

Trump Administration Confirmation Hearings: Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert Kennedy Policy Insights



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In this series, we summarize each candidate's relevant positions. For more insights on the Trump Administration, visit [Winston & Strawn's The First 100 Days](#).

Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert Kennedy

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. appeared before the Senate Finance Committee on Wednesday, January 29, 2025, and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on Thursday, January 30, 2025, as President Trump's nominee to head the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In his opening statements on both days, ^[1] Kennedy pinpointed chronic disease as the most significant issue plaguing the American health care system. He evidenced that over the last century, illness and government spending have grown, while the American population's health has deteriorated. To "Make America Healthy Again," Kennedy alluded to plans involving holistic care, healthier eating, nutritional and pharmaceutical transparency, and reformed research. Kennedy developed a theme for his administration called "radical transparency" and promised to make HHS^[2] "the gold star of science." During the confirmation hearing, over a dozen senators questioned Kennedy on his stances regarding topics pertinent to our clients. Those topics and Kennedy's voiced stances follow.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

- **Vaccines:** During Kennedy's opening remarks, he stated, "vaccines play a critical role in health care." He also stated he does not plan to block the measles and polio vaccine from the public as Health Secretary. Kennedy reaffirmed that he is not anti-vaccine or anti-pharma. When asked by Senator Cassidy, chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, Kennedy agreed that under his leadership, the FDA will not deprioritize or delay review or approval of new vaccines. Kennedy further committed to not reduce funding appropriated by Congress for the purpose of vaccination programs or impose new grant conditions that limit, restrict, or rescind access to vaccines. Kennedy also agreed that he would support the Avian flu vaccine should that become available.
- **Long COVID Research:** Senator Young asked Kennedy to take a firm stance on long COVID research. Kennedy promised to collaborate with healthcare providers, researchers, and affected communities to better understand

and mitigate long COVID's impact. Kennedy committed to prioritizing long COVID research and integrating the work into broader healthcare policies. He also agreed to focus research funding primarily towards trial or novel research directions and not replicating existing observational research.

- **Stem Cell Research:** When asked by Senator Cantwell about protecting stem cell research, Kennedy stated that he supports stem cell research now that it can be conducted on umbilical cords and not fetal tissue. During questioning with Senator Hawley, Kennedy stated he would uphold President Trump's prior restrictions on stem cell research on fetal tissue. Contradictorily, Kennedy also affirmed that he would uphold the status quo regarding stem cell research.^[3]
- **Sickle Cell Research:** Kennedy agreed to support the continuous study and research of sickle cell disease.
- **HIV Treatment:** Kennedy vowed to continue the previous Trump administration's expansion of HIV treatment, specifically through the PEPFAR program's disbursement of lifesaving antiviral drugs in African nations.^[4]
- **Clinical Trials:** Kennedy committed to finalizing the congressionally mandated FDA guidance to increase diverse patients in clinical trials, including Native Americans.

PHARMACEUTICALS

- **Pharmacy Benefit Managers:** Kennedy said that he will focus on a bipartisan resolution as the Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBM) system must be reformed. He also agreed to hold PBMs accountable to lower prescription drug prices. Based on Kennedy's remarks, we expect this administration to advocate for greater scrutiny of PBMs.
- **Prescription Drugs:** Kennedy expressed his commitment to addressing high drug prices. He also stated the need for transparency. Before the 2024 elections, Kennedy said that he would advise President Trump to ban pharmaceutical advertising.^[5] However, Kennedy did not address this during the Senate Finance Committee Hearing. Instead, Kennedy said he wants to ensure that drug prices are disclosed on television ads for prescribed medications. Kennedy also stated that President Trump is "absolutely" committed to negotiating lower drug prices for Medicaid.

When questioned by Senator Sanders on American drug prices being higher than any other country and a proposal for ending drug price disparity, Kennedy stated that "in principle we should end that disparity."

Multiple senators discussed side effect disclosures for drugs, specifically Mifepristone. Kennedy made it clear that he believes it is improper for pharmaceutical companies not to disclose dangerous side effects. But he stated that President Trump has not yet taken a stance on Mifepristone and more research must be conducted on its side effects.

- **Domestic Manufacturing:** When asked about essential drug shortages, Kennedy stated that it is Trump's priority to bring essential medicine manufacturing back to the United States. Kennedy committed to fostering public and private partnerships to provide the government with key information of pharmaceutical supply chains, address shortages, and improve the drug supply of the United States.
- **Youth Prescriptions:** Kennedy took an anti-ADHD and antidepressant prescription stance, particularly for children. When asked about the millions of dollars spent on hundreds of thousands of children's ADHD medicine, Kennedy stated that the solution is community health treatment, exercise, and healthier food. Kennedy pushed for increased research into antidepressants and the side effects they have on children, stating that, anecdotally, he believes antidepressants are harder to stop taking than heroin. Kennedy described GLP-1 drugs as a "miracle drug," but he stated that it should not be the frontline option for obesity in children. Kennedy made his stance on children's access to prescription drugs clear: He wants to reduce access.
- **Pharmaceutical Litigation and Conflicts of Interest:** Kennedy was questioned heavily by Senator Warren on conflicts of interest he may have regarding payments received for endorsing and encouraging lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies. When asked whether he would disavow receiving any form of compensation during his tenure as Secretary and four years afterward related to advocating for suing pharmaceutical companies, Kennedy initially stated that he could only promise not to do so as Secretary but retracted that statement by concluding he could not agree to not sue pharmaceutical companies.

