

US politics & policy

US scientists warn 'critical work' at risk from further Trump cuts

AAAS chief says more disruption threatens to undermine crucial healthcare and research, ahead of next month's fiscal bill



Sudip Parikh: 'We have got to stay together as a community because it's going to get rough' © Robb Cohen

Clive Cookson in Boston YESTERDAY

US science leaders have warned of the threat of more abrupt policy changes and funding cuts by the Trump administration, saying the disruption risks undermining crucial healthcare and research.

As Congress works towards a March 14 deadline for a spending bill for the upcoming fiscal year, the next month could be “one of the most important in the history of science and technology” in the US, said Sudip Parikh, chief executive of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

President Donald Trump and his adviser Elon Musk are seeking to cut trillions from the federal budget, including through swingeing cuts to government jobs.

They have already cut [billions of dollars in research funding](#) and thousands of jobs in agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, alarming the AAAS.

“We have got to stay together as a community because it’s going to get rough,” said Parikh, speaking at the grassroots scientific organisation’s annual conference in Boston this weekend.

International links will be damaged through US withdrawal from the World Health

Organization and Paris agreement on climate change. The AAAS meeting heard that Trump's actions would undermine global collaboration in fields ranging from public health to space exploration, while also deterring scientists from other countries from studying and working in the US.

Monica Bertagnoli, who was NIH director until Trump's inauguration, said: "We have a lack of scientific leadership. Decision-making is paralysed and critical work is not going forward."

She said several key NIH activities that were already planned and funded had been suspended. They included expanding access to the National Library of Medicine, the world's largest biomedical database, and targeted programmes to improve the health of women and disadvantaged groups.

Willie May, AAAS president and head of research at Morgan State University in Maryland, said scientific and technological research were at risk of losing talent to other fields.

"The chaos and rhetoric are already taking a toll . . . Many early-career scientists are telling us that they are now questioning whether they should continue to pursue careers in science."



The Trump administration has already cut billions of dollars in research funding and thousands of jobs in agencies such as the National Institutes of Health © Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Some of Trump's appointments, such as new health secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr, a

long-standing anti-vaccine campaigner and pharmaceutical industry critic, have also caused dismay. Scientists have not been convinced by Kennedy's assurances to senators at last week's confirmation hearing that he was "not anti-vaccine or anti-industry" but "pro-safety".

Parikh said: "Some of the people leading the scientific endeavour are wrong. Let me say this clearly — Robert F Kennedy Jr is not the right person to lead the Department of Health."

"Treating disease . . . requires a certain truth, requires science," he added. "We're going to figure out ways as a scientific community to advance health no matter who is in those leadership positions."

Last week the British Medical Journal published an anonymous article by a "terrified" US federal researcher. [The article](#) accused the Trump administration of "digital genocide" by removing any mention of advocacy, bias, gender or diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as well as all references to vulnerable groups in grants and scientific papers.

Professor Maria Leptin, president of the EU's European Research Council, told her US counterparts at the conference: "Those of us who value the spirit of discovery need to issue a strong outcry."

Other countries should ignore "the cynical voices saying maybe we can get some of our scientists back from the US," Leptin added. "That is missing the point totally and the price is far too high."

DEI initiatives in science and medicine have also been scrapped. May, who grew up in a poor Black family in Alabama, said: "How can we stick to our values of creating an inclusive scientific process with the new constraints that are placed upon us? . . . It requires a new determination to safeguard our work."

With the UK's Royal Society, the AAAS has unveiled [an international strategy](#) to defend science through diplomacy "in an era of disruption".

"We're going to be working so hard together with our partners in universities, with patient organisations, with our partners in industry," said Parikh. "I don't want us on our back foot. I want us to reclaim the narrative."

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