

**Medical science**

## Scientists warn Trump's \$4bn funding cuts will harm US medical research

Academics say the move imperils scientific progress and helps America's rivals



Universities say they rely on government funding to build and maintain laboratories and cover costs. © Bloomberg

**Andrew Jack** in New York FEBRUARY 8 2025

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US universities say lifesaving medical research is threatened by fresh federal funding cuts of up to \$4bn a year announced by the Trump administration.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), which disburses nearly \$50bn a year, has released [guidance](#) saying it will cut from Monday “indirect” support to 15 per cent from a current average of 27 per cent and in some cases above 60 per cent. The funding covers the administrative costs of research projects.

The NIH said it was “vital to ensure that as many funds as possible go towards direct scientific research costs rather than administrative overhead”.

But universities argue they rely on this funding to build and maintain laboratories and cover costs. They say raising tuition fees or recruiting additional students would be insufficient to cover the gap.

The Association of American Medical Colleges warned that the cuts will “diminish the nation’s research capacity, slowing scientific progress and depriving patients, families, and communities across the country of new treatments, diagnostics, and preventive interventions.”

Nick Dirks, president of the New York Academy of Sciences, said: “This will be

devastating and will gut research. Without ample indirect cost recovery, universities and hospitals will not be able to run many of their most critical research programmes.”

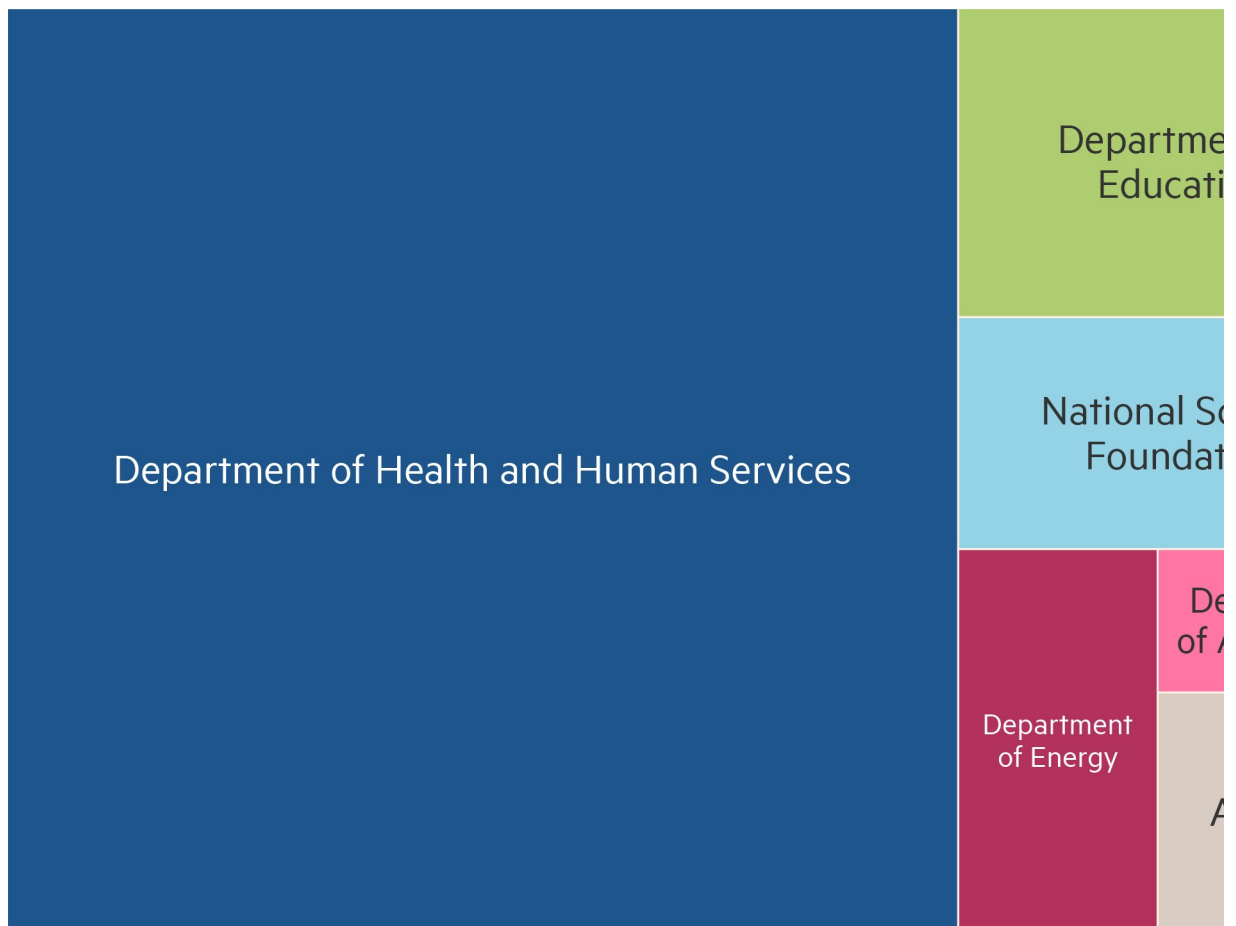
US universities are already facing a temporary freeze on federal funding announced by President Donald Trump, as well as a ban on diversity and “environmental justice” work, probes into alleged antisemitism on campus and threats of a new endowment tax.