NUTRITION AND DIETARY GUIDELINES

- **Food Additives:** Kennedy has maintained a heavy focus on nutrition-oriented disease prevention. In his campaign website, Kennedy states that he “will change regulations, research topics, and subsidies to reduce the dominance of ultra-processed foods.”^[6] In his opening remarks, Kennedy stated, “we will scrutinize the chemical additives in our food supply.” He also mentioned the need for NIH and FDA to study the impact and relationship between food additives and chronic disease. He expressed a desire to educate Americans on the foods they are consuming. Although Kennedy wants to reduce the use of additives, he mentioned that the American people will be able to make their own decisions. He told the Committee, “I am not the enemy of the food producers.”
- **Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee:** Kennedy agreed to address conflicts of interest in the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee and to provide Congress with confidential financial disclosures of the Advisory Committee before finalizing dietary guidelines.

MEDICAID AND MEDICARE

Although Kennedy said there is no proposal for dismantling Medicaid, he will consider reforming it. He would like to consolidate Medicaid and Medicare, but he is unsure of what that process would look like. Kennedy further stated he would bring cooperatives and health savings accounts to both programs while also evaluating value-based pilot programs in each state to explore better solutions. Value-based programs incentivize health care providers to work together to address their patients’ needs holistically.^[7]

RURAL HEALTHCARE

Rural healthcare was discussed by a multitude of senators. Kennedy acknowledged that HHS must focus on rural health, as it was one of few bipartisan issues. He intends to work with other agencies particularly to ensure services are improved for Reservations, rural areas, and U.S. farmers. Kennedy discussed possible solutions including expanding telemedicine and potentially implementing AI nurses to create concierge care for all Americans. He believes that HRSA^[8] and GME^[9] programs have the capacity to resolve the issues with the decline of rural healthcare. Kennedy also spoke of a need to address healthcare for people living on Reservations. As a result, he is going to appoint a Native American as Assistant Secretary in his office.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTION CARE

When asked about substance abuse care by Senator Corwyn, Kennedy stated that addiction care is a priority for him. He plans to use GME programs to help primary physicians to understand addiction to substance abuse issues. Kennedy voiced his support for drug-assisted treatments to assist with opioid addiction.

GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

Kennedy vowed to repeal HHS guidelines on gender affirming care.^[10]

AGRICULTURE

In his opening remarks, Kennedy stated, “I want to work with our farmers and food producers to remove burdensome regulation and unleash ingenuity.” Kennedy sees a need to partner with the USDA and other agencies to provide a holistic approach to protecting and preserving U.S. farms. Kennedy is meeting with manufacturers in the herbicide, pesticide, chemical, and fertilizer industries and he would like to explore regenerative agriculture. Although Kennedy expressed willingness to partner with farmers, he agreed that he will leave agricultural practices and regulations to the pertinent agencies.

In conclusion, Kennedy conveyed that he would approach the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services position with a mindset of radical transparency, focus on holistic medicine, and commitment to furthering medical research. If confirmed, the focus of this next administration will be on chronic diseases, rather than infectious diseases. We expect opportunities in the field of medical technology innovation for rural healthcare, production of less-processed foods, and domestic drug manufacturing. Challenges may arise regarding pharmaceutical disclosures, youth prescriptions, and potentially increased private litigation.

Disclaimer: This information is strictly to provide public information on the administration's policy positions and in no way indicates an affiliation with any political party.

- [1] https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/01292025_kennedy_statement.pdf.
- [2] <https://www.hhs.gov/programs/index.html>.
- [3] <https://stemcells.nih.gov/NIH-Stem-Cell-Research>.
- [4] <https://www.state.gov/pepfar/>.
- [5] <https://www.mahanow.org/pharma-ads-video>.
- [6] <https://www.mahanow.org/issues>.
- [7] <https://www.cms.gov/priorities/innovation/key-concepts/value-based-care>.
- [8] <https://www.hrsa.gov/about>.
- [9] <https://www.acgme.org/about/overview/>.
- [10] <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/hhs-ocr-notice-and-guidance-gender-affirming-care.pdf>.

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[Cari Stinebower](#)

[Hamza Rashid](#)

[Adriana López Torres](#)

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