



Trump Promised We'd Defeat AIDS. Now He's Cutting HIV Services. What Happened?

Politico, former health workers, HIV advocates and UNAIDS try to make sense of the decimation unleashed since January 2025.

June 18, 2026 By Eva Lorenz

On February 5, 2019, in a [State of the Union address](#), [President Trump](#) vowed to “defeat AIDS in America and beyond.” Yet during his second term, Trump and his administration have made unprecedented [cuts](#) to HIV programs at home and abroad—with even more severe reductions proposed for next year.

Since Trump's 2025 inauguration, cutbacks have hamstrung such health programs as the [Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program](#) and the [U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief](#) as well as agencies such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the [United States Agency for International Development](#).

Why the turnabout? How did Team Trump go from defeating AIDS to decimating AIDS services? And what have been some of the measurable outcomes? A year and a half into Trump's second term, journalists and organizations are seeking clarity while examining the receipts.

In an article this week titled [Inside Trump's Reversal on HIV](#), Politico takes a deep dive into the topic, focusing on stateside funding and interviewing numerous former Trump officials and health workers. Reporters Alice Miranda Olstein and Megan Messerly summarize:

Most of those people argued that, while the president himself never changed his mind about the importance of addressing HIV, the effort to end the epidemic fell victim to a host of other fiscal and ideological forces. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) campaign to shrink the federal workforce took a heavy toll on teams working on HIV. New bans on the promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion—and what the government considers “wokeness” and “gender ideology”—have made it harder to study or direct aid to the LGBTQ+ and racial

minority populations most at risk of contracting the disease. And conservatives' general hostility to the CDC in the wake of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic made the public health agency a prime target for cuts and restrictions.

"In conversations that we had with appropriators [congresspeople who oversee budgets] last year about proposed cuts to funding, oftentimes it wasn't even about HIV in their minds or the specific programs that they were cutting. It was really just about, 'CDC needs to be reined in,'" Jeremiah Johnson, the executive director of the HIV prevention advocacy group [PrEP4All](#), told [Politico](#). "The public backlash that occurred toward the CDC following COVID has hit HIV prevention activities, which have been particularly vulnerable to partisan rhetoric and attacks that are most of the time unfounded. It's disheartening and alarming."

"You can't talk about health disparities without talking about things like race and, in some cases, sexual orientation," added Jeanne Marrazzo, MD, MPH, the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who was [fired in 2025](#). "It's back to this culture of blaming the victim that is just so reminiscent of the early days of HIV."

Meanwhile, the [UNAIDS released a report](#) this week on global HIV programs showing that "external funding cuts, a strong pushback on human rights and underinvestment and under-prioritization of HIV prevention and community services are threatening to reverse years of gains in the AIDS response."

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