

A Statement from the Society of General Internal Medicine on the Re-Organization of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

March 31, 2025

The Society of General Internal Medicine is extremely concerned about the recently announced plans from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to lay off 10,000 staff in addition to the 10,000 that have already resigned, reducing the department's workforce by 25% and reorganizing the department. These changes have the potential to undermine public health and the public health infrastructure, moving America further from Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s goal to make America healthy again.

Primary care is critical to a high-performing healthcare system to keep people healthy and is already facing serious challenges, including a persistent workforce shortage that limits Americans' access to comprehensive primary care. Data show that supporting comprehensive primary care is the most efficient way to improve Americans' health. However, the changes announced this week further threaten primary care. Important concerns have been raised about whether these changes can legally be implemented given their impact on congressionally authorized agencies and appropriated funding. If these changes do occur, we offer the following recommendations to avoid potential damage to primary care and the health of American patients.

HHS intends to merge the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) to create the Office of Strategy as part of HHS' reorganization. SGIM is concerned that if AHRQ's authorized health services research portfolio is not included in the merger then the research that is needed to improve the quality, efficiency, and safety of health care in this country will face devastating consequences. To make health care more efficient and effective, AHRQ-supported health services research provides information on interventions and therapies that can meaningfully improve care delivery while controlling costs. Additionally, AHRQ's National Center for Excellence in Primary Care Research is the only dedicated research entity that focuses on innovation in primary care, which plays an integral role in improving Americans' health and reducing the burden of chronic diseases. The indiscriminate dismantling of AHRQ's research portfolio and excessive dismissal of its staff will have harmful effects on the health care that people receive and move the administration further from its goal of improving Americans' health.

Besides the impact on AHRQ, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will be consolidated along with three other agencies into a new Administration for Healthy America (AHA). HRSA supports workforce programs to support the growth of general internal medicine and other primary care specialties. While AHA is reported to include divisions in primary care and workforce, it is unclear what its scope and the fate of these critical programs will be. Any changes must support the growth of a well-trained primary care workforce to help Americans prevent and treat the chronic conditions burdening their health.

SGIM supports changes that improve Americans' health and the efficiency and effectiveness of federal health programs. However, these changes were made without consultation with Congress or stakeholders who deliver healthcare services across the country. Any changes should be made in consultation with these groups to ensure that they do not undermine the country's health and safety.