Although an executive order to freeze all grants was rescinded after a legal challenge last month, universities are now unsure if funding will continue.



## Nearly \$100bn in federal grants went to higher education in FY2024

Size of federal grants outlays to higher education, by awarding agency (\$)



Todd Wolfson, president of the American Association of University Professors, said:

“It’s purposeful chaos. People have been told to stop their research, some faculty have been told they have to fire postdocs and to shut down their labs, meaning time sensitive materials will no longer be usable.”

Adam Bauer, a doctoral science student at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, said he will only know on payday next week whether he will receive his next monthly living allowance now that his National Science Foundation fellowship funding has been called into question.

His research focuses on the physics of heatwaves and how they affect crops, people and energy demand. But he fears the climate-related topic, as well as his proposal to help retain female scientists in his field, puts his grant at risk. Climate and diversity, equity and inclusion programmes have been targeted by the Trump administration.

“After the freeze I was reeling and our group chat was going a little crazy,” he says.

“I can imagine a situation if they do a Control F and they want to cancel the grant, they will come up with a way.”

Harold Varmus, the Nobel Prize-winning former head of the National Institutes of Health and the National Cancer Institute who is a professor at Weill Cornell Medical College, said even a couple of weeks of uncertainty would significantly delay meetings to plan research, review grant applications and delay clinical trials.

“It doesn’t take very long before things could be really messy,” he said. “It’s worrying because money is tight and it could lead to real setbacks for science and for the public which is waiting to have results.”

The NIH is among the largest federal funders of research, with the greatest share going to top research universities led by Johns Hopkins and the University of California.

While some of the biggest recipients have other sources of research income and substantial endowments, others are more vulnerable at a time of slowing student applications.

## Higher education federal grants outlays by recipient, FY2025 to date

Recipient	Total federal grants (\$mn)
Johns Hopkins University	1094

University of California, Los Angeles	790
Columbia University	764
Duke University	520
University of California, San Francisco	484
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	481
Yale University	474
Emory University	427
University of Wisconsin System	423
University of Michigan	420
<i>All others</i>	14,824
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,702</b>

Source: USASpending.gov

Barbara Snyder, president of the Association of American Universities, an alliance of leading research universities, said: “Even a temporary stoppage of critical scientific research is a self-defeating, unforced error . . . If you are racing neck-and-neck, stepping off the track for any amount of time is a gift to your competitors.”

Lynn Pasquerella, president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, warned that the broader threat of “governmental intrusion and undue political influence” risked undermining “the integrity of American higher education and scientific research”.

“The freeze signals a growing politicisation of higher education,” she said.

“[It] risks upending scientific advancements and impeding life-saving research.”

Bauer, the student in Illinois, has been seeking academic jobs focused on private universities which may have greater resources than the more vulnerable public ones.

“It’s been tough,” he said. “The job market is dry for climate projects since it’s unclear the extent to which the Trump administration is willing to go.”

# Higher education federal grants outlays by recipient, FY2024

Recipient	Total federal grants (\$mn)
California Department of Education	3158
Johns Hopkins University	2835
Columbia University	2464
University of Michigan	2226
University of California, San Francisco	2026
Duke University	1975
University of Washington	1961
University of Pennsylvania	1944
University of California, Los Angeles	1915
Yale University	1826
<i>All others</i>	<i>75,811</i>

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