in a number of harmful initiatives.

The Trump administration, where fake news and conspiracy theories form part of the power structure, has launched a substantial and wide-ranging assault on public health. In early 2025, it withdrew funding overnight for programmes giving people free access to contraception and antiretroviral HIV drugs in the Global South (1). And a number of US research databases and programmes have been cut due to their focus on topics that the administration derides as “woke”, such as women’s health, diversity and inclusion (2).

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have been substantially weakened under the leadership of “anti-vax” health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. These two previously world-leading institutions have been lowered to disseminating false information, for example about the existence of a link between *paracetamol* or vaccination and autism spectrum disorder (3-5).

The global reach of the US’s health and public research institutions means that undermining these institutions will have a damaging impact around the world (6). But equally troubling is the way in which weakening them is encouraging imitators to take similar action outside the US.

In Europe, for example, “anti-vaxxers” and far-right politicians have launched a movement heavily inspired by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s Make America Healthy Again initiative (7). And the European Union’s health commissioner, Hungarian Olivér Várhelyi, has made the disturbing claim that “*unnecessary clinical trials*” and excess bureaucracy are “*not sending the right message*” to the pharmaceutical industry (8).

In France, the recent debates over the business simplification bill led politicians to put forward amendments to scrap several of the country’s health agencies, on the grounds of their overlapping remits. In a move revealing their ignorance of these agencies’ important roles, elected representatives proposed abolishing the High Council for Public Health, the High Council for the Future of Health Insurance, the public health agency Santé Publique France (which is set to be broken up in 2026), the Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety and the National Authority for Health (9,10).

In Europe and around the world, there is a danger that the “US model” will inspire disastrous deregulation policies in the name of cutting public spending, reducing “red tape”, improving competitiveness, stimulating innovation and freeing up the economy. And that the quality of care and the safety of the public will suffer as a result.

